



## TIME SIGNATURES – by Nate Brown

There are many different time signatures. For a simple explanation, time signatures tell the reader how to count the notes. They don't actually change the sound of a rhythm. The same rhythm can be written in multiple time signatures and still sound exactly the same. Keep that in mind: time signatures change the way rhythms are counted, not how they are played.

### THE TOP NUMBER

A time signature consists of a top number and a bottom number. The meaning of the top number is simple: It indicates what number to count up to in each measure. In other words, it tells how many counts (also called *beats*) are in each measure. If a 3 is on top, count to 3 each measure. If a 2 is on top, count to 2 each measure.

### THE BOTTOM NUMBER

The bottom number indicates what kind of note takes up 1 count or beat. If an 8 is on bottom, an 8<sup>th</sup> note takes up 1 count. If a 2 is on bottom, a half note takes up 1 count. See the below examples.

#### Example 1: Four on bottom

A 4 on bottom means that a quarter note takes up 1 whole count.



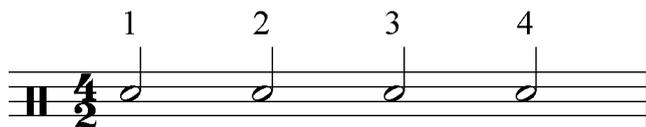
#### Example 2: Eight on bottom

An 8 on bottom means that an 8<sup>th</sup> note takes up 1 whole count.



#### Example 3: Two on bottom

A 2 on bottom means that a half note takes up 1 whole count.



#### Example 4: Sixteen on bottom

A 16 on bottom means that a sixteenth note takes up 1 whole count.



### How do you know which note each bottom number represents?

Here's the trick: think of the number as the bottom number of a fraction with a 1 on top. For example, if 4 is the bottom number, think of the fraction 1 over 4 or 1/4. This fraction is commonly referred to as a *quarter*. Therefore, the 4 represents a quarter note. If an 8 were the bottom number, think of the fraction 1 over 8 or 1/8. This fraction is called an *eighth*. Therefore, an 8 represents an eighth note. See the list below..

### List of the most common numbers in a time signature and their meanings

\*See the top number and bottom number explanations above for clarification.

Top Number	Meaning
2	Two counts in a measure
3	Three counts in a measure
4	Four counts in a measure
5	Five counts in a measure

Bottom Number	Meaning
2	Half note gets 1 count
4	Quarter note gets 1 count
8	Eighth note gets 1 count
16	Sixteenth note gets 1 count