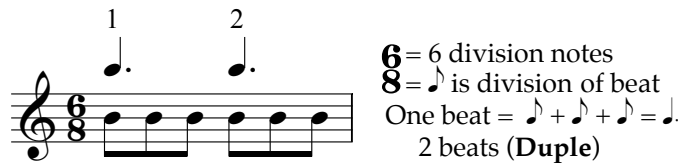


COMPOUND AND ASYMMETRIC METER

Compound time signatures

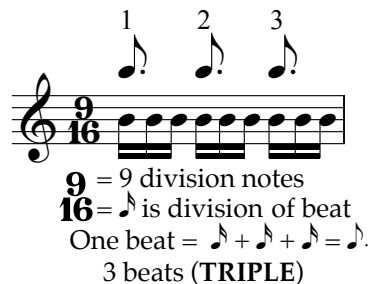
Beats in **compound time signatures** divide into **three** division notes, not two. The **top number** indicates the number of **division notes** per measure. The **bottom number** indicates the **division** rhythmic value (not the beat unit). It takes **three** division notes (not two) to make one beat.



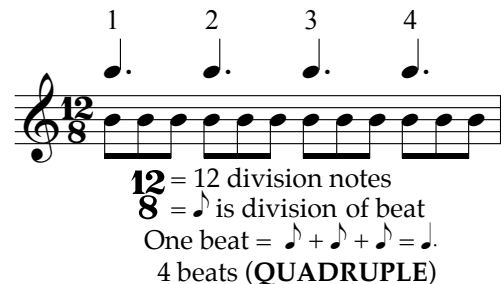
6 = 6 division notes
8 = eighth note is division of beat
One beat = quarter note + eighth note + eighth note = quarter note
2 beats (Duple)

Decoding compound time signatures

A time signature with **6, 9, 12, or 15 on top** is compound. To get the **number of beats**, divide the top number by three. The **beat unit** is a dotted rhythmic value one larger than the bottom number; sixteen on the bottom means a dotted-eighth beat unit, eight on the bottom means a dotted quarter, and so on. Compound time signatures can be duple, triple, quadruple, or even quintuple (five beats).



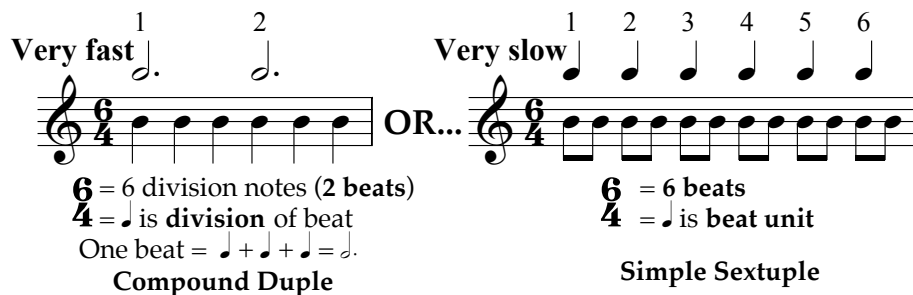
9 = 9 division notes
16 = dotted eighth note is division of beat
One beat = dotted eighth note + eighth note + eighth note = dotted quarter note
3 beats (TRIPLE)



12 = 12 division notes
8 = eighth note is division of beat
One beat = dotted quarter note + eighth note + eighth note = dotted quarter note
4 beats (QUADRUPLE)

Tempo and Meter

Sometimes tempo can make a normally compound time signature into a simple time signature, or a normally simple time signature into a compound one. This is especially common if the top number is six or three.



Very fast 6 = 6 division notes (2 beats)
4 = quarter note is division of beat
One beat = quarter note + quarter note + quarter note = quarter note
Compound Duple

OR...

Very slow 6 = 6 beats
4 = quarter note is beat unit
Simple Sextuple

Asymmetric time signatures

Asymmetric time signatures have a **mixture** of two and three-part beat divisions. The **top number** indicates the number of **division notes** per measure (often 5, 7, or 11, but varies). The **bottom number** indicates the **division** rhythmic value (not the beat unit). The **beaming** indicates **beat groupings** for individual beats.

1 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 4

$\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{7}{16}$ $\frac{11}{8}$

5 = 5 division notes 7 = 7 division notes 11 = 11 division notes
 8 = $\frac{1}{8}$ is division of beat 16 = $\frac{1}{16}$ is division of beat 8 = $\frac{1}{8}$ is division of beat
 2 beats (DUPE) 3 beats (TRIPLE) 4 beats (QUADRUPLE)

Performing asymmetric time signatures

For time signatures in asymmetric meter, beats with three division notes will be longer than beats with two division notes. The length of the division note value, **not** the beat, must remain constant. In the left example below, the eighth note pulse remains constant, while in the right example the quarter note pulse remains constant. See **1.7 Tuplets/Grouplets** for an explanation of the triplets in the right example.

1 2 1 2

$\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{7}{4}$

...sounds different than...

3

Anacrusis and stress patterns in compound meter

Music in compound meter may also include an **anacrusis**. If so, the last measure will be shortened by the amount of the anacrusis, as in simple meter. **Stress patterns** for duple, triple, and quadruple compound time signatures match those given at the end of **1.5 Time Signatures in Simple Meter**.

Summary of time signatures and meter

Simple time signatures are simple: the top number is the number of beats, and the bottom is the beat unit. **Compound** time signatures nearly always have **6, 9, 12, or 15** on top, indicating the number of division notes; the bottom number indicates the division rhythmic value. **Asymmetric** signatures have beats with unequal lengths. Like compound time signatures, asymmetric time signatures indicate the rhythmic value for one beat division, not the beat unit.