

Name _____

WHAT IS A TIME SIGNATURE?

The **meter (or time) signature** is found at the beginning of the staff, following the clef sign and key signature (sharps or flats). It consists of two numbers, one on top of the other.



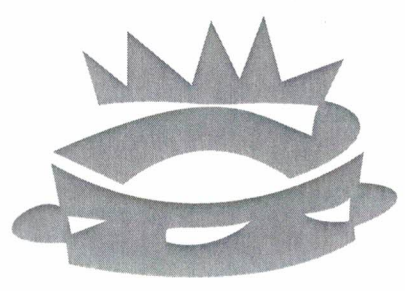
The **top number** indicates how many beats are in each measure and the **bottom number** tells what kind of note gets one beat (half note = 2 on the bottom, quarter note = 4 on the bottom and eighth note = 8 on the bottom).

Ex. **3** = three beats in each measure **6** = six beats in each measure
4 = a quarter note gets one beat **8** = an eighth note gets one beat

The top number is usually between **one and twelve**, but the numbers two, four and eight are the most common bottom numbers. It is **not necessary** to show the time signature on each line of music after it is once indicated, unless the meter changes within the piece. A time signature is not written as a fraction with a dividing mark between the numbers.

The most frequently used time signatures are listed below. (These meters will be discussed in Lesson 13.)

- duple meter $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{8}$
- triple meter $\frac{3}{2}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{3}{16}$
- quadruple meter $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{8}$



APPLY WHAT YOU KNOW

Describe what these numbers mean in various meters.

- 6** = _____
- 8** = _____
- 3** = _____
- 4** = _____
- 3** = _____
- 2** = _____

X

Fill in the time signatures for these examples.

a. $\frac{2}{4}$ b. _____ c. d. _____ e. _____

A SIMPLER SYMBOL

Sometimes in music, a simpler symbol for the time signature may be shown, as a number on top with the specified note underneath. This is a more graphic usage found often in textbooks and printed music.

Ex.	$\frac{3}{4}$	is written as	
	$\frac{6}{8}$	is written as	
	$\frac{4}{2}$	is written as	

SHORT CUTS

Two other time signature symbols are often used instead of numbers. The first of these 'short-cut' symbols is a capital 'C' centered on the staff, used for pieces in $\frac{4}{4}$ time, often called **common time**. The other refers to **cut time** (*alle breve*), used for pieces in $\frac{2}{2}$ time, made like a capital 'C' with a vertical line drawn through it. It means to give each note one-half of its defined value. These time signatures are actually leftover symbols from the late 13th century to the late 16th century, then called mensural notation.

Ex.

MORE PRACTICE

Practice these rhythm patterns in simple time by marking the strong beats, counting and clapping each pattern several times.

$\frac{2}{4}$

$\frac{3}{4}$

$\frac{4}{4}$