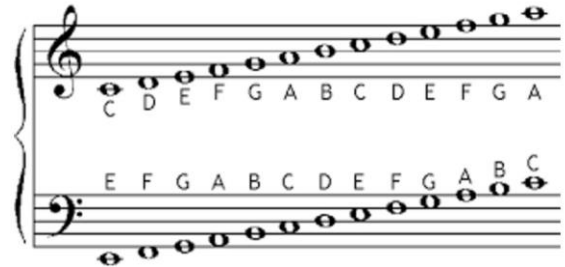


Basic Music Reading Part 2: Musical Notation

What is a musical note?

Every musical note has a **pitch** and a **duration**. And you have to be able to read that information instantly. This is done by using symbols.

Pitch is how high or how low the note is. This is shown by where the note appears on the Grand Staff. In this diagram, the low E in the Bass Clef is E2. Middle C is of course C4. And in the G Clef, the highest note shown here is A5.



Duration is how long you hold the note. Duration is measured in "**beats**", which is a clock you keep ticking inside your head. The director's right hand shows you how fast the beats are happening. You synch your mental clock to the director's right hand.


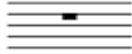

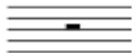

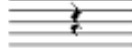

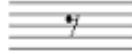

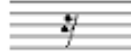
Rests:

Obviously, you won't be singing constantly for 2 hours. So there has to be a kind of note that doesn't make any sound. It's called a **rest**. When you see a rest, it doesn't mean "take a coffee break". It means "**keep counting the beat and sing silence.**"

What does a note look like?

The **shape** of the note tells you how many beats to hold it.

- A whole note is just an open circle. Hold it 4 beats.
- Add a tail (up or down) and you get a half note. Hold it 2 beats.
- Fill in the circle and you get a quarter note. Hold it 1 beat.
- Add a flag and you get an eighth note. Hold 1/2 a beat.
- Add another flag and you get a sixteenth note. Hold it 1/4 of a beat.
- This is a slight oversimplification. A quarter note doesn't always get one beat. See "time signature" below.

Name	Note	Rest
Whole Note		
Half Note		
Quarter Note		
Eighth Note		
Sixteenth Note		

Never forget that **a rest is also a note!** It's just a **note without any sound**. **You really, really have to understand this concept.**

Dotted notes:

A dot after the note always means you hold it for 50% longer. **Dotted notes are a huge deal for singers!** Holding a note just a bit longer adds emphasis.









Example: think about how you might sing "America":

"A" = quarter note

"mer" = dotted quarter note

"i" = eighth note

"ca" = dotted quarter note

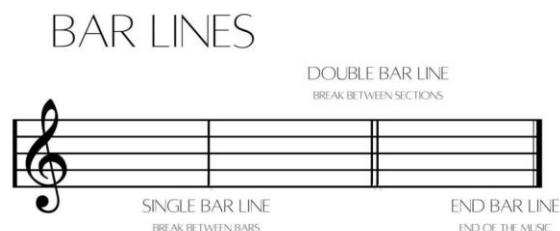
Note	Beats	Note	Beats
	4 beats		6 beats
	2 beats		3 beats
	1 beat		1½ beats
	½ beat		¾ beat

Measure:

Music is written in units called **measures** or **bars**. This example has four measures. Most musical scores also number the measures. This is so in rehearsal, you can quickly jump to specific parts of the score.

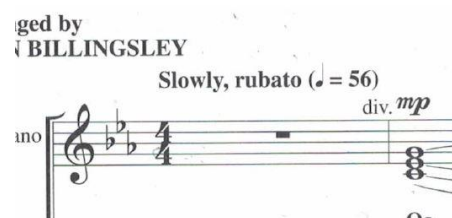


There are several different types of bar lines. Here are the most common ones. You'll learn about a few more bar lines when we get to verse repeats and the "musical road map."



Tempo:

Tempo is **how fast the beats are happening**. Usually printed at the beginning of the score in beats per minute. Throughout the score there might be adjustments for tempo.



In this example, the tempo is "a quarter note is 56 beats per minute". In other words, about one beat per second.

Your director's job is to set the tempo. All a singer needs to know about tempo is: **watch the director's right hand**. The director is always right, no matter what the numbers say.

Time Signature:

The time signature is written as a fake fraction, and tells you

- (1) (top number) **How many beats** in one measure, and
- (2) (bottom number) What kind of note gets **one beat**.

3/4 Time Signature



Most music is written so that a quarter note gets one beat. However, there are times when it might be better to make a different note equal to one beat. Don't worry about this - it'll make perfect sense when you see it for real.

4/4 time: 4 beats per measure, every 1/4 note gets one beat. This is by far the most common time signature. In fact, when music was all hand-written, most copyists just used a **capital C** as a shorthand symbol to mean 4/4 or **common time**.

	Duple Time: Two beats in each measure	Triple Time: Three beats in each measure	Quadruple Time: Four beats in each measure
The Quarter Note = 1 beat/count	$\frac{2}{4}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{4}{4}$
The Half Note = 1 beat/count	$\frac{2}{2}$	$\frac{3}{2}$	$\frac{4}{2}$
The Eighth Note = 1 beat/count	$\frac{2}{8}$	$\frac{3}{8}$	$\frac{4}{8}$

Here are some other time signatures you will see:

2/2 time: 2 beats per measure, every 1/2 note gets one beat. You'll see this a lot. It's so common that it's often called "**cut time**" and the symbol is a "C" with a cut mark through it.



4/2 time: 4 beats per measure, but a 1/2 note is what gets one beat. Sooner or later, you can bet that the music is going to get fast, and there will be a lot of notes per measure.



9/8 time: 9 beats per measure, and an eighth note gets one beat. As you can see, this is really some kind of 3 beat measure. You could write it as 3/4, with each quarter note getting a dot. But all those dots would probably look messy and confusing after a few pages.



Subdividing:

Subdividing means "breaking a note into groups of smaller notes." This subject can get complicated, but let's just stick with the basics for now.

You already know that a whole note equals two half notes, four quarter notes, eight eighth notes, and so forth. Life would be simple if all music was just a string of quarter notes, half notes, and two flavors of rest. But you'd hate that kind of music. Everything would sound like a marching band.

This is where **Subdividing** comes in. You usually sing notes right on the beat. But what if you want to stick an extra note or two in the same measure? It makes music much more interesting - but how do you show it on paper? Subdividing and triplets.

Here's an example. It's 4/4 time, so four beats per measure. But the bass part has eight notes in it. Two of them are quarter notes and six of them are eighth notes. That's five beats. It just won't fit! And in the piano accompaniment, there are twelve eighth notes! How do you get twelve eighth notes into four beats?

Welcome to the **triplet**. Three eighth notes connected together with a "3" means "sing these three notes in the same time as you would sing two notes." Remember Lawrence Welk? If you count "one-and-a two-and-a, three-and-a, four-and-a" then there's your twelve notes in four beats.

Here's a subdividing graphic. Read it vertically. Look at the quarter note column here. It says: One quarter note equals:

- 2 eighth notes
- 3 triplet notes
- 4 sixteenth notes
- 5 quint notes

And so forth.

By the way, the line connecting note groups is technically called a "beam".

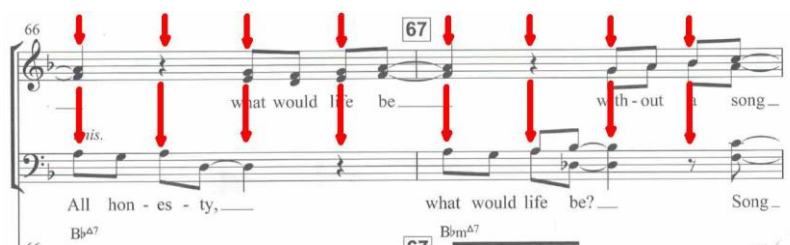
	Note:	Divisions:	Divisions:	Divisions:	Divisions:
2 parts					
3 parts					
4 parts					
5 parts					
6 parts					
7 parts					

Lining up the parts

It's very easy to get lost, especially when there's a lot of notes. But there is a trick! Notice the spacing of the notes here. The notes are spaced so they line up with the beats.

Two eighth notes in the upper part line up with one quarter note in the lower part. Then they allow two spaces for the half note in the lower part. In modern musical printing, they almost always manage to line up the notes for the upper and lower parts.

Here's another example. Look at how the notes are lined up with the beat. Vertical spacing is very important. If the notes were all crammed together at random, finding the beat would be a nightmare.



This example is in 4/4 time so there are 4 beats per measure and a 1/4 note gets one beat. Now look at the first measure:

- Beat #1 = quarter note for high voices and two eighth notes for low voices.
- Then on beat #2, highs sing silence for one beat while the low voices sing two eighth notes.
- On beat #3 highs sing two eighth notes while the lows carry the syllable "ty" for one beat.
- On beat #4 highs sing two eighth notes while the lows sing silence for one beat.
- The second measure is left to the student as an exercise.

Alignment shows you how your notes relate to the other voices. **When** you get lost, listening to the other voices and looking at the alignment will get you back in synch. **Everybody gets lost**, and the note alignment helps you get un-lost.

Breathing:

A comma is used to show you when to breathe. Breath marks are not always printed, and the director usually disagrees about where to put them. You'll add your own breath marks during rehearsal. **Remember to bring a pencil to rehearsal!**



Unless directed otherwise, a rest is always a good place to grab a breath. Just remember that **a rest is also a note!** It's just a silent note. When you see a rest, don't just take a vacation. That will make you late for the next note. Just "sing silence" when you see a rest.

And of course there's **staggered breathing**. This is when a choir has to hold a ridiculously long note. Yes, there will certainly be a **fermata** in the score. What you do is take turns breathing. Remember that a choir is trying to sound like one really big voice. No individualism.

Stagger breathing is a lot harder than you think. What you do is pick a time when the people near you are still singing, then fade out, grab a breath, then fade in. This just takes practice. You'll figure it out.