

# Time Signatures

## The Complete Break Down



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Key: All

Harmony of example: C, G, Am, F

Video Tutorial: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgHL4cao\\_58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgHL4cao_58)

Chord Progression Used Throughout:

| C //// | G //// | Am //// | F ////

Time Signatures: When you look at a piece of sheet music and you see two numbers stacked on top of each other

5 2 7 2 3 4  
4 2 8 4 2 4

These numbers tell you two things, let's use 4/4 as an example

- The first number is how many, so 4 would be 4 in total
- The second number is what kind of beat, so it would be quarter time (you can imagine the second number as the bottom number of a fraction with one over it, or 1/4)
- So 4/4 is four quarter notes

### 4/4

The most common of all time signatures, completely dominates all of modern radio (which is a shame because varying time signatures is a lot of fun to be honest, must my opinion)

With 4/4 the strong beat can be 1 2 3 or 4 or any combination of those, lets look at how some strum patterns you know look in this time signature

Strum Pattern:

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |  
C | G | Am | F |  
D D D D U | D D D D U | D D D D U | D D D D U |

- When strumming in 4/4 that doesn't mean you are limited to just using quarter beats, but if you use 8ths or 16ths you should remember that it all needs to add up to 4/4 in the end, taking into account all the strums and rests.

Strum Pattern: The classic old faithful, calypso strum or island strum

```
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
C                | G                | Am                | F                |
D  D U  U D U | D  D U  U D U | D  D U  U D U | D  D U  U D U |
```

Lets look at one example of a using 16<sup>th</sup>s in 4/4, you count these 1 e & a

Strum Pattern:

```
1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a |
C                                |
D  D  D  D U  U  U D U D U |
```

Suggested Listening: Literally everything on FM radio for the last 30 years

## 3/4

Waltz time, the second most popular time signature, used in waltz, country music, ballads.  $\frac{3}{4}$  has Three quarter beats. It also has a more fixed "down beat" or strong beat, and that is the 1

Strum Pattern 1

```
1 & 2 & 3 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & |
C                | G                | Am                | F                |
D  d  d  | D  d  d  | D  d  d  | D  d  d  |
```

- The strong beat is emphasized here by writing the other down strums with a lower case D

Strum Pattern 2

```
1 & 2 & 3 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & |
C                | G                | Am                | F                |
D    u d u | D    u d u | D    u d u | D    u d u |
```

Suggested Listening:

Hank Williams: I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry  
Tennessee Waltz

## 6/8

Hey, Tyler, 6/8 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  are the same, right? Mathematically yes, but musically now, because 6/8 has two strong beats, the 1 and the 4, as you can see in fingerpicking patterns which are more common in this style but let's look at it from a strumming perspective to really hammer home this idea.

```
1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
C           | G           | Am          | F           |
D d d D d d | D d d D d d | D d d D d d | D d d D d d |
```

- Here are our 8ths have become down, unlike  $\frac{3}{4}$  that has up strums on the 8ths, or &.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> beats have a strong beat, with a stronger down strum.

```
1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
C           | G           | Am          | F           |
DududuDududu | DududuDududu | DududuDududu | DududuDududu |
```

- Even when strumming the 1/6<sup>th</sup> notes we still emphasis the 1 and the 4.

Suggested Listening: Ballads from the 60s loved this time signature

Elvis Presley: Can't Help (Falling In Love)

James Brown: Try Me

Leonard Cohen: Hallelujah

## 12/8

12/8 is where we start to count it outloud while we play it a little bit differently than we write it, when it is written out it is 1 through 12 but the swing groove lends itself more to counting it as 4 triplets

```
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
```

Here we have strong beats on the 1, 4, 7 and 10, similar to 4/4. In fact many times 12/8 is written has 4/4 with "swing time"

I count it like this, like 4 triplets

```
1 po la 2 po la 3 po la 4 po la
```

A swing time strum pattern may look like, this is very common in the blues

```
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 |  
C                               |  
D   U D   U D   U D       U   |
```

Suggested Listening:

T-Bone Walker - Stormy Monday  
Stevie Ray Vaughn - Texas Flood

## 5/4

This one may seem exotic at first but is actually quite fun and practical, it is five quarter notes and would be technically written like this. Our down beats are on 1 and 4.

```
1 2 3 4 5
```

With 8<sup>th</sup> notes like this

```
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 &
```

Now, this is very tricky to count, so when strumming so you actually count it like this.

```
1 2 3 1 2
```

I will write out a strum pattern 1-5 but then again on how to count it to illustrate the difference. It is only the first two chords of the progression because I ran out of space, but make sure you play all the way through Am and F

```
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & |  
C                   | G                   |  
D   U D U D   D   | D   U D U D   D   |
```

This is how I could count it.

```
1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & |  
C                   | G                   |  
D   U D U D   D   | D   U D U D   D   |
```

Suggested Listening

Jesus Christ Super Star: Everything's Alright

## 7/8

This is the time signature I know the least about, I am not that familiar with songs that use this other than "Money" by Pink Floyd. Because it is essentially 4/4 minus one 8<sup>th</sup> note it has an interesting quality of rolling over on itself that sounds nice. Strong beats here on the 1 and the 5 as well.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
D d d d D d d

You could also think about it like

1 & 2 & 3 & 4

Suggested Listening:

Money - Pink Floyd

\*The vocal parts are in 4/4, only the riff is 7/8

