

Time signatures are very important in music. They enable us to count a pulse in a piece and so to keep time. This is absolutely necessary whether you are playing on your own or with others. They occur at the beginning of a piece, after the clef and key signature. Unlike the clef and key signature, they are not written at the beginning of every line. However, if a composer changes the number or type of beat, a new time signature would be shown.

A time signature is made up of two numbers. The top number tells you how many beats to count in a bar. The bottom number tells you what type of beat to count in. The chart below, which lists all the time signatures that may be tested in Associated Board Exams up to Grade 5, will help you to understand this. Let's explore some of the terms:

Simple Time - where a time signature uses a beat that isn't dotted. Here the beat can be divided by two.









Compound Time - where a time signature uses a beat which is dotted. The beat would be divisible by three.

Irregular Time - bars which contain beats that are divisible by a combination of two and three. Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* and Holst's *Mars, the Bringer of War* are both in $\frac{5}{4}$ for example.

In exam questions you would also need to use words to describe the quantity of beats in a bar. *Duple* (where there are two beats), *triple* (three beats), *quadruple* (four beats) and more rarely *quintuple* (five beats) and *septuple* (seven beats) would be the descriptive words to use here.

Next to the $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{2}{2}$ signs are the alternative symbols for those time signatures.

Let me know if there is anything you don't understand here.

SIMPLE TIME			Duple Time (two lots of)		Triple Time (three lots of)		Quadruple Time (four lots of)
 beats				3	3 quaver beats in a bar	4	4 quaver beats in a bar
 beats	2 4	2 crotchet beats in a bar	3 4	3 crotchet beats in a bar	4 C	4 crotchet beats in a bar	
 beats	2 2 C	2 minim beats in a bar	3 2	3 minim beats in a bar	4 2	4 minim beats in a bar	
COMPOUND TIME			Duple Time (two lots of)		Triple Time (three lots of)		Quadruple Time (four lots of)
 beats	6 16	2 dotted quaver beats in a bar	9 16	3 dotted quaver beats in a bar	12 16	4 dotted quaver beats in a bar	
 beats	6 8	2 dotted crotchet beats in a bar	9 8	3 dotted crotchet beats in a bar	12 8	4 dotted crotchet beats in a bar	
 beats	6 4	2 dotted minim beats in a bar	9 4	3 dotted minim beats in a bar			
IRREGULAR TIME			Quintuple Time (five lots of)		Septuple Time (seven lots of)		
 beats	5 8	5 quaver beats in a bar	7 8	7 quaver beats in a bar			
 beats	5 4	5 crotchet beats in a bar	7 4	7 crotchet beats in a bar			