

A RHYTHMIC MIX

Composers and songwriters are always coming up with new musical challenges for performers. Some pieces have a new time signature in almost every bar. While complex meters and irregular placement of accents can make for a rhythmically exciting piece, they can also be a challenge to master.

In reading any meters outside of the most common ones—4/4 (common time), 3/4, or 2/2 (half time)—the key is paying attention to the placement of accents and other strong or stressed beats.

Simple meter means that each beat in a measure can be divided into two even parts (2/2, 2/4, 4/4, etc.) and compound meter contains beats that can be divided into three or more parts (6/8, 6/4, 9/8, etc.) or into two uneven parts. Even time signatures that have 16 or 32 in the denominator can be easily classified; the only thing that changes is which type of note provides the basis for the beat.

When shifting between these compound meters and more regular ones, the important thing to remember is that the basic pulse—the eighth note, or a smaller subdivided note—remains the same. Moving from a 4/4 measure to one in 7/8 is just a shift from eight eighth note pulses per measure to seven eighth note pulses per measure.

Irregular and complex meters crop up all the time, even in popular songs. With this guide you'll be able keep the beat no matter what meter comes your way.

7/8 Often grouped into two groups of two beats and one group of three, and the group of three can appear anywhere in the measure. This meter is sometimes alternated with 4/4 for a jerky, off-balance feel.

1 2 - 1 2 - 1 2 3

1 2 3 - 1 2 - 1 2

8/8 Two groups of three and one group of two. ONE two three FOUR five SIX seven eight. One popular example can be found in the song "Clocks" by Coldplay. ONE two three FOUR five six SEVEN eight.

1 2 3 - 1 2 3 - 1 2

1 2 3 - 1 2 - 1 2 3

5/4 When accented on beats one and four, it imitates a kind of waltz: ONE two three FOUR five. Also appears with accents on one and three: ONE two THREE four five. It appears in the theme from *Mission: Impossible*, which uses an off-beat series of accents on one, the "and" of two, four, and five.

1 2 - 1 - 1 - 1

1 2 3 - 1 2

7/4 Sometimes represented as 4/4 followed by a 3/4, also a kind of variation on 3/4 waltz meter. It appears in "Money" by Pink Floyd, "Solsbury Hill" by Peter Gabriel, and in the verses of "All You Need Is Love" by The Beatles.

1 - 1 - 1 - 1 1 - 1 - 1

1 - 1 - 1 1 - 1 - 1 - 1

