

Note Values

Recognise the shape. Count the duration. Keep the pulse.

What does note value mean?

A note value shows **how long a note lasts** relative to other notes. Its duration is shown by the notehead, stem, flags or beams. Its vertical position on the staff shows pitch. Tempo determines how long the beats last in seconds.

All examples here use **4/4**: four quarter-note beats in each bar. The durations below assume that the **quarter note receives one beat**.

Five common note values

Whole note (semibreve)

4 beats in 4/4

Hollow notehead; no stem.

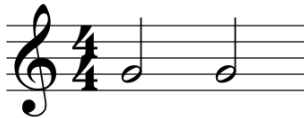


1 note fills one complete 4/4 bar.

Half note (minim)

2 beats in 4/4

Hollow notehead with a stem.



2 notes fill one complete 4/4 bar.

Quarter note (crotchet)

1 beat in 4/4

Filled notehead with a stem.



4 notes fill one complete 4/4 bar.

Eighth note (quaver)

½ beat in 4/4

Filled notehead, stem and one flag or beam.



8 notes fill one complete 4/4 bar.

Sixteenth note (semiquaver)

¼ beat in 4/4

Filled notehead, stem and two flags or beams.



16 notes fill one complete 4/4 bar.

Each step halves the duration: 1 whole = 2 halves = 4 quarters = 8 eighths = 16 sixteenths. A beam replaces flags when short notes are grouped together.

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The same rhythm in different clefs

Each staff below contains **four quarter notes**: count 1 - 2 - 3 - 4. The clef changes their pitch names, but each quarter note still lasts one beat in 4/4.

Treble clef



Bass clef



Alto clef



Tenor clef



Four-bar motif - flute, treble clef, C major

Keep a steady quarter-note pulse. C major has no sharps or flats. The motif uses all five note values, and every bar adds up to four beats.

Bars 1-2: whole note, then two half notes



Bar 1: hold C5 for beats 1-2-3-4.

Bar 2: D5 lasts beats 1-2; E5 lasts beats 3-4.

Bars 3-4: quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes



Bar 3: quarter + quarter + two eighths + quarter = 1 + 1 + 1 + 1.

Bar 4: four sixteenths + two eighths + half = 1 + 1 + 2.

Subdivide the beat: two eighths = "1 and"; four sixteenths = "1 e and a". In bar 4, count "1 e and a, 2 and, 3, 4" and hold the half note across beats 3-4.