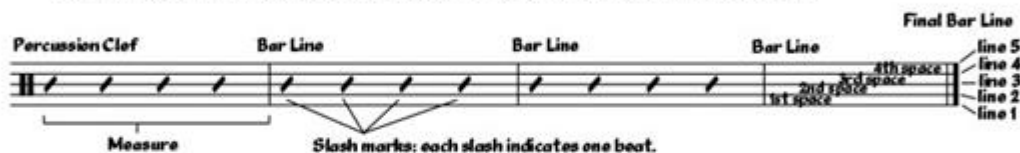


Lesson 1. Pulse and Meter

A regular pulse (**beat**) is fundamental to music. It establishes the tempo—how fast or slow the music is played. The pulse is usually divided into groups of beats. Each group of beats is called a **measure** (bar). On the musical staff, **bar lines** separate measures. Longer compositions end with a final bar line.

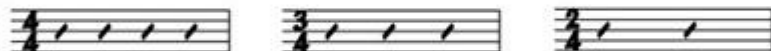
The Musical Staff

The **staff** is where music notation is written. It includes five parallel lines and the four spaces between them. The lines and spaces of a staff are referred to by number, and are always counted from the bottom up. The percussion clef sign appears at the beginning of this staff; it is most commonly used for rhythmic notation.



When beats are grouped into measures, the pulse is said to be in **meter**. Meter is indicated by a time signature. The **time signature** has two numbers, one above the other, and appears at the beginning of the first line of music.

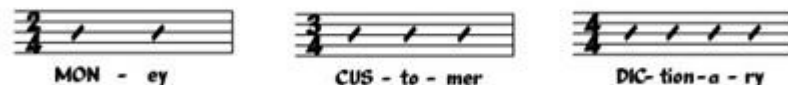
The top number of the time signature indicates how many beats are in each measure, and the bottom number indicates the duration of each beat. (You'll learn more about duration in lesson 2.)



1

$\frac{4}{4}$ time is also known as “common time,” because it is used so often. Common time is indicated with a **C**. **C** and $\frac{4}{4}$ mean the same thing: four beats per measure.

The first beat of a measure is called the **downbeat**. It is stressed more than the other beats. When words are set to music, usually the accented syllables are placed on the downbeats.



Sometimes, the accented syllable is not the first syllable of a word, as in the word “guiTAR,” “comPUter,” and “satisFACtion.” In cases like these, the beat on which the word begins may be shifted to the previous measure. This allows the accented syllable to fall on the downbeat.

