

How to Count Half-Note Triplets: A Step-by-Step Guide

SUMMARY

1. Assume we have two measures in 4/4 meter.
2. Measure #1 contains two half notes.
3. Measure #2 contains a half-note triplet.
4. In measure #1, divide each half note into three parts and count “1-2-3” for the first half note and “4-5-6” for the second half note. So, a steady “1-2-3-4-5-6.”
5. Finally, to play the half-note triplet in measure #2, continue counting 1-2-3-4-5-6 but pluck only on “1,” “3,” and “5.” The three notes you just played are even half-note triplets!

HERE IS THE PROCESS IN DETAIL TO LEARN TO PLAY HALF NOTE TRIPLETS

If we have half notes like the following in 4/4 time, we typically count them as:

1-&-2-&-3-&-4-& |

We will set a metronome at a slow speed of 40 bpm, so it ticks on numbers 1 and 3 (the red x's).

Example #1:

Example #1

The metronome ticks on the red x's.

Musical notation for Example #1: A treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains two half notes. Above the first measure, the counts are 1, &, 2, &, 3, &, 4, &. Red 'x' marks are placed above the numbers 1 and 3. The second measure is empty.

Next, instead of counting them in the usual way, |1-&-2-&-3-&-4-&|, we will divide each half note into three parts counting 1-2-3 for the first half note and 4-5-6 for the second half note. If we set a metronome, it will tick on numbers 1 and 4. Example #2:

Example #2

The metronome ticks on the red x's.

Musical notation for Example #2: A treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains two half notes. Above the first measure, the counts are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Red 'x' marks are placed above the numbers 1 and 4. The second measure is empty.

Next, we will divide each half note into three equal notes which makes them quarter-note triplets. The metronome will tick on number 1 and number 4 (the red x's). Example #3:

Example #3

Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets

Therefore, we assign a number to each note of the two triplets: **1-2-3** and **4-5-6**. Set a metronome to 40 bpm. The metronome will tick on number 1 and number 4 (the red x's in the example). Tap your right foot with the metronome and **COUNTING OUT LOUD**, play the quarter-note triplets:

Example #4

1. We assign a number to each note of each triplet.
2. Red x's =metronome ticks at 40 bpm.
3. The metronome ticks on number 1 and number 4 of each measure.

COUNT OUT LOUD and tap your right foot on the red x's with the metronome at 40 bpm.

Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets

Next, we practice alternating between half notes and quarter-note triplets, always counting **1-2-3-4-5-6**. Again, the metronome ticks on number 1 and number 4 (the red x's in the example). Tap your right foot with the metronome and **COUNTING OUT LOUD**, alternate playing a measure of half notes and a measure of quarter-note triplets. Example #5:

Example #5

Alternate between playing half notes and quarter-note triplets.

COUNT OUT LOUD and tap your right foot on the red x's with the metronome at 40 bpm.

Quarter-note triplets Quarter-note triplets

Finally, if we delete or don't play notes 2, 4, and 6 in the quarter-note triplet measures, we are left with half-note triplets! Example #6:

Example #6

Alternate between playing half notes and quarter-note triplets.

COUNT OUT LOUD and tap your right foot on the red x's with the metronome at 40 bpm.

The diagram illustrates the transformation of quarter-note triplets into half-note triplets. It consists of three musical staves:

- Staff 1:** Shows a sequence of six quarter notes numbered 1 through 6. Above notes 1, 4, and 6 are red 'x' marks. Brackets below notes 1-3 and 4-6 are labeled "Quarter-note triplets".
- Staff 2:** Shows the same sequence, but notes 2, 4, and 6 are enclosed in boxes with an 'x' over them, indicating they are to be deleted. Notes 1, 3, and 5 are blue. Brackets below notes 1-3 and 4-6 are labeled "This equals".
- Staff 3:** Shows the resulting half-note triplet: notes 1, 3, and 5 are blue, and notes 2, 4, and 6 are missing. A bracket below notes 1-3 is labeled "Half note triplets".

PRACTICE THIS FIVE-STEP EXERCISE

To better understand how to count half-note triplets, practice this five-step exercise. As you practice each step:

- Play with a metronome at 40 bpm
- Count out loud
- Tap your right foot with the metronome.

Later, when you are comfortable with all five steps, omit counting, then omit foot tapping, and finally, omit the metronome.

Example #7:

AN EXERCISE TO MASTER HALF NOTE TRIPLETS

COUNT OUT LOUD and tap your right foot with the metronome.

Red x's =metronome ticks at 40 bpm

Step #1:

1

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

5

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

9

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

Step #2: Repeat several times. If you get confused, go back to the previous step.

13

This equals

Half note triplets:

16

This equals

Half note triplets:

Step #3: Repeat several times. If you get confused, go back to the previous step.

19

This equals

Half note triplets

This equals

Half note triplets

Step #4: Repeat several times. If you get confused, go back to the previous step.

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The notation shows six measures of music. Each measure contains a half-note triplet. Above each measure are the fingerings: 1 2 3 4 5 6. Red 'x' marks are placed above the first and fourth notes of each triplet. Brackets under each triplet are labeled '3'. Below the first three triplets, arrows point to the text 'This equals' followed by a simplified version of the triplet (three half notes) labeled 'Half note triplets'.

Step #5: Repeat several times. If you get confused, go back to the previous step.

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The notation shows six measures of music. Each measure contains a half-note triplet. Above each measure are the fingerings: 1 2 3 4 5 6. Red 'x' marks are placed above the first and fourth notes of each triplet. Brackets under each triplet are labeled '3'. Below the first three triplets is the text 'Half note triplets'.

How Do I Incorporate This Method of Counting Into The Piece I Am Working On?

- Practice away from the piece first.
- Learn the basics of counting half-note triplets by practicing open-string exercises such as those above.
- When you return to the piece, extract the passage with the half note triplets.
- If it is a fast passage, work out the rhythm slowly at first using the counting principles above.
- Gradually speed it up either by ear or with a metronome.