

# How to Count Quarter-Note Triplets: A Step-by-Step Guide

## SUMMARY

1. Assume we have two measures in 2/4 meter.
2. Measure #1 contains two quarter notes.
3. Measure #2 contains a quarter-note triplet.
4. In measure #1, divide each quarter note into three parts and count “1-2-3” for the first quarter note and “4-5-6” for the second quarter note. So, a steady “1-2-3-4-5-6.”
5. Finally, to play the quarter-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 quarter-note triplets!

## HERE IS THE PROCESS IN DETAIL TO LEARN TO PLAY QUARTER NOTE TRIPLETS

If we have quarter notes like the following in 2/4 time, we typically count them as: **1-&-2-&** | **1-&-2-&** |. If we set a metronome, it would tick on numbers 1 and 2 (the red x's). Example #1:

Example #1

The metronome ticks on the red x's.

1 & 2 & | 1 & 2 & |

But instead of counting them in the usual way, **1-&-2-&** / **1-&-2-&**, we will divide each quarter note into three parts counting **1-2-3-4-5-6**. 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.

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

Next, we will divide each quarter note into three equal notes which makes them 8<sup>th</sup>-note triplets. The metronome will tick on number 1 and number 4 (the red x's). Example #3:

Example #3

8th-note triplets                      8th-note triplets

Therefore, we assign a number to each note of the triplet: **1-2-3-4-5-6**. Set a metronome to 60 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 8<sup>th</sup>-note triplets:

Example #4

1. We assign a number to each note of each triplet.
2. Red x's =metronome ticks at 60 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 60 bpm.

Next, we practice alternating between quarter notes and 8<sup>th</sup>-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 quarter notes and a measure of 8<sup>th</sup>-note triplets. Example #5:

Example #5

Alternate between playing quarter notes and 8th-note triplets.

**COUNT OUT LOUD** and tap your right foot on the red x's with the metronome at 60 bpm.

Finally, if we delete or don't play notes 2, 4, and 6 in the 8<sup>th</sup>-note triplet measures, we are left with quarter-note triplets! Example #6:

Example #6

Delete or don't play  
notes 2, 4, and 6.

The diagram shows a sequence of notes on a treble clef staff. The first six notes are numbered 1 through 6, with red 'x' marks above notes 1, 3, 4, and 6. The next six notes are also numbered 1 through 6, with red 'x' marks above notes 1, 3, 4, and 6. The final six notes are numbered 1 through 6, with red 'x' marks above notes 1, 3, 4, and 6. Brackets below the notes indicate triplets of notes 1-2-3, 3-4-5, and 5-6-1. A bracket labeled 'This equals' spans the last triplet, pointing to a simplified diagram below. The simplified diagram shows a treble clef staff with notes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Red 'x' marks are above notes 1, 3, 4, and 6. A bracket below notes 1, 2, and 3 is labeled '3', indicating a quarter note triplet.

Quarter note triplets

## PRACTICE THIS FIVE-STEP EXERCISE

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

- Play with a metronome at 60 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:



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

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This equals

Quarter note triplets

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

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## 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 quarter-note triplets by practicing open-string exercises such as those above.
- When you return to the piece, extract the passage with the quarter 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.