Simple and compound time

- All the time signatures we've met so far are examples of **simple time**. In simple time, each beat divides into two – a crotchet into two quavers, a quaver into two semiquavers, and so on.

> $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{4}$:   The ♩ beat divides into ♪ ♪
>
> $\frac{2}{2}$, $\frac{3}{2}$ and $\frac{4}{2}$:   The ♩ beat divides into ♩ ♩
>
> $\frac{3}{8}$:   The ♪ beat divides into ♫ ♫

- It's time to meet some **compound time signatures**. In compound time, each beat is a dotted note that divides into three. At Grade 3, the compound time signatures all have a dotted-crotchet beat, which is divided into three quavers.

- The top number of the time signature tells us how many quavers (shown by the bottom number '8') there are in a bar.

> In $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{9}{8}$ and $\frac{12}{8}$, the ♩. beat divides into ♪ ♪ ♪

Did you know?

Notice the dotted minims in the $\frac{9}{8}$ and $\frac{12}{8}$ examples above. In compound time, a dotted minim is equivalent to two dotted-crotchet beats: ♩. = ♩. ♩., just as ♩ = ♩ ♩ in simple time.

Exercise 1 Circle the correct answer for each of these questions.

a. What is the time signature for four dotted-crotchet beats in a bar?
$\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$

b. How many quavers are there in a bar of $\frac{6}{8}$?
2 3 4 6

c. Which of these is a compound time signature?
$\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{3}{2}$

d. How many dotted-crotchet beats are there in a bar of $\frac{9}{8}$?
2 3 4 9

Exercise 2 Number the dotted-crotchet beats and then circle the correct time signature for each rhythm.

a.
$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$

Beats:

b.
$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$

Beats:

c.
$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$

Beats:

d.
$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$

Beats:

e.
$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$

Beats:

Smart tip

Each of these rhythms adds up to one dotted-crotchet beat:

Challenge!

Can you tap the rhythms in Exercise 2 while counting the beats out loud? Try repeating them over and over.