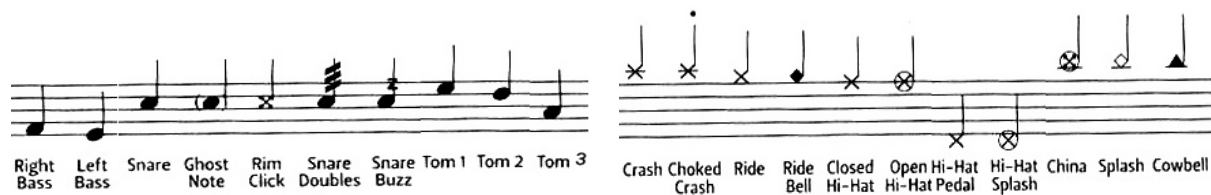


Drum Notation and Reading Basics

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Music is written on a staff (a set of five horizontal lines with notes written on them). The notes typically represent a different musical pitch but in drum notation, they represent what drum or cymbal to play. Here is a chart of standard drum set notation.



Rhythms are written as a combination of notes and rests. Notes represent sounds of a certain duration and rests represent silence of a certain duration. So you play the notes and don't play the rests but they both last for a specific amount of time. Here are the different types of notes and rests and how long they last.



So in the amount of time it would take to play 1 whole note, you could also play 2 half notes, 4 quarter notes, 8 eighth notes, 12 eighth note triplets, and so on.

Tempo is how fast or slow a piece of music is. This is measured in beats per minute, usually quarter notes. A metronome (a device that generates a pulse) is a good tool for establishing the tempo of a song. You can set most metronomes to play the different subdivisions (quarter notes, eighth notes, etc.) at any particular tempo.

The **time signature** of a song is written as a fraction and specifies how many beats are in each measure and what note value gets the beat. The bottom number indicates what note value gets the beat while the top tells you how many of those beats are in a measure. So if you have a time signature of 5/4, this tells you that there are five quarter notes in a measure. Some examples would be:



The C (common time) is the same as 4/4 and the C with a slash through (cut time) is the same as 2/2.

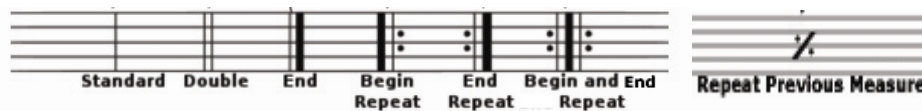
Dynamic markings indicate how loud or soft to play. The six main ones are:

- pp* = pianissimo (very soft)
- p* = piano (soft)
- mp* = mezzo piano (medium soft)
- mf* = mezzo forte (medium loud)
- f* = forte (loud)
- ff* = fortissimo (very loud)

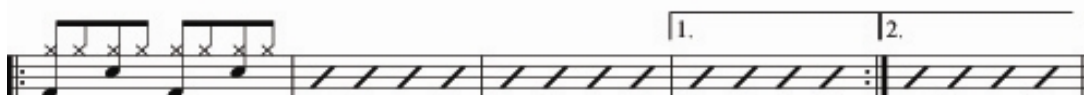
> = indicates an accent. Play notes with an accent louder than the others.

Measures (or bars) are separated by bar lines. A double bar line separates different sections of music (verse-chorus, A section-B section, etc.). A double bar line with a thicker second line indicates that the piece of music is finished.

Repeats are double bar lines with the thicker second line and two dots between the middle line on the staff. They indicate when a piece of music is to be repeated. A percent sign indicates to repeat the previous measure. This illustration shows the bar lines and repeats.



Numbered endings allow for repeated sections to have different endings. In the example below, you would play what is indicated up to the first ending, then take the repeat back and when you come to the 4th measure again, you would play the second ending. (The slashes indicate to continue to play “time”, a steady beat, or to continue playing the groove).



Capo, Segno, Coda, and Fine are other directions telling you where to play in the song.



- * **Capo** means “beginning”, so if you see **D.C.** (Da Capo), go to the beginning.
- * **Segno** means “sign”, so if you see **D.S.** (Dal Segno), go to the segno symbol.
- * **Coda** means “tail”, so if you see **A.C.** (Al Coda), play to the coda symbol.
- * **Fine** means “the end”.

You will typically see combinations of these directions in sheet music. For example,

* **D.S. al Fine** means go to the segno symbol and play to the end or where the piece is marked “fine”.

* **D.C. al Coda** means go to the beginning and play until you see “coda”, then go to the coda symbol.

Tied Notes indicate that the two notes tied together are played as one (you only play the first note). In the example below, two tied 8th notes would be played like a quarter note, two tied 16th notes would be played like an 8th note and two tied quarter notes would be played like a half note.



Dotted Notes (a single dot placed immediately after a note or rest) increases the duration of that note or rest by one half of its original value. So if a quarter note is worth 1 beat, the dot following that quarter note is worth a half of that. Then the value of a dotted quarter note is 1 and ½ beats. Here is an example of dotted quarter notes.



This is an overview of reading drum notation. A good teacher can help put this into practice. For more articles like this one, visit DrumLessonsInLA.com.