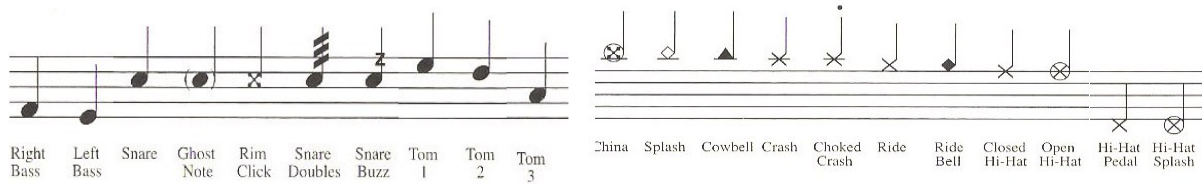


Drum Notation and Reading Basics



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.

Name	Note	Rest	Beats	1 $\frac{4}{4}$ measure
Whole			4	
Half			2	
Quarter			1	
Eighth			$\frac{1}{2}$	
Sixteenth			$\frac{1}{4}$	

So in the amount of time it would take to play 1 whole note in a typical measure, you could also play 2 half notes, 4 quarter notes, 8 eighth notes, and 16 sixteenth notes.

Tempo is the speed of a piece of music. 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.

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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)

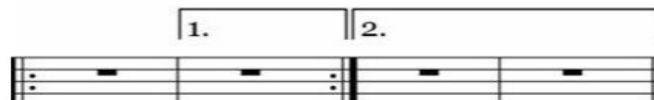
> = indicates an accent. Play notes with an accent louder than the others.

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 a 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 end of the phrase again, you would play the second ending.



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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,

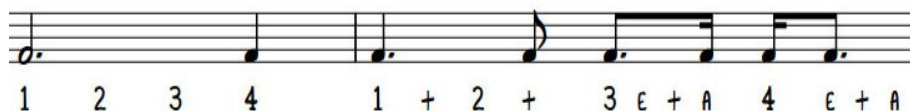
* **D.S. al Fine** means go to the segno symbol and play to the end or where the piece is marked “fine”.

* **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, the quarter note on beat four of the first measure is tied to the half note on beat one of the second measure. So you don't play the half note. Same goes for the quarter and eighth note in the third measure.



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 these into practice. For more articles like this one, visit DrumLessonsInLA.com .