

Irregular time signatures - 5/4, 7/4, 5/8, 7/8 | Amy Linington music

This worksheet Covers:

- Irregular time signatures - 5/4, 7/4, 5/8, 7/8
- Grouping of notes and rests within these times
- Irregular divisions of simple time values.

What Is An Irregular Time Signature?

An irregular time signature *cannot* be subdivided into regular groups such as, duple, triple or quadruple. This is because the top number cannot be divided **equally** into two, three or four ie: regular timings. Until the late 19th century, irregular time signatures were rarely used in Western music.

The number on the top of the time signature (the one that tells you how many beats) will not be able to be divided into equal groups. This is because the number is not a multiple of 2, 3 or 4!

Some common irregular time signatures that you should familiarize yourself with are:

5/4 5/8 7/4 7/8

Irregular Time Signatures In Detail...

5/4

5/4 means 5 crotchets in a bar.

However, 5/4 is an unusual timing to count as it is an uneven division of strong beats. When counting in this time signature, you want to break up the beats to be

- 1-2 / 1-2-3 or
- 1-2-3 / 1-2.

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- Each bar is generally broken down into two different segments. See t below



Remember, 5/4 is an irregular time signature because the number 5 is not easily divisible between 2, 3 or 4!

5/8

5/8 means 5 quavers per bar.

But as we have seen with the 5/4, 5/8 is also counted in 2 irregular sections.

We would group this into:

- a dotted crotchet followed by a crotchet (1-2-3 / 1-2) or
- a crotchet followed by a dotted crotchet (1-2 / 1-2-3).

See below.

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Two musical staves in treble clef. The first staff is in 5/4 time, showing a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, half, quarter, quarter. The second staff is in 7/4 time, showing a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. Both staves have a box above the first two notes and accents (>) above the other notes.

7/4

7/4 means 7 crotchet beats per bar.

However, as we have seen with the time signatures above, we usually count this in irregular parts. However this time there are 3 of them.

Although we are counting in 3 this cannot be considered “triple time” because the beats are unequal.

We would either group this as

- minim, minim, dotted minim 1-2-/1-2-/1-2-3 or
- dotted minim, minim, minim 1-2-3 / 1-2 / 1-2

Two musical staves in treble clef, both in 7/4 time. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: dotted half, minim, minim, dotted half, minim, quarter, quarter. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: dotted half, minim, dotted half, minim, dotted half, quarter, quarter. Both staves have a box above the first three notes and accents (>) above the other notes.

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7 8

7/8 means 7 quavers per bar.

As with 7/4, we also count 7/8 in 3.

This would be grouped as

- dotted crotchet, crotchet, crotchet 1-2-3 / 1-2 / 1-2 or
- crotchet, crotchet, dotted crotchet 1-2 / 1-2 / 1-2-3

Two musical staves in 7/8 time signature. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: a dotted crotchet, a crotchet, and a crotchet, followed by three groups of a crotchet and a dotted crotchet. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: a crotchet, a crotchet, and a dotted crotchet, followed by three groups of a crotchet and a dotted crotchet. Both staves have a box above the first three notes containing a dotted crotchet, a crotchet, and a crotchet. The notes are beamed together in groups of three, with accents (>) above the first note of each group.

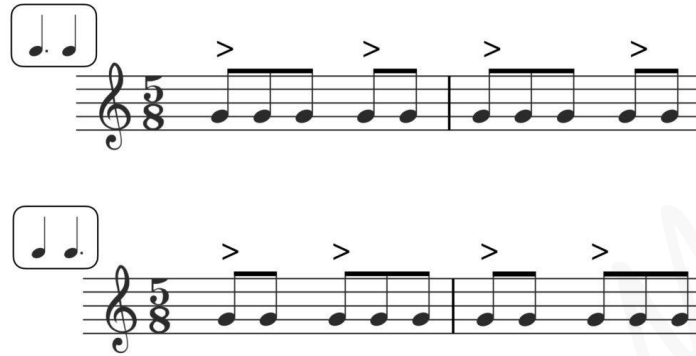
Grouping Irregular Time Signatures.

It is as important to know how to group the notes in irregular time signatures as it is the regular time signatures. It will help you with recognising time signatures in the exam and beaming notes correctly. Look at this bar:

A musical staff in 5/8 time signature showing a sequence of ten eighth notes beamed together in two groups of five.

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This is unclear and difficult to read. If we group the notes as follows, it is a lot clearer and we can understand the rhythm and feel of the music straight away.



What kind of time signature questions are there in Grade 5 Theory?

There are 4 types of question:

- Putting bar lines in an extract with a given time signature.
- Putting a time signature in an extract with given bar lines.
- Rewriting music in a new time signature without changing the rhythmic effect.
- General knowledge questions about the technical names of time signatures.

You won't get every type in your exam, but any of them can come up, so be prepared for all of them.