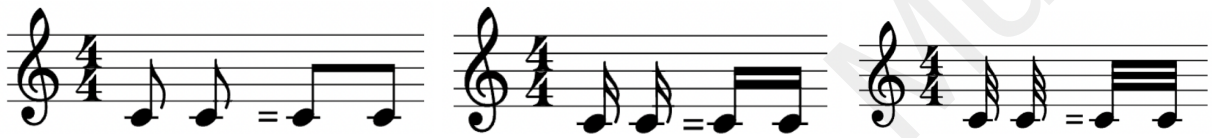
Grouping Notes In Bars - Grade 5 Theory | Amy Linington Music

Beaming Notes

Notes shorter than a crotchet, such as a quaver or semiquaver, have “tails” attached to them. Connecting several notes with tails is called “beaming.” Beaming notes together is important because it makes sheet music significantly easier to read:



There are general “grouping” rules which generally stay the same for both simple and compound time signatures:

- **Do not beam across bar lines.**
    - All beaming takes place within the measure! If you have a stray quaver at the end of a bar, it should be written with the tail, rather than connected to the first beat of the next bar.
- **Do not beam across the centre of a bar. EVER.**
    - For example, in 4/4 time, the centre of the bar lies between beats two and three. These beats are almost always separated to ensure a clear rhythm for the reader.
- **Semi-quavers are grouped by beat.**
    - For example, in a bar where you are counting in crotchets, a maximum of **four** semiquavers should be grouped together. If a *dotted* crotchet gets a beat, say in 6/8 time,, a maximum of *six* semiquavers can be grouped together.
- **Demisemiquavers are grouped by beat.**
    - For example, in 4/4 time, a maximum of *eight* **Demisemiquavers** can be grouped together. But because the triple lines of **Demisemiquavers** beams can get a little messy, we connect groups of four with a single line.

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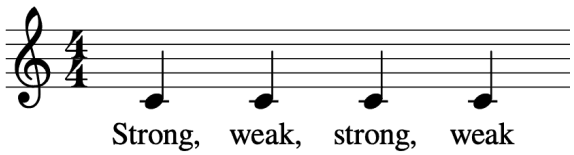
Grouping Notes

Grouping Notes In 4/4 Time

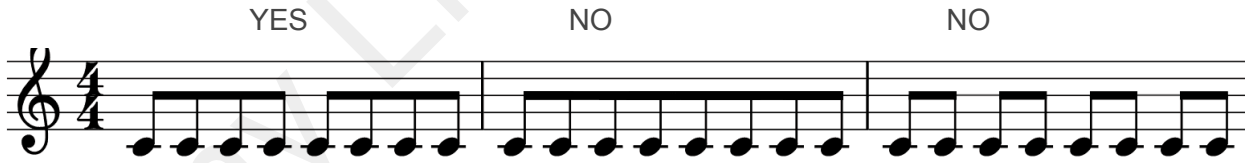
Every time signature has “strong” and “weak” beats. In 4/4 time

- beat **one** is the strongest beat in the measure.
- beat **three** is the *secondary* strong beat
- Beats **two** and **four** are weak



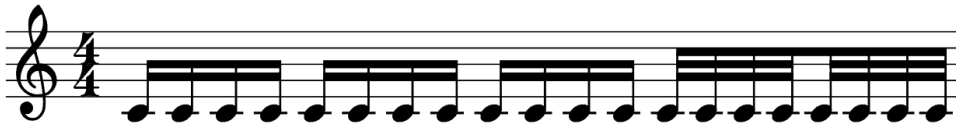
Now it might be clear why it’s important not to **beam over the centre of the bar.**

In 4/4, beats 2 and 3 should always be separated. However, beats one and two *can* be grouped together, as well as beats three and four:



Remember

- both **semiquaver and demisemiquavers should be grouped by beat**.
- In 4/4 time, this means that there will be a maximum of *four* semiquavers in a beat, and a maximum of *eight* demisemiquavers in a beat:



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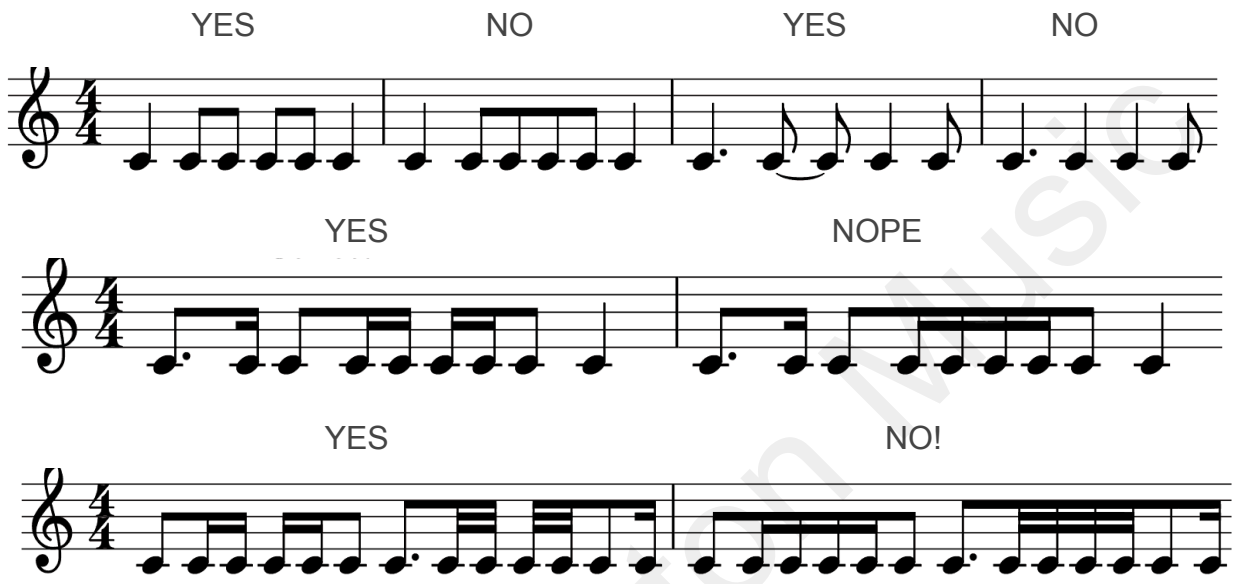
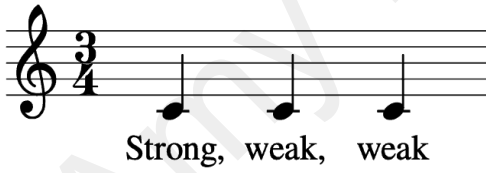
Here are some examples of correct and incorrect beaming in 4/4 time.



Note how the correct examples are much easier to read.

Grouping In 3/4 Time

In 3/4 time, beat **one** is the strongest, while beats **two** and **three** are both weak.



Because there is an odd number of beats per bar, the “centre” of 3/4 is in the middle of beat two. As both beats two and three are weak, there is no need to separate them. Many choose to group quavers by beat in 3/4 time, both of the following groupings are correct:

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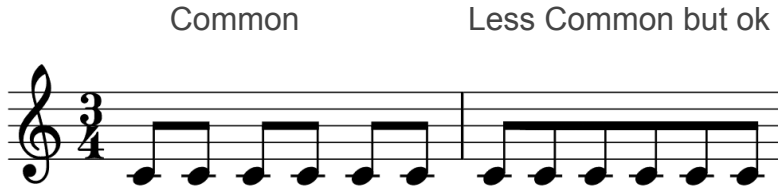
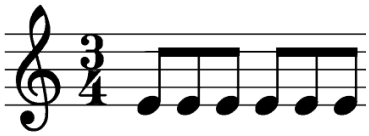


Quavers in 3/4 time should **not** be grouped like this. EVER!:

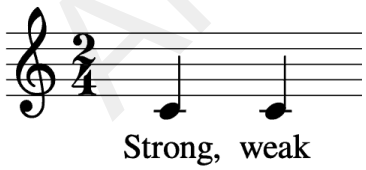


This is because 3/4 is a **simple** time signature and the the beat is divisible by **two**, not three. This grouping above is actually the correct grouping for 6/8 time.

semiquavers and demisemiquavers are the same in 3/4 time as they are in 4/4 time as a quaver is still the equivalent to one beat.

Grouping In 2/4 Time

In 2/4 time, beat **one** is strong and beat **two** is weak.



The centre of the bar is between beats 1 and 2 so again, don't beam over it. Again, the crotchet is equivalent to one beat, so we can have a maximum of four semiquavers per beat, and demisemiquavers per beat.

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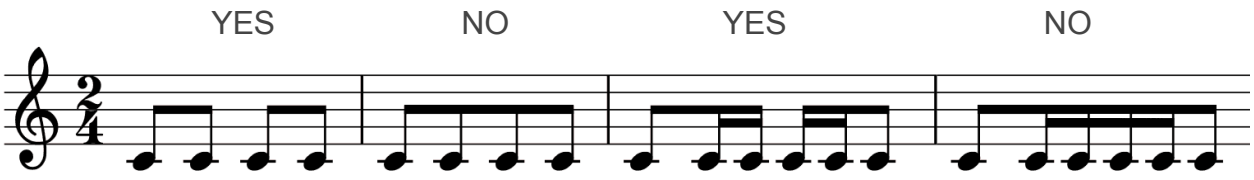
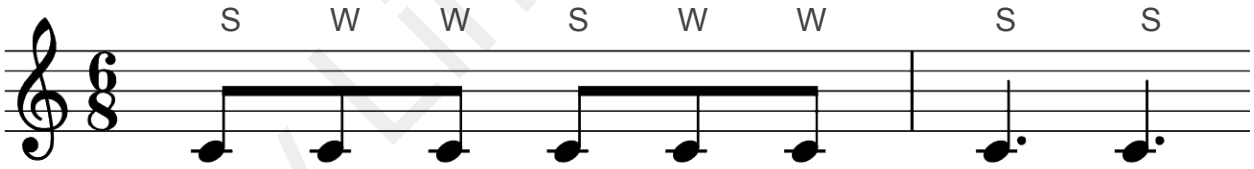


Grouping In 6/8 Time

6/8 is a compound time signature. 9/8 and 12/8 will be pretty self-explanatory after this

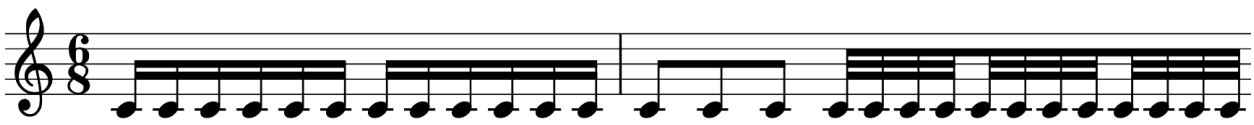
- In **compound** time signatures, the beat is divided into **three equal parts**
- in simple time signatures, the beat is divided into two equal parts.
- Because of this, 6/8 time, has six quavers per bar, but it often feels like there are only two *beats*.

Quaver **one** and **four** act as beats 1 and 2, with one being the strongest. Quavers **2,3 5+6** are all weak.



The centre of the bar in 6/8 is between quavers three and four, so we ALWAYS keep them separated as above.

In compound time, the beat has changed from a crotchet to a dotted crotchet. Instead of 4 semiquavers per beat, we now get *6*, and instead of 8 demisemiquavers per beat, we now get *12*. Demisemiquavers , however, will still be in subgroups of four, connected by a single line:



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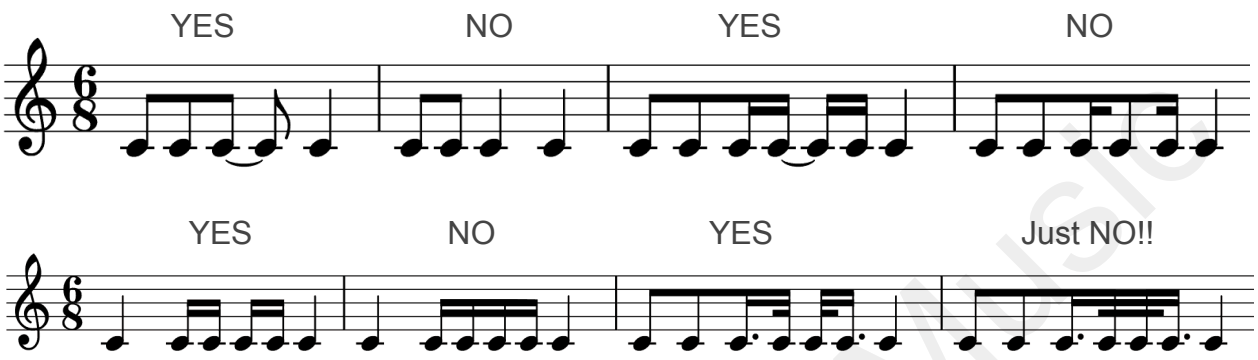
Examples of correct and incorrect groupings in 6/8:



The reason there are so many rules around grouping is to make reading sheet music easier, a bit like why we use grammar in literature.

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