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Introduction

Welcome to Learn Flamenco Guitar: The Ultimate Guide, Flamenco Explained's comprehensive course for learning what you need to know about flamenco guitar. We know why you're here, and that you want to get started right away, so we'll make this as quick as possible, but we'll also encourage you to read this now to get a few things out of the way before you start.

This booklet is meant as a companion to the video course. By itself the information here will not be enough to give you a real sense of how flamenco works. Flamenco has traditionally been taught by rote - you sit with a teacher who shows you what to do and corrects you if you do it wrong. Our course is designed to replicate this system, to the extent possible without direct interaction. We recommend you always watch the videos *first*.

Once you've watched the video for a given lesson, the material here will serve to remind you of what's been covered. Occasionally we'll have some additional information here, but the great bulk of the instruction is contained in the videos, and not here in this booklet. You'll also notice that some of the videos, notably most of the first few, have no chapter here, as I see no benefit in notating the information in those videos.

Almost all of the material in the course is included in the notation and TABs in this booklet, but in many cases it's in condensed form, so that it will only make perfect sense *after* you've watched the video. And in some cases the material contained here represents the component parts of what you've learned, but not every possible variation - this is on purpose!

Flamenco is different from classical music in that you are not expected to learn to play a piece as written. In fact, until very recently flamenco was not written down in any way at all. One of the goals of this course is to teach you to play real flamenco, and not just to learn a piece that might be considered flamenco.

Because of this you will learn how to put things together on your own. For some this will come easily, and for others it will not be so easy. We could have made life a little easier by handing you a piece to play, but that's just not how flamenco works. Our commitment is to teach real flamenco and to not cut any corners or dumb anything down. So it may take a little more work, but we believe it will be worth it, as you will come out on the other end with a real understanding of how flamenco does work.

One last thing - Enjoy the process! Learning something new can be frustrating at times, but it's one of the most rewarding things you can do. So commit to the learning process and if you run into trouble, give yourself some time and don't get down because you can't get something right away. As I say throughout the course: "it's not that you can't do this - you just can't do it YET."

Cheers,
Kai

How to Read Notation and TABs

We've notated almost all of the material in this course, even though doing so is a decidedly un-flamenco thing to do. Traditionally flamenco has not been written out in any way, and I believe that this is part of why it has evolved the way it has. I recommend using the notation for this course only as a reminder of what you have learned, or to help you learn new material (which in almost every case you should be able to do through the videos and without the help of notation). Once learned, I strongly recommend you not refer to the notation, as this hinders memorization.

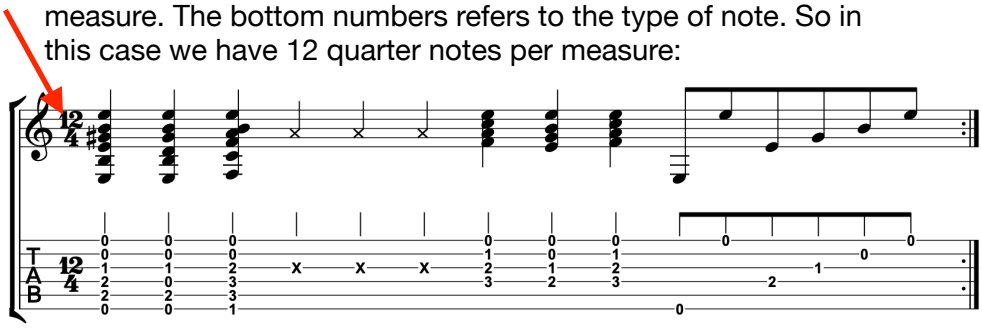
We've provided both notation and TABs here. If you don't already read music, then teaching this is beyond the scope of this course, and we recommend you use TABs.

If you don't read music and will be relying on TABs you will still want to go over all of the information here. Before we look at TABs, let's look at some information that will be very helpful even if you can't read a lick of music.

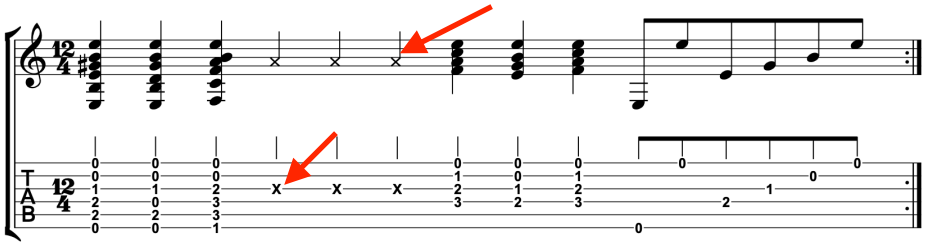
All of the notation in this course looks more or less like this example below, so let's take a look at what it all means:

You'll notice that the top staff (bunch of lines) has standard music notation, and the bottom staff has the word TAB at the beginning. Both staves (plural of staff) have the same information about the notes and rhythms, but the top uses standard music notation, and the bottom uses TABs - a system designed for guitarists who don't read standard notation. At the end of this PDF we'll look at how to read TABs.

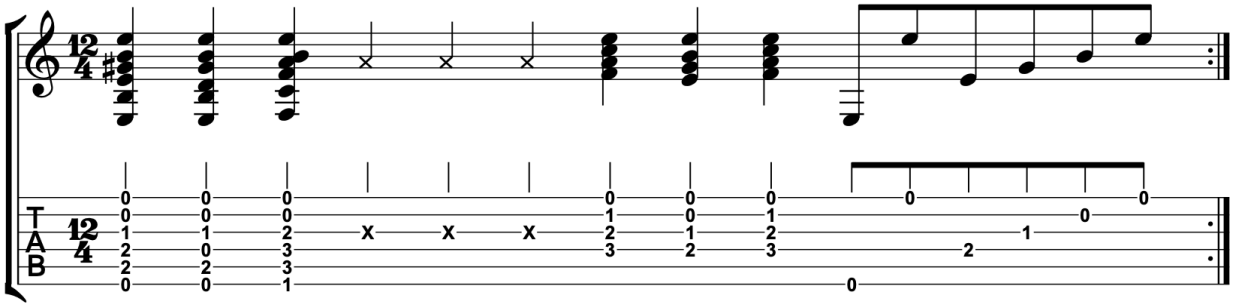
The top number - 12 - refers to the number of beats in each measure. The bottom numbers refers to the type of note. So in this case we have 12 quarter notes per measure:



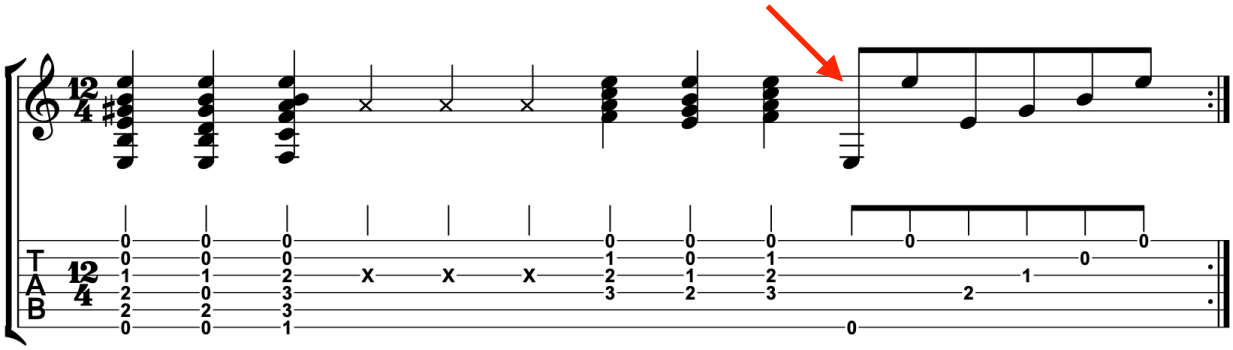
The little X's here represent golpes - when we hit the guitar with our nail - so no notes are played here:



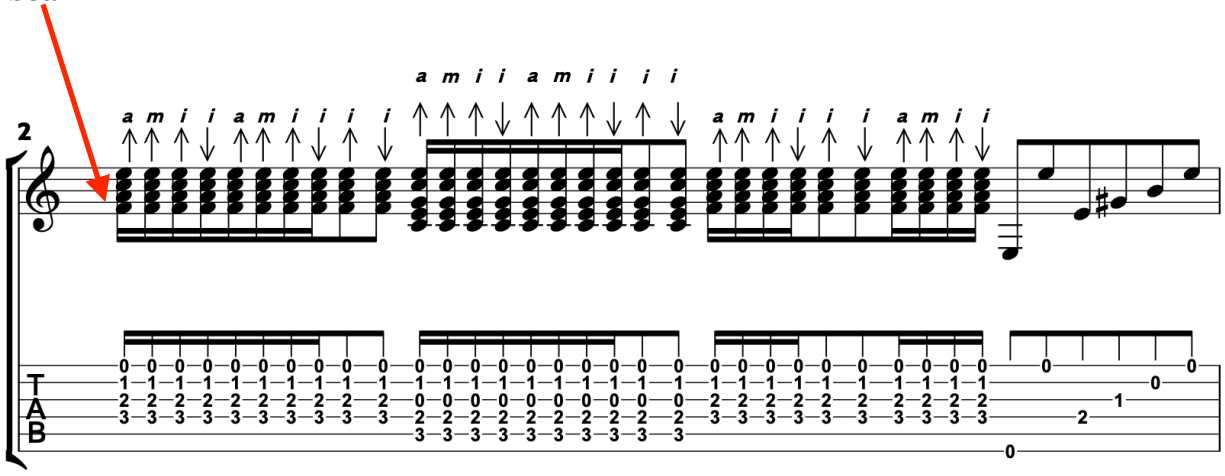
These are quarter notes - solid black note heads with a stem but no beam or flag:



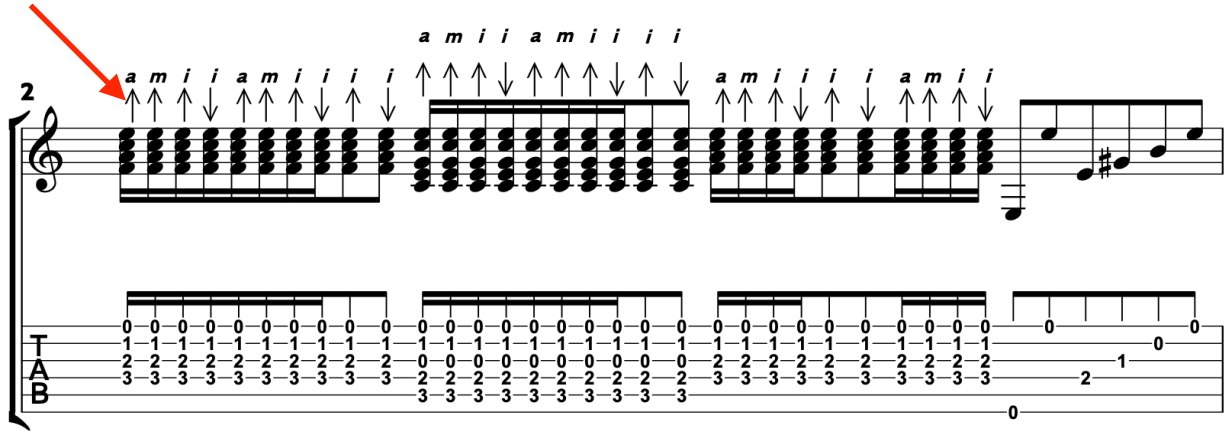
These are 8th notes - solid black note heads beamed together with a single beam:



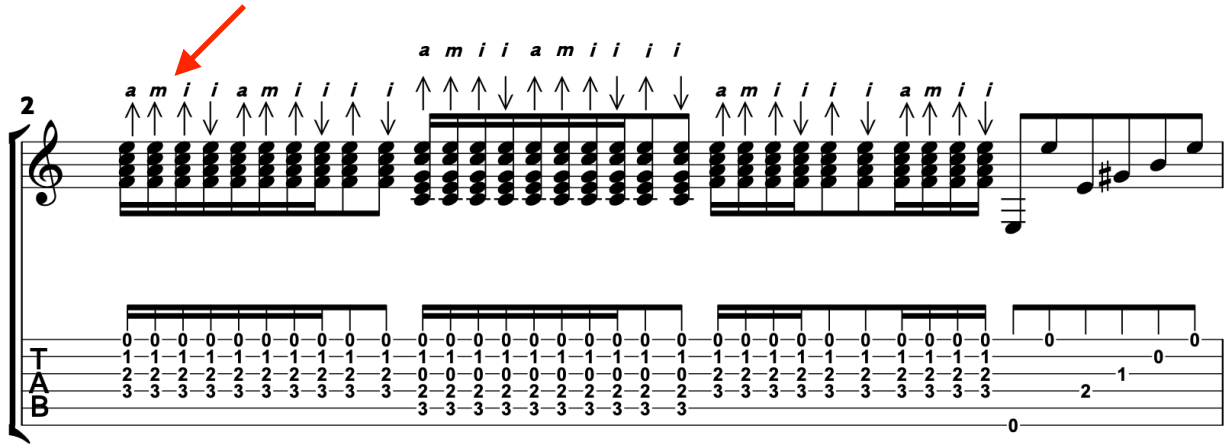
16th notes (four notes per beat) are also solid black note heads, but they have a double beam:



These arrows are a bit counter-intuitive, but we use the system that is generally recognized for guitar notation. An up arrow represents a stroke towards the floor, and a down arrow represents a stroke towards your head. These are mainly relevant when learning rasgueado.

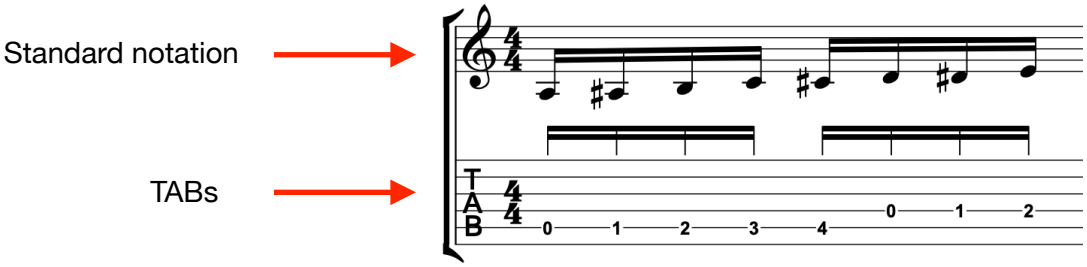


The letters here represent the fingers of the right hand. p = the thumb, a = the ring finger, m = the middle finger, i = the index finger. We don't use the pinky in this course, but it is variously notated as either e or c.

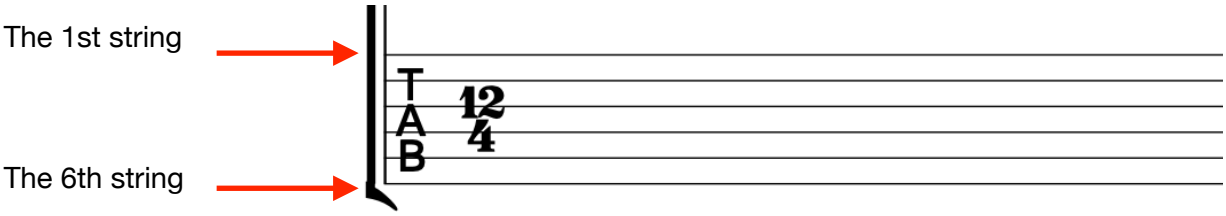


Reading TABs

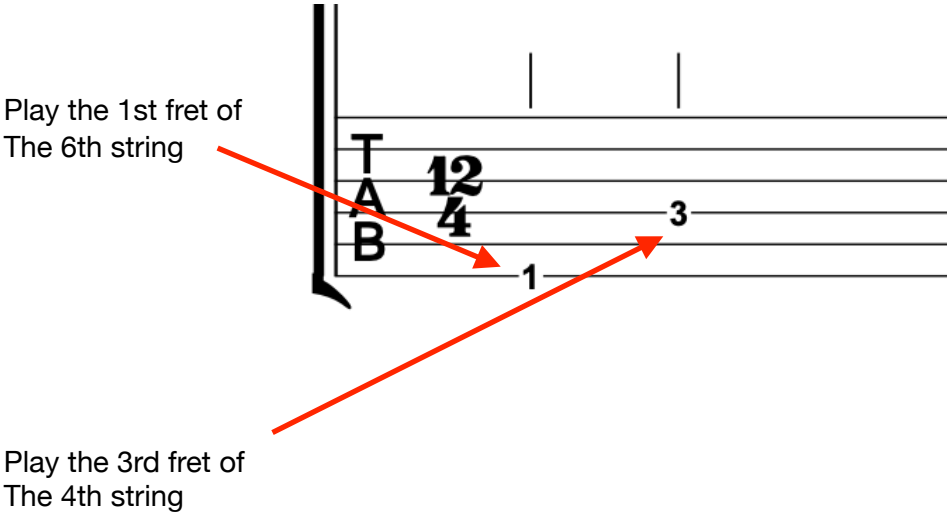
On the bottom staff - the TAB staff - you'll see six lines and a lot of numbers. These six lines represent the six strings of a guitar.



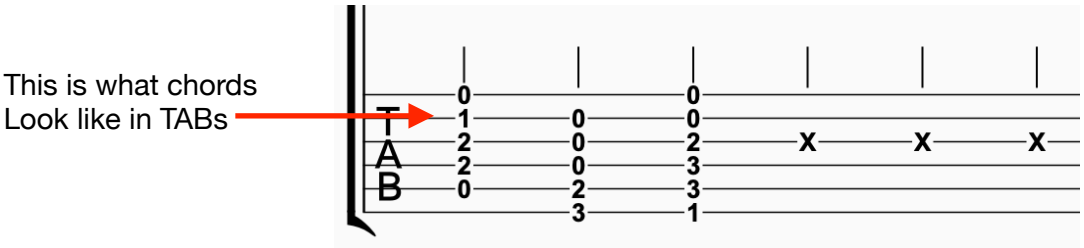
The bottom line on paper represent the bottom string on the guitar. Remember that the bottom, or lowest, string on the guitar is the one that sounds lowest, i.e. the one closest to your head. The top line of the TAB notation is the highest string, or the one closest to the floor when you hold the guitar.



The numbers on the TAB staff represent fret positions. So the number 1 on the bottom-most line means that you put your finger on the 1st fret of the sixth string. The number three on the third line from the bottom means you put your finger on the 3rd fret of the 4th string. No information is given about which finger to use to play these notes.



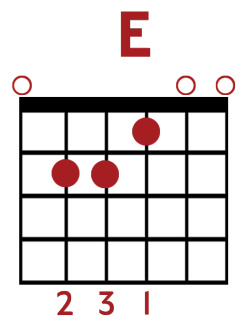
If numbers are directly in line (on top of) one another, this indicates a chord is being played. Again, no information is given in TABs about which fingers to use to play the given chord, so you will want to refer to the videos if you are unsure.

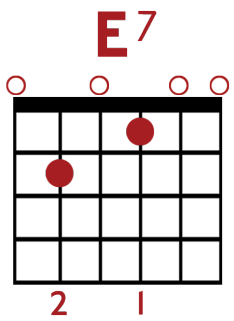


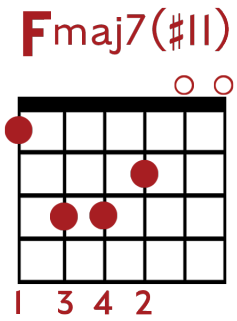
Lesson 2 - Part 3 - Chords

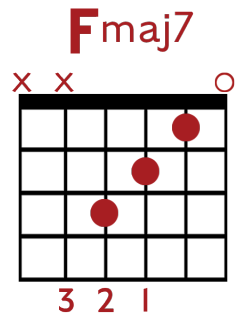
Following are the chords you'll want to become familiar with as we get started. Practice changing from each chord to every other chord here to get fluid changing from one chord to another. For now, don't worry about what order you play them in. The more comfortable you are with changing from any chord to any other, the easier it will be to stay in time once we start playing! Also - don't worry too much about the names of the chords for now!

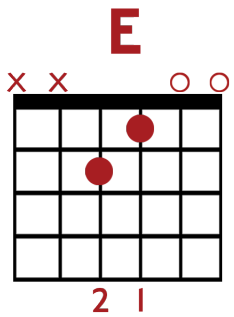
And be sure to check out our Pro Tip Video on switching from E to F.

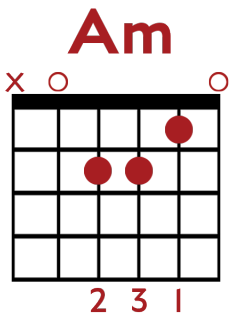


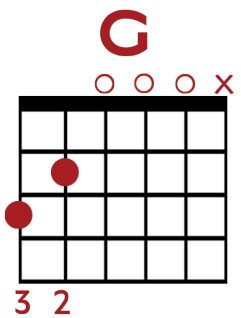


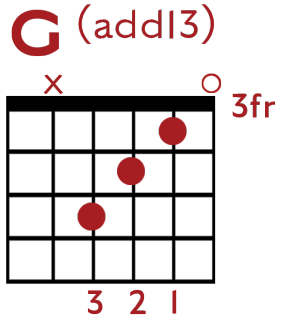


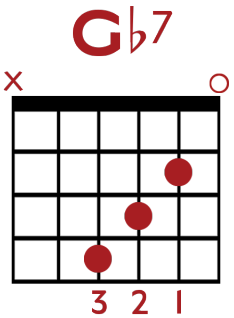












Lesson 3 - Part I - Time
Definitions and Concepts

Following are definitions of some of the terms I use in the Introduction to Time video:

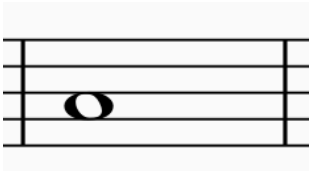
Rhythm - the time aspect of music, or how notes are arranged in time
Pulse - a regular, repeating beat
Meter - the arrangement of beats into measures, expressed as a fraction. 4/4 means that each measure has 4 quarter notes, 6/8 means that each measure had 6 8th notes, etc..
Measure - In Western music time is arranged into measures, which have a strong downbeat, and sometimes have one other weaker accent.
Time signature - Written as a fraction, a time signature is how we describe the rhythm within each measure. You may see something like 4/4 or 3/4, where the top number is the number of beats per measure, and the bottom number is the type of beat. So 4/4 means 4 quarter notes per measure, and 6/8 means 6 8th notes per measure.
Beats per measure - Simply describes how many beats are in each measure.
Downbeat - In Western music the first beat of a measure is called the downbeat. We also use this word to describe playing on the beat (at the moment that beat starts) vs. playing the upbeat (halfway between two notes).
Subdivision - The division of one beat into more than one note.
Attack - When a note starts.
Duration - How long a note lasts.
Staccato - To play in a manner such that notes are cut short before the entry of the next note.
Legato - To allow a note to ring until it is replaced by another note.
Compás - This word has many meanings in flamenco. The literal Spanish meaning of compás is a measure of music. In flamenco a compás is often a type of measure that often has 12 beats with irregular accents - we'll really get into this soon!.
Flowing from one compás to the next - This is a simple concept that can be less than simple in practice when we start playing. It means that the first beat of each compás follows the last beat of the previous compás at the same rate as all of the preceding notes. In other words, you don't stop and pause or wait at the end of a measure or compás, but rather keep playing.

You don't have to read music to understand rhythm, but I believe that if you can wrap your head around the symbols we use to notate time it makes life a lot easier. Something about being able to actually see the rhythms in your head is very powerful and has helped many students who don't otherwise read music. In the end, the concepts are more important than the actual notation, but I encourage you to take a look at the notation to help you understand. Just think about it as shorthand for writing about time, or as a visual representation of what we're talking about.

In the following examples we are looking at one measure of 4/4 time, which means that the notes (fractions) must add up to 1 (because the fraction 4/4 = 1). A whole note = 1, so a half note = 1/2, a quarter note = 1/4, etc…

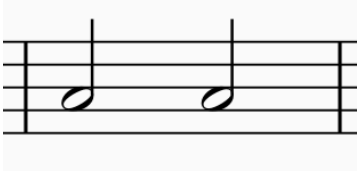
One Whole Note

(The note is white and there is no stem)



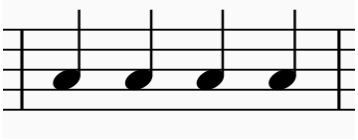
Two Half Notes

(The notes are white and they have stems)



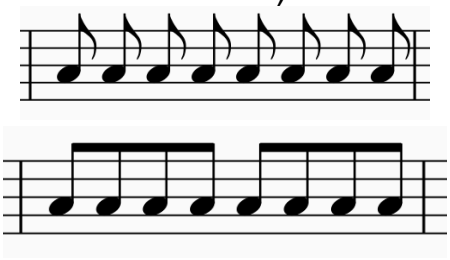
Four Quarter Notes

(The notes are black and they have stems)



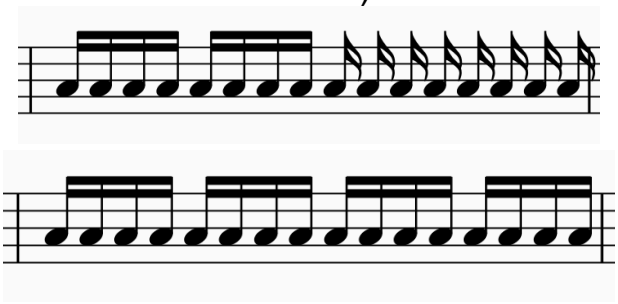
Eight Eighth Notes

(The notes are black and can have individual *flags* or be grouped with *beams*)



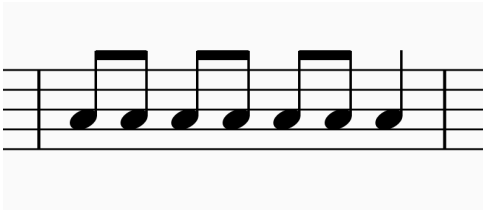
Sixteen Sixteenth Notes

(The notes are black and can have individual *flags* or be grouped with *beams*)

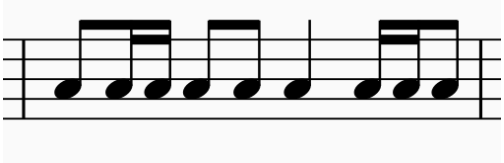


In the above examples each beat is divided into an equal number of subdivisions. In real life, however, we run into many situations where we use a combination of notes of different values. Here's the rhythm for our simple Mary had a Little Lamb, notated. You'll see that the first three beats each has two 8th notes and the last beat has one quarter note.

Ma-ry Had a Lit-tle Lamb



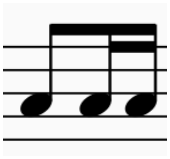
Furthermore, we can subdivide a single beat into more than one kind of note, which might give us something that looks like this:



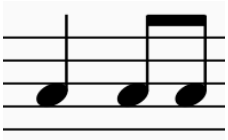
In the above example, the first beat has been subdivided into 8th notes, and the second 8th note of that beat has been further subdivided into 16th notes. The second beat has been evenly subdivided into 8th notes, the third beat is a quarter note, and the last beat has been subdivided into 8th notes, but in this case it's the first 8th that has been further subdivided into 16th notes. So how do we begin to understand this?

We've established that each beat is one pulse. In this case it may help to subdivide each pulse itself into two to learn how to read (or think about) these rhythms.
What I mean by this is that in the same way that we've divided a measure into four beats, we can subdivide each beat into any combination of notes/rhythms.
You could divide one beat into four 16th notes, for example, or you could think of subdividing it into two notes (each of which can be further subdivided).

If beat one in the example above is divided into two pulses, then we see that the first of these two pulses gets one note, and the second pulse gets two notes. In effect it's the same as a quarter note followed by two 8th notes, only faster.

So this rhythm: 

Accomplishes in one beat what the below rhythm takes two beats to accomplish.



And if we think about the language we use to talk about this (which is derived from simple fractions in math), we would see that in the 1st rhythms we have 1/8 + 2/16 =1/4, or a quarter note (one quarter of a measure of 4/4). In the second example we have 1/4 + 2/8 = 2/4, or a half note (one half of a measure of 4/4). All the notes in a measure of 4/4 must add up to a fraction that equals 1 (because the fraction 4/4 =1). In a measure of 3/4 they must add up to a fraction that equals 3/4, and in a measure of 12/4 they would have to add up to 3. Sorry to make you do math!

Once you've spent some time getting used to the concept of subdividing a beat the rhythmic aspects of music become much easier to discuss. If I say that there's a three-beat phrase in which the first two beats are even 16th notes and the third note is a quarter note, then you'd start to hear two pulses, each of which is divided into four notes, followed by a pulse that has a single note. And if you sang it it might sound something like Ta-ta-ta-ta Ta-ta-ta-ta Tum!