

Make Your Music Count

Part 1

When playing our music I think that we all have a good idea of where the beats should be placed in the music (if you are unsure about **exactly** where the beat should be placed please ask the P/M or a P/S and they will arrange assistance) but one area which many people seem to struggle with is just how long a note should be played (particularly if the next note is *not* a beat note) and how that note fits in with the time signature and overall rhythm of the piece.

Many people rely on a recording or attempting to remember how the tune was played at previous practice. None of these ploys are very successful and thus pipers end up “winging it” and guessing note length which is usually too short or variable in execution.

*Note: At this point I should mention that most (all) pipe majors will say that we do not play in a strictly metronomic fashion in order that we might inject some ‘life’ or ‘expression’ into our music and this is certainly true **but**, in order to have control over these nuances of timekeeping we **must** have full control over the basic timing of the notes.*

How then do we remedy this situation?

Exercise 1: Counting in 4/4

Subdivision of note values and counting is the way forward.
Let us start simply in 4/4 time and counting just 1/4 notes as below:

Counting here is simply “1,2,3,4” (in time with your metronome obviously). Here we have a click for each note and the metronome accounts for every note. Clap or tap along with your metronome and get used to it!

Example 1 - Metronome = 77



Counting quarter notes

Exercise:

Tap or clap along with your metronome and record yourself at 77bpm making your best attempt to hit each and every click of the metronome for around 30 seconds (roughly). Don't start clapping or tapping until you have first recorded four clicks of the metronome.

This is your foundational exercise and it will improve timekeeping and tempo control for any rhythm.

Save your recording as an MP3 file and send your recording to Robert for analysis and feedback. I use a program called Audacity for recording and analysis and it is freely available for use on PC and MacBook. Users of iPads already have access to Garage Band and Android tablet users can use Tapemachine Recorder.

Exercise 2:

Mixed note values of 1/4 and 1/8th notes.

How should we count a mixture of note values in order to figure out what the rhythm of the bar should be?

For a mix of 1/4 and 1/8th notes we need to be able to establish just where the 1/8th notes would lie (especially the off beat ones) so, to assist us with this we count the 1/4 notes in **1/8ths** as below (this is subdivision of the beat), vocalising the ,**"One and two and three and four and"** to give us the feel for the 1/8th notes. Note how we denote the quarter note by two signifiers so that we have a time value for the

quarter note in terms of eighth notes (the shortest note in the piece we are working on). Don't forget the "and" for the last note - this is vital to your timing for entry to the next bar.

Example 2



Note that in the example above there are **still** four beats in the bar but because we need to count notes with a value of just half of the 1/4 note signified in the time signature then we need to have a way of counting those notes and we do this by using the + symbol, vocalising it as "and".

What you would vocalise for *example 2* would be, "One and, two and, three, and, four and". Remember to only clap/ tap **once** on the quarter notes!

Practice *Example 2* using your metronome set around 60-77bpm. Experiment with keeping time with your foot following the metronome and tapping the rhythm with your finger or clapping. You will find it difficult not to tap your foot every time you clap!

Exercise 3:

Counting dotted notes: Try this exercise before reading the explanatory text below.

Example 3



Fairly straight forward until we get to the dotted note. Remember that we are using an eighth note designator (as this is the shortest note in this piece, see the first four notes) and that a dotted quarter note has the same value as *three* eighth notes hence the *three* designators against the dotted note.

Exercise: Write this bar above out on a sheet of paper and put an arrow pointing down to where each beat lies.

Exercise 4: Mixed values of 1/4 and 1/8th notes, dotted notes and 1/16th notes.

For this example we have a mixture of three different note values (1/4, 1/8th, 1/16th and dotted notes). In order to count the shortest of these notes (the 1/16th notes) we need to subdivide by four (as the 1/16th notes are equal to one fourth of of the 1/4 note denoted by the time signature).

We use two extra vocables in addition to the beat number plus the “and” we used before.

We will add the vocables “**ee**” and “**ah**” (shortened to **e** and **a** for brevity on the score). Noted as **1 e + a**.

Count aloud while clapping. Metronome on.

Example 3

The musical notation for Example 3 is written on a single staff in 4/4 time. The notes and their corresponding vocalizations are as follows:

- Measure 1: A quarter note with the vocalization "1e+a".
- Measure 2: A dotted quarter note with the vocalization "2e+".
- Measure 3: An eighth note with "a", followed by another eighth note with "3e", and a quarter note with "+a".
- Measure 4: An eighth note with "4e", followed by a quarter note with "+a".

Thus the length of a quarter note will now be spoken as, “**one ee and ah**”

See the dotted eighth note? Remember the value of this is 1/8th plus 1/16th (or 3 x 1/16th notes worth) which is 3/4 of the first 1/4 note so we can use three vocables to denote the time value of this.

Thus the length of the dotted eighth note will be “two, ee and”

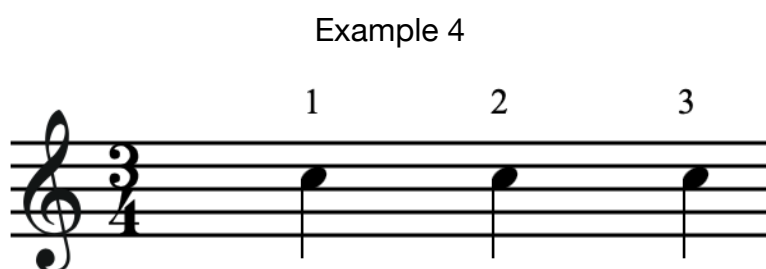
The sixteenth note will just be “ah”

The eighth notes will now be vocalised as “three ee” and “and ah” etc. Note how we use all the vocables for every beat, ensuring that we have not missed any notes out.

Important note: Although we have been using the 4/4 time signature for all these examples this method works for every time signature.

3/4 Rhythm Counting

Obviously, as there are three 1/4 notes in a bar, we will be counting in threes as in the example below:



So, for rhythmic counting, we proceed exactly as before. Find the shortest note value in the section you're working on and select the appropriate level of vocables to use.

Try the example below using your metronome as usual at a low tempo.

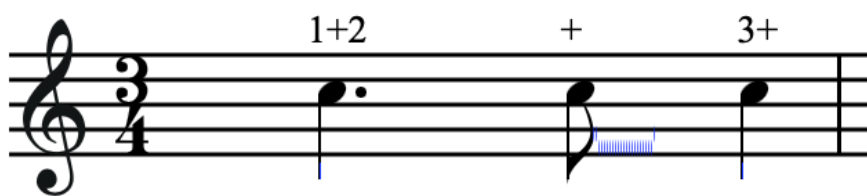
Example 5



No problems there I hope? Remember to include the “and” after the “one” in order to keep the timing correct.

Dotted notes are treated as below: Repeat several times without pausing.

Example 6



Practice this until its second nature.

2/4 Rhythm

The 2/4 march time signature in piping has, possibly, some of the trickiest rhythmic intricacies to get to grips with but is well worth persevering with if you aspire to play the classic ‘big’ 2/4s by the great composers. We will stick with simplicity for now.

Two quarter notes to the bar so, starting most simply:

Example 7



Below is a tricky example for you to have a crack at. It looks deceptively easy at first glance.

Example 8



This is a little more difficult rhythmically than previous examples as the beat is part way through the quarter notes. This requires a fair bit of dedication and practice to get your head around.

There are many, many interesting variations of the two four idiom and we will cover some of them in the exercise sheets that follow.