

# Writing rhythm right

Examples by Zach Sheets

It may seem like it's not a big deal — and the computer might not care — but writing rhythms correctly is very important when you're giving music to a live performer. The strong beats of the bar should always be displayed, not hiding in some imaginary space between notes. We want players to be able to sum up what's going on by easily dividing bars into groups of 2 or 3, not reading and counting from left to right.

It's also a question of tradition; since music is "supposed" to be written a certain way, we become more familiar with that way. Even if all the information may be adequately conveyed for a computer, it can still look wrong to a human because of convention and tradition.

In 4/4 time, beats 1 and 3 should always be visible. If you're using 8th or 16th syncopations, all the beats should be visible. This may mean more ties, but the eye should be able to break a bar into 2x2 or 4x1 groups.

**CONFUSING:**                      **CORRECT:**

Flute

Violoncello

Quick — where's beat 2 or 3? Nope, no idea. See how many beats are just hanging in the middle of nowhere in the first example?

**CONFUSING:**                      **CORRECT:**

Fl.

Vc.

Does the first bar give you a headache, too? Of course not everything has to be tied, and longer note values are obviously ok—so long as they start or end on a strong beat.

**ARGH:**                      **HAPPY:**

I give up.

Fl.

Vc.

18 minutes of your 20 minute rehearsal will be spent on the "ARGH" way. I guarantee it — no time for music!

Same thing in 6/8 time. The 1st and 4th eighth note of each bar should always be clear. The arrows below show where the beats should be:

**CONFUSING:**

See how the 2nd big beat of each bar is just floating in space? It would make sense if we were in 3/4 time, counting in three groups of 2 (like, 1-2-3-4-5-6), but we're not. We're in 6/8 time, which is two groups of three (1-2-3-4-5-6) each bar.

**RAINBOWS AND PUPPIES:**

While at first this might look like more information, the eye can break down each bar into the same groups that the body is feeling as rhythmic divisions. (1-2-3-4-5-6)