

HEADING: TUTION TIP: RHYTHM READING

SUBHEADING: Last issue (BGM 45) I looked into reading notes, but when learning to sight-read music notation, at least 50% of the problem is deciphering the rhythms...

SKILL LEVEL: 1/5



Andrew McKinney
Head of Bass at Tech
Music Schools in
London. Andrew is
currently touring with
the James Taylor
Quartet.

For the full Tuition Tip
archive including
sound files and videos,
visit the website:
[www.bassguitar-
x.co.uk](http://www.bassguitar-x.co.uk) - Interact –
Tuition Tips. Each
issue Andrew will be
featuring a specific
class taught at the
school, giving you a
bite-size chunk of the
lesson, and an insight
into what it's like to be
on a course.

Andrew's column is
brought to you in
association with Bass
Guitar-X, part of Tech
Music Schools.

NEW WEBSITE!:

[www.bassguitar-
x.co.uk](http://www.bassguitar-x.co.uk)

020 8749 3131

To start with rhythm reading may seem impossible, but like anything, it's just about taking one step at a time and practicing regularly. On all our courses at Guitar-X, we have a dedicated notation reading class every week, but the ability to read rhythms will come in very handy in nearly all of the other classes as well. For example, even if you don't play drums, knowing how rhythms are written will help you to understand a drum chart in our Rhythm Section Skills class, which in turn will inform you about how your bass line should fit.

There is a systematic way of reading rhythm, and all it involves is learning what each of the symbols mean and counting – simple huh?! The symbols might all seem a bit weird, but they were invented a thousand years ago so probably made a bit more sense at the time.

TIME SIGNATURE

At the start of every piece of music notation should be a time signature. This tells you how the rhythm of the music is represented on the page, specifically how it is divided into beats and bars. The top number refers to how many beats are in the bar, and the bottom number is what type of beat. There are many possible time signatures, but in practice there are relatively few that are actually used. Today's examples all use the most common time signature: 4 – 4, which refers to four quarter notes per bar.

NOTES vs RESTS

The way a note is drawn indicates how long it is supposed to last. Periods of silence are represented by *rests*, which also have specific durations. This means that every moment of time will be accounted for by either a note or a rest.

RHYTHMS – SEE TABLE 1

One of the most annoying things about learning to read rhythms is that there are two different naming systems. There's the traditional terms originating in European classical music (crotchet etc.) and the more modern system based on the duration of the note in relation to a standard bar of 4 – 4. If you are new to this then just choose one and stick to it, but further down the line it will be useful to learn the other system as well.

WHOLE NOTES/SEMIBREVES

These last for four beats, which is the entire bar in 4 – 4. They are a circular note head with no stem attached. The whole-note rest is a square box that hangs underneath one of the lines on the staff, usually the middle one.

HALF-NOTES/MINIMS

These last for two beats, and are represented by a circular note head with a stem attached. If the note is above the middle line on the staff, the stem should hang down from the left of the note head. If the note is below the middle line, the stem should be rising up from the right side of the note head. The half-note rest is a square box that sits on top of one of the lines on the staff.

QUARTER NOTES/CROTCHETS

These last for one beat, and are represented by a filled-in note head and stem, attached as per the half-notes above.

EIGHTH-NOTES/QUAVERS

These last for half a beat and therefore it would require eight of them to fill a bar in 4 – 4 time signature. They are represented by a filled-in note head with a stem and *flag* attached. The flag always points to the right, regardless of the direction of the stem. If there are two or more eighth notes in a row, the flags can be *beamed* together, but not normally in groups of more than four at a time.

EXERCISES

These exercises are designed to take you one step at a time. They are written on specific notes on the staff, but you could just tap the rhythm if you don't have your bass to hand.

Method for exercises:









- Count 1, 2, 3, 4 out loud, and tap your foot at the same time – try and keep a consistent and even pace.
- When you are reasonably comfortable with the exercise then try playing along with a metronome or drum loop. Start off slowly (e.g. 55bpm) and don't move on or increase the speed until you are totally satisfied that it was perfect.
- Exercises 4 – 8 use eighth note rhythms. For this you need to count in eighth notes – e.g. 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &. Maintain this count the whole time, even if you are playing notes of a longer duration. This will help you to lock into the subdivision and keep your timing consistent.

The main skill required here is one of coordination. You are required to read and decipher symbols, count and play at the same time, all at a regulated, consistent pace! These first few exercises may seem simple,

but take your time over them and make sure you are always counting. The next stage on from this gets quite tricky, but the process and method is exactly the same.

Any questions or thoughts about this article, or anything you'd like me to cover, email me on andrew@guitar-x.co.uk - see you next time.

TABLE 1 – RHYTHMS

Name	Classical name	Duration (in number of beats)	Rhythm	Rest
Whole note	Semibreve	4		
Half note	Minim	2		
Quarter note	Crotchet	1		
Eighth note	Quaver	0.5		

EXERCISES

1. 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4



2. 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4



3.



4.



5. 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &



6. 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &



7.



8.

