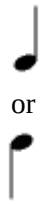
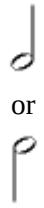
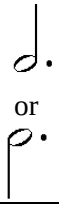
Lesson 9: Note Values

When you listen to music, you will notice that sometimes the music moves from one note to the next very quickly and other times more slowly. The length of time the music stays on one note before moving to the next (measured in beats) is determined by the value of the note, or the "**note value**".

The note value indicates the number of beats a note should be held – to "**hold a note**" means to hold down the piano key after the original strike in order to sustain the sound for the desired amount of time.

The number of beats assigned to each note (its value) is indicated by the note's appearance. Let's examine the appearance of notes with four very common values (this discussion assumes we are working in the context of 4/4 time):

Name		Value (# of beats)	Occupies ?? fraction of a measure
quarter note	 or	1	1/4 of a measure *(*  **=** *1 measure)*
half note	 or	2	2/4 (1/2) of a measure *(*  **=** *1 measure)*
dotted half note	 or	3	3/4 of a measure *(*  **=** *1 measure)*
whole note		4	4/4 of a measure *(*  **=** *1 measure)*

Each measure in 4/4 time has four beats. Therefore, the beats would be counted "one", "two", "three", "four" – your counting should be very steady. When counting the beats out-loud for the following combinations of notes, the beats assigned to the various notes are as follows:

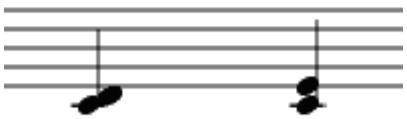
	One-Two-Three-Four
	One-Two Three Four
	One Two-Three Four
	One-Two-Three Four

A note can fall on beat one of a measure – or beat two, beat three or beat four. The note's location within a measure (on which beat it falls) is called its **position** within the measure.

If the same note appears twice, with the two occurrences positioned next to each other, the notes should be played twice. These are called **repeated notes**.

To better understand the relationship among notes and their values, hold a piece of paper over a line of music (line of music = one instance of a bass clef and treble clef joined together by a brace) so all but the very first note is covered. Then, slide the paper slowly and steadily to the right so that more and more notes are uncovered. You play the notes in the order they are uncovered.

If two notes are uncovered at the same time, they are to be played at the same time. If those two notes are in the same clef (either in the bass clef or the treble clef), they will share a stem. If the two notes are not in the same clef, they will not share a stem but they will be aligned – the treble clef note will be directly above the bass clef note, not to the left or the right of it. They will also fall on the same beat (beat one, beat two, beat three or beat four) when you count the beats out-loud.



Younger students can easily be confused by the relationship between a note's value and its position. If a quarter note falls on beat three, a younger student may not understand why you are saying "three" for that note when the note's value is "one" – he or she may think you mean that note should be held for three beats. For these students, you may need to start counting each note with "one", regardless of its position within the measure. For example, the second example from the above table could be counted: "one-two", "one", "one". As the student gets older and his or her ability to understand abstract concepts improves, he or she will eventually understand the difference.

For the Younger Student

New vocabulary: **note value, to hold a note, quarter note, half note, dotted half note, whole note, position, repeated notes**

"Notes are to be held for a certain number of beats"

1) To help your child learn to identify the visual differences in note appearances, have him or her find examples of each type of note in his or her music book. Have him or her practice holding down that note on the piano keyboard for the appropriate number of beats.

2) Using random measures of music from his or her music book, have your child count the beats out loud and clap when the notes should be played. This way, he or she can focus on the rhythm without having to simultaneously figure out which keys to play. This develops visual recognition of rhythms. (This is difficult and will take time to master – please be patient!)

3) Help your child develop an ear for rhythm by tapping out a simple rhythm on a firm surface (like a table top), then ask him or her to mimic the rhythm based upon what he or she hears (not what he or she sees on paper). Keep it interesting by counting the beats out loud sometimes and not other times. (This is difficult and will take time to master – please be patient!)

"Notes are to be played in the order they appear in the music"

1) If your child is having trouble determining the order the notes are to be played in a piece of music, slide a piece of paper from left to right to show him or her how the notes are to be played in the order they are uncovered.