

Quarter Note Triplet

A "triplet" is a group of three notes that is played in the time value that is usually given to two of that type of note. Therefore a quarter note triplet is played in the time of two normal quarter notes or the time of a half note. In 4/4 time, the quarter note triplet is played within two beats. Each of the notes of the triplet is two thirds of one beat. In order to count two thirds of a beat, each beat obviously has to be subdivided into three parts. Observe the evolution of the counting system in the first staff. The second measure has the notes of the eighth note triplets tied in pairs. This would be exactly the same as the third measure which contains the quarter note triplet.

In real life, does anyone count the quarter note triplets in this manner? **NO!**

The official counting method is so cumbersome that it is best to practice the rhythm so you can feel what it sounds like when you "drag three notes across two beats." If you are tapping your toe on each down beat, notice that the second two quarter notes in the triplet both fall "off" the beat. It may be better to only tap your foot on the half notes in the bar. This may help in coordinating the counting procedure. The most common method of counting the quarter note triplet is to find some familiar tune which contains that rhythm. Use this as a template for the rhythm. "All of Me" is an old standard which contains lots of quarter note triplets.

Notice that in these examples, the half note is still counted with a two-way subdivision of the beat.

A musical staff in 4/4 time showing three measures of quarter note triplets. Each measure contains a triplet of quarter notes followed by a half note. The counting is written below the staff: 1 & a 2 & a 3 & 4 & for the first measure, 1 & a 2 & a 3 & 4 & for the second, and 1 & a 2 & a 3 & 4 & for the third.

"NOT SO CATCHY TUNE" (Study in Quarter Note Triplets)

A musical staff in 4/4 time for a study in quarter note triplets. The staff is divided into four lines of music. Each line contains quarter note triplets and half notes, with various chords indicated above the notes. The chords are: C, G7, F, C, F, G7, C, F, C, Am, A7, Dm7, G7, C, G7, C, G7, C, A7, Dm7, G7, C.

The quarter note triplet rhythm sounds slightly like an "eighth-quarter-eighth" but it is not the same. Spend some time in learning how to manage the quarter note triplet because it is a very interesting rhythm to use in your improvisations. Often, the "slower" syncopations are more dramatic than the fast ones that go by so quickly that your ear and brain hardly have the time to realize that something rhythmically unusual just happened. Musicians have all of the elements of music to work with but the most powerful element in music is rhythm.