

Short Guide On Note Values

When we read tabs we need to be able to recognize how long each note should last when we play it. All music is divided into regular length measures or bars. Each bar must contain the same number of beats when we add up all the note values. So in a piece containing four beats to the bar we can have either one whole note, or two half notes, or four quarter notes (four beats), or eight eighth notes etc. Alternately we could have a combination of these note values to make up the four beats. For example we could have one half note (two beats) plus two quarter notes (two beats), which add up to four beats. Or we could have two quarter notes (two beats) plus four eighth notes (two beats).

Let us look at this more closely:

If we have a piece of music that has four beats in the bar, I could play:

1 Whole note in the bar (worth 4 beats) - which equals

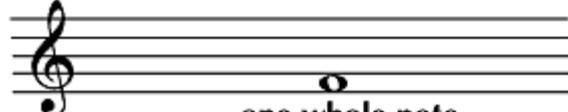
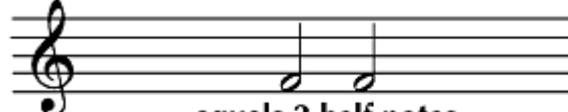
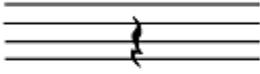
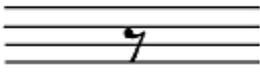
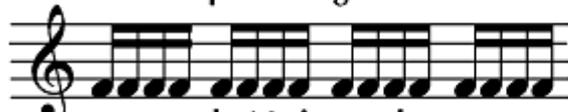
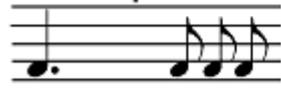
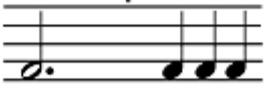
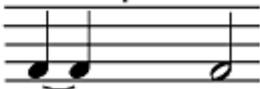
2 Half notes in the bar (worth four beats) – (1 half note = 2 beats) - which equals

4 Quarter notes in the bar (worth four beats), (1 quarter note = 1 beat) - which equals

8 Eighth Notes in the bar (worth four beats), (2 eighth notes = 1 beat) - which equals

16 Sixteenth Notes in the bar (worth four beats), (4 sixteenth notes = 1 beat)

(See the graphic below)

 <p>one whole note</p>	 <p>whole rest</p>	
 <p>equals 2 half notes</p>	 <p>half rest</p>	
 <p>equals 4 quarter notes</p>	 <p>quarter rest</p>	
 <p>equals 8 eighth notes</p>	 <p>eighth rest</p>	
 <p>equals 16 sixteenth notes</p>	 <p>sixteenth rest</p>	
<p>this. . equals this</p> 	<p>this. . equals this</p> 	<p>this. . equals this</p>  <p>tie</p>

In each bar you can have a combination of note values so long as they add up to the number of beats each of other bars have in the piece, in this example that means four beats.



In many tabs there are only note values without a staff.

As well as having to know the note values, we also need to know when to be silent in a measure, and for how long. There again the length of silence and the length of notes must all add up to the measure's number of beats. These lengths of silence are called rests for obvious reasons. If you look at the first graphic in the tutorial, on the right hand side you will see the symbols for the rests and their note value.

There are two other symbols that you need to learn. The first is the dotted note. If you see a note with a dot next to it, that note is worth itself plus half its amount again. So in the case of a dotted half note the half note is worth two beats, plus another half which is another one beat equaling three beats. A quarter note is worth one beat, but if it has a dot next to it, it is worth one and a half beats.

The last note value symbol you should learn, at this stage, is the tie. Look on the right hand side of the first graphic, and at the bottom you will see two notes joined with a curved line. This is called a tie. What it means is that the two notes are joined as one, and you only play the first note, but it lasts for the combined time of both notes, in the example this would be for two beats. I will not go into why you would use a tie to join two quarter notes, instead of using one half note at this stage, as it requires a knowledge of music theory that is not necessary for us to play tabs. On a practical level you will see them in many tabs because the software creating the tab cannot put different note values in the same chord, so we just tie two notes of the same value together.

I hope this has given you a basic understanding of note values as applied to tabulature. I have included sound files with all my arrangements, so you can hear how a piece should sound, with the correct note values.