Basic Materials I
Notes, Rests & Beaming in Common Time

In an effort to make sheet music easy to read, we try to make it clear where each beat falls. Ideally each beat would be represented by some "object" (a note or rest).

However there are several situations where a beat may be "obscured."

In common time (4/4), here's the basic rule:

• **In general, provide an "object" on beat 3, and in some cases, on beats 2 and 4.**

But there are several exceptions. Here's some clarification regarding **notes**--

• **Half notes are allowed on beats 1, 2, and 3.**

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Notice that these measures are correct, even though beats 2, 3, and 4 may be obscured.

• **Dotted half notes are allowed on beats 1 and 2.**

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Again, beats 2, 3, and 4 may be obscured.

• **Quarter notes are allowed on any 8th-note position except the "and-of-2."**

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The first two bars are correct even though they hide beats 2 or 4. But the third measure is hard to read—see the corrected version in measure 4. Here we've divided the quarter note on the and-of-2 into two tied 8th-notes.
• Dotted quarter notes are allowed on beats 1 and 3, also on and-of-1 and and-of-3.

In a similar way, here we split the quarter note on beat 2 of measure 3 into a tied quarter-8th.

• Use ties where necessary to make the location of beat 3 clear.

We showed a couple of examples on the previous page; above are similar examples of splitting half notes and dotted half notes into two tied notes that allow placing an object on beat 3.

• Do not tie unnecessarily.

This is the rule that is the trickiest to follow. Basically, it means adhering to the exceptions listed above. In this example, the correct usage is shown on the bottom staff. Notice the double-dotted half note in the third measure. In the fourth measure, the bottom staff shows the need for one tie while removing another.
In the case of rests, the same general rule to provide objects on beats applies. Let's start with some additional guidelines--

- **It is never necessary to use dots with rests, and rests are never tied.**

Starting with half rests, there are some differences between rests and corresponding notes.

- **In common time, half rests can be used only on beats 1 and 3, and are never dotted.**

The first two bars are correct even though beats 2 and 4 are obscured. In bar 3, beat 3 is hidden, and in bar 4, the corrected version splits the half rest into two quarter rests to show beat 3 more clearly. Notice that in bar 3, if the half rest were a note, it would be drawn correctly--that's a difference between note and rest usage.

- **In the case of quarter rests, don't use a quarter rest to hide any beat.**

Here again, we are even more careful to show beats using rests than with notes.

- **If quarter rests are dotted, use only on beats 1 or 3.**

Measure 4 is clearer to read than measure 3.
Beaming rules are related to note and rest usage because beams are used to show beat placement.

• In common time, use 8th- and 16th-note beams to show beat placement.

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\begin{align*}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
\end{align*}
\end{verbatim}
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Notice that beams don't cross over any beats, also that beams are used within beats even if they only constitute partial beats.

• In a common time measure where the smallest duration is 8th-note, 8th-notes that constitute beats 1 & 2 or 3 & 4 can employ a single beam.

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1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
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```

In the first three measures, 8th-notes in either first or second halves of measures are beamed. Otherwise, beams are limited to beats.

If you need to apply beams to flagged notes, divide the measure into separate beats, think of them as separate units. Then apply beams within beats. Don't allow any beam to cross over into a different beat.