

How to Feel Half-note Triplets

by Dennis Winge

You can read and watch videos about analyzing certain rhythms until you're blue in the face, and afterwards you still might not be able to play them on the guitar. There are only 12 notes, but there are thousands of rhythms, so your brain can think about the notes, but it can't think about the rhythms. You must feel them.

A group of half-note triplets is a rhythm that many guitarists struggle with. There are 3 half-note triplets in a bar, as Diagram 1 shows.

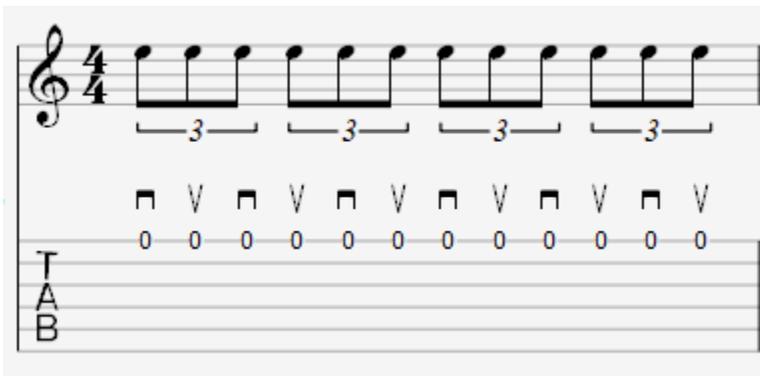
Diagram 1: Half-note Triplets



The diagram shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains three half-note triplets, each indicated by a bracket with the number '3' underneath. Below the staff is a guitar TAB with three '0' fret notes, each aligned with one of the triplets.

This results in a “3 over 4” type of polyrhythm. The easiest way to feel this rhythm is to first play or count 8th note triplets. There are three 8th-note triplets per beat as per Diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Eighth-note Triplets



The diagram shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains four eighth-note triplets, each indicated by a bracket with the number '3' underneath. Below the staff is a guitar TAB with 12 '0' fret notes, each aligned with one of the eighth-note triplets.

I. Counting Out Loud

The easiest way to count 8th note triplets is by saying “one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three” on each beat.

Then to go to quarter-note triplets, the easiest way is to count “one-two, one-two, one-two, one-two, one-two, one-two” *at the same speed* at which you were counting the eighth notes. However, only play a note whenever you say “one.” To hear this, watch the [video that goes with this article](#).

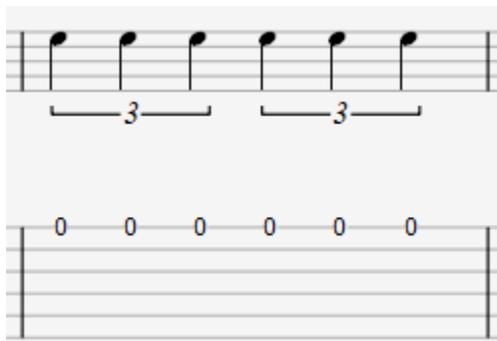
From there to get to half-note triplets, count “one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four” again *at the same speed* as 8th note triplets, and again only playing a note when you say “one.” This is also demonstrated in [the video](#).

II. Using Pick Direction as a Guide

Sometimes even if guitarists can clap or speak a particular rhythm in question successfully, they may not always be able to play on their instrument. Using the bi-directionality of alternate picking (up – down – up – down) can help in this regard. Notice that the pick direction is “down up down, up down up” and it gets repeated again on beats 3 and 4. We are going to use this bi-directionality when we play quarter-note triplets and half-note triplets.

Quarter-note triplets are 6 notes per bar or 3 notes over 2 beats, as in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3: Quarter-note Triplets



To accurately feel this rhythm you can play only the downstrokes the 8th note pattern. This is outlined in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4: Using Pick Direction to Feel Quarter-note Triplets



From there, to go to half-note triplets, which is generally among the hardest rhythms for musicians to feel, you can simply play *every other* downstroke from the 8th note triplet pattern, as illustrated in Diagram 5.

Diagram 5: Using Pick Direction to Feel Half-note Triplets



This article is not suggesting that alternate picking is always the best way to pick. Economy picking or sweep picking may be more efficient and better suit your style or the song's mood. Alternate picking, however, can be a great tool whereby to feel the rhythm in question better in your body. Once you can feel the rhythm in your body, you can adjust your technique to suit the particular passage or lick you are playing, but you must feel it first.

About the author: Dennis Winge is a professional guitarist living in the Finger Lakes area of New York with a passion for vegan food and bhakti yoga. If you are interested in taking [Guitar Lessons in Newfield, NY](#), then be sure to contact Dennis!