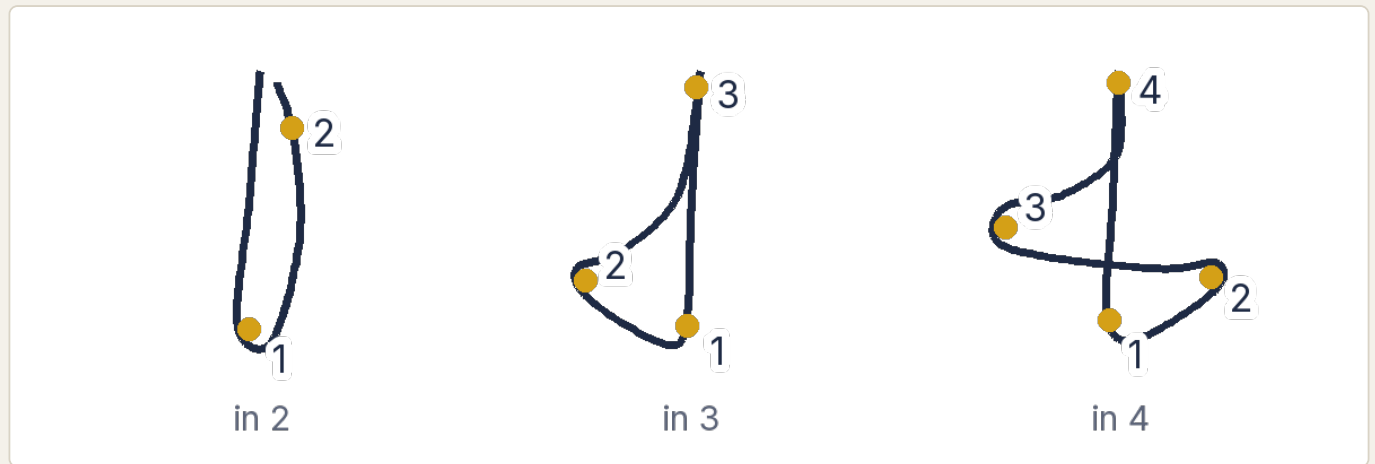


Reading the conductor

What the hands are telling you, and where the beat actually is.



The patterns in 2, 3 and 4, drawn as you see them from your seat: the mirror image of the diagrams in conducting books. The gold dot is where each beat lands.

1 The beat is at the bottom

The beat happens where the hand changes direction, not where it is highest. In a clear pattern that is the bottom of the downbeat and the turn of each other beat. Watch the turn, not the travel.

2 The upbeat tells you everything

The preparatory beat before the first note gives you the tempo, the dynamic and the character: its size shows the dynamic and its speed sets the tempo, so large means loud and quick means fast. If you take the tempo from the upbeat you never have to guess it from the first bar.

3 One hand for time, one for shape

The baton hand keeps time. The free hand shapes: it asks for more or less, cues a section, holds a pause, and cuts off. When the free hand comes towards your section with the eyes, that is your cue, and it usually arrives a beat early.

4 The cut-off

A small loop or a closing of the hand. Release together on the cut-off, not when you run out of note. The end of a chord is as audible as the beginning.

5 Subdivision

When the tempo slows, the pattern may split, each beat gaining a small extra bounce: a four becomes an eight, and a quick six-eight conducted in two spreads into all six. If the hand starts adding bounces, follow the bounces.

6 Where to look

Set the stand low enough to see the conductor over the top of the part. Read the music with the lower half of your eyes and the beat with the upper half. Look up at every rehearsal letter, every tempo change and every entry, and at nothing else.

