






Bach's Proportional Method

There are two fixed pulse rates, which we refer to as the common tactus (72 BPM) and the accelerated tactus (81 BPM). The speed of the shortest note value of a movement is a multiple of the speed of the tactus. The size of the multiple depends on the shortest note value itself:

TABLE The number of shortest notes per tactus ranges from two to eight

Shortest Note Value	Number of Shortest Notes per Tactus
	8
	6
	4
	3
	2

The time signatures **C** and **2** specify the common tactus, while the signatures **C**, **2**, and **Φ** specify the accelerated tactus. In addition, the signatures **2**, **2**, and **Φ** increase the number of shortest notes per tactus. When a work begins with a double-integer numeric time signature such as $\frac{3}{4}$, it uses the common tactus. Double-integer signatures that appear later in a work continue to use the tactus of the immediately preceding music.

All of Bach's rarely used Italian performance markings describe his intended musical effect. Many of these markings, but not all of them, also alter the number of shortest notes per tactus. When they do, a slow marking such as *Adagio* indicates to use the next lower number of shortest notes per tactus, while a fast marking such as *Allegro* indicates to use the next higher number.