

19.2.1 The Numeric Keypad↓

The set of keys for entering numerical data that appear on full-sized keyboards make a very useful tool for entering rhythms. Even if you use a laptop without such a numeric keypad it is worth the 5 or 6 dollars/euros/pounds that a separate USB keyboard costs nowadays - it can be blu-tacked to your MIDI controller for easy access.

The default key shortcuts for the numeric keypad are illustrated here:



Here I have actually stuck labels with the most used durations and over-drawn an indication of the others. (Keys 5 and 6 do the 1/32 and 1/64th notes). The keypad 7 does triplets with a double press (so that it makes three presses for a triplet, e.g. Key 4, Key 7, Key 7 for a triplet of 1/16th notes). The dotted rhythm "dottifies" the current note whatever its duration is. Likewise the grace note key turns the current note into a grace note and the tie key turns tied status off/on for the current note. Keypad 8 fills the rest of the bar with the current note or rest, while Enter duplicates the current bar. The enharmonic shifts↓ can be pressed repeatedly to shift the set of accidentals to be used sharp-wise or flat-wise, subsequent notes played in will be taken from the new set, which is indicated on the status bar. The duration keys, triplet key and dottify key can all be used with the Control modifier to slur from the previous note.

With this arrangement you can play in the rhythm of a piece in musical time and then play once more with the MIDI keyboard to add the notes (chords require the Alt key or foot pedal). Before you are practiced in this use of the numeric keypad it is a good idea to do just a bar or two, or a line or two at a time, so as not to lose your place.

Some computers don't respect the numeric keypad's keys - confusing the Enter with the Return key for example, or treating Shift-2 as arrow-down. Try the numlock key to see if you can persuade it to take you seriously, or look into any key-mapping facility there may be with the machine. And, beware! a separate standalone numeric keypad might seem like a good idea but in fact they are a nuisance, besides being more expensive, as they have things like a 000 key which emits three keypresses at your peril!