

What Is A Sequencer – Defined

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / August 16, 2008

This article gives a simplified explanation of what a MIDI sequencer is.

A sequencer today is a software program that records MIDI data of a musical performance from a MIDI Controller. A MIDI controller can be a MIDI keyboard, a guitar controller, a violin controller (as produced by Zeta), a MIDI wind instrument (often called an EWI), or a MIDI brass instrument.

When music is recorded in tempo or “live” it’s called real time recording.

If a hardware MIDI controller isn’t available, a sequencing program enables the user to literally key punch (data entry) music information into the program. This is called step-time.

Sequencers also give tools to edit and correct performances.

Sequencers are also found in MIDI keyboards and some are still available as separate hardware units.

Modern software sequencers do more than record data. These programs are now complete music production suites which include:

- a sequencer with editing features
- a music notation program
- an audio engine for digital recording
- an internal “virtual” mixing board
- a complete audio effects rack containing reverb, EQ, compressors, chorus, delays, limiters, expanders, flangers, phasers, guitar and bass amp modeling, vocal editing software (de-essers and pitch correction), gain, and more
- fully programmable virtual synthesizers (software versions of hardware MIDI keyboards)
- virtual samplers
- virtual drum machines
- loop patterns

Pricing of these programs ranges from free (GarageBand which is included in every new Mac), to \$495US and up.

The main sequencing programs include Cubase (Mac and PC), Digital Performer (Mac only), Logic (Mac only), and Sonar (PC only).

Those wanting sequencing programs with better developed notation capabilities usually consider Cubase or Logic. Those for whom notation is not important often consider Digital Performer or Sonar.

Because modern software sequencing programs are complete music production suites, the learning curve is longer because not only must sequencing be learned, but also MIDI editing, and audio recording. While similar in approach, both are separate disciplines.

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