A hornpipe is phrased as four groups of three beats. This gives the hornpipe its characteristic skipping or swing feel. In theory the best time signature to notate a hornpipe is 12\|8. But that can be difficult to read. So, more often than not, the time signature of 4\|4 is used for a hornpipe. The "skip" is implied rather than written out. Some transcriptions will notate hornpipes with a series of dotted eighth notes and sixteenth notes. However, if the title of the tune includes the word "hornpipe" and the time signature is 4\|4, play the tune with swing.