Music Theory

Rhythm I

Foreword

Musicians tend to focus generally too much on the "what" to play (notes, chords, etc...) and much less on the "when" to play part. However music is half the "what" and half the "when". Thus the rhythm has to be considered as a important topic and not to be left aside.

When composing, trying to be original in the "what" is nice but great things can be made on the "when" part too in order to create interesting sounding musics. So let's get into it !

The basic

Beat : In rhythm everything starts with a steady beat. We use a metronome in order to produce a sound that rings at a regular identical interval.

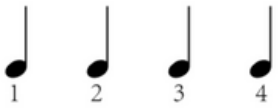
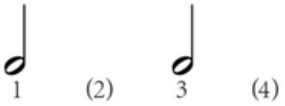
Tempo : defines the speed of a music piece. Musicians count this with BPM which means Beats Per Minutes. Hence in a 60 BPM song, a beat rings out every seconds. In a 120 BPM song, a beat rings out every half-second.

Measure : it is an abstract group to gather a number of beats in it. A measure is just a group of beats. The most common measure is composed of 4 beats.

Quarter note : A beat duration is equal to a quarter note duration. The symbol for a quarter note is the following : ♩ In a measure of 4 beats we count each quarter notes as is : 1, 2, 3, 4.

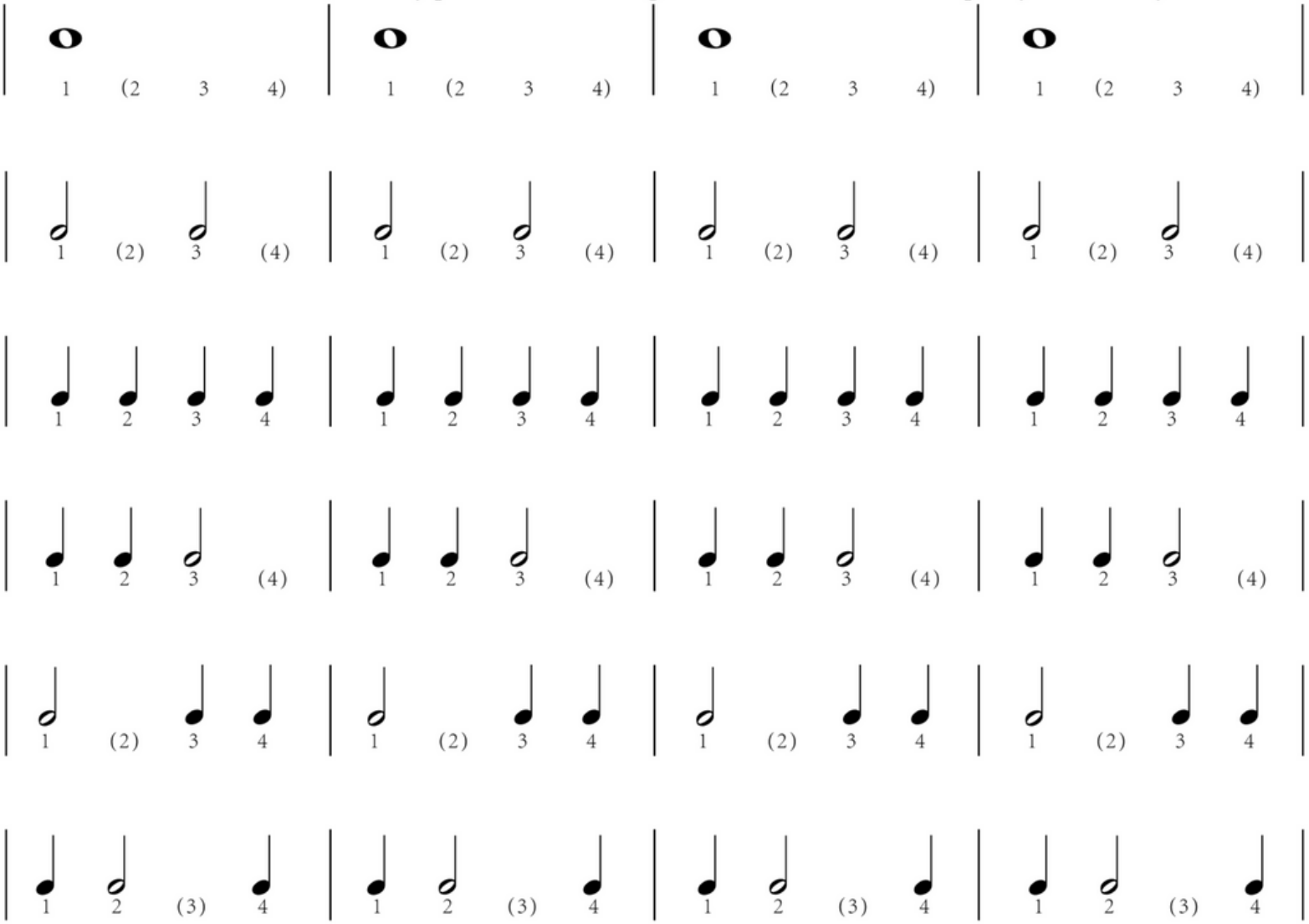
The next pages are course extracted from signal music studio rhythm course.

The Basics

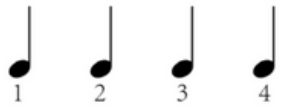
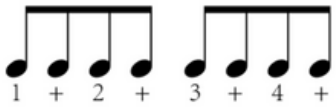
		Symbol	Counts
Quarter Note	1 beats		
Half Note	2 beats		
Whole Note	4 beats		

Tap your foot on each beat.
Count EVERY quarter note, whether it is strummed or not.
If you do not strum a count, say it quietly.
Only use down-strums (⊓).

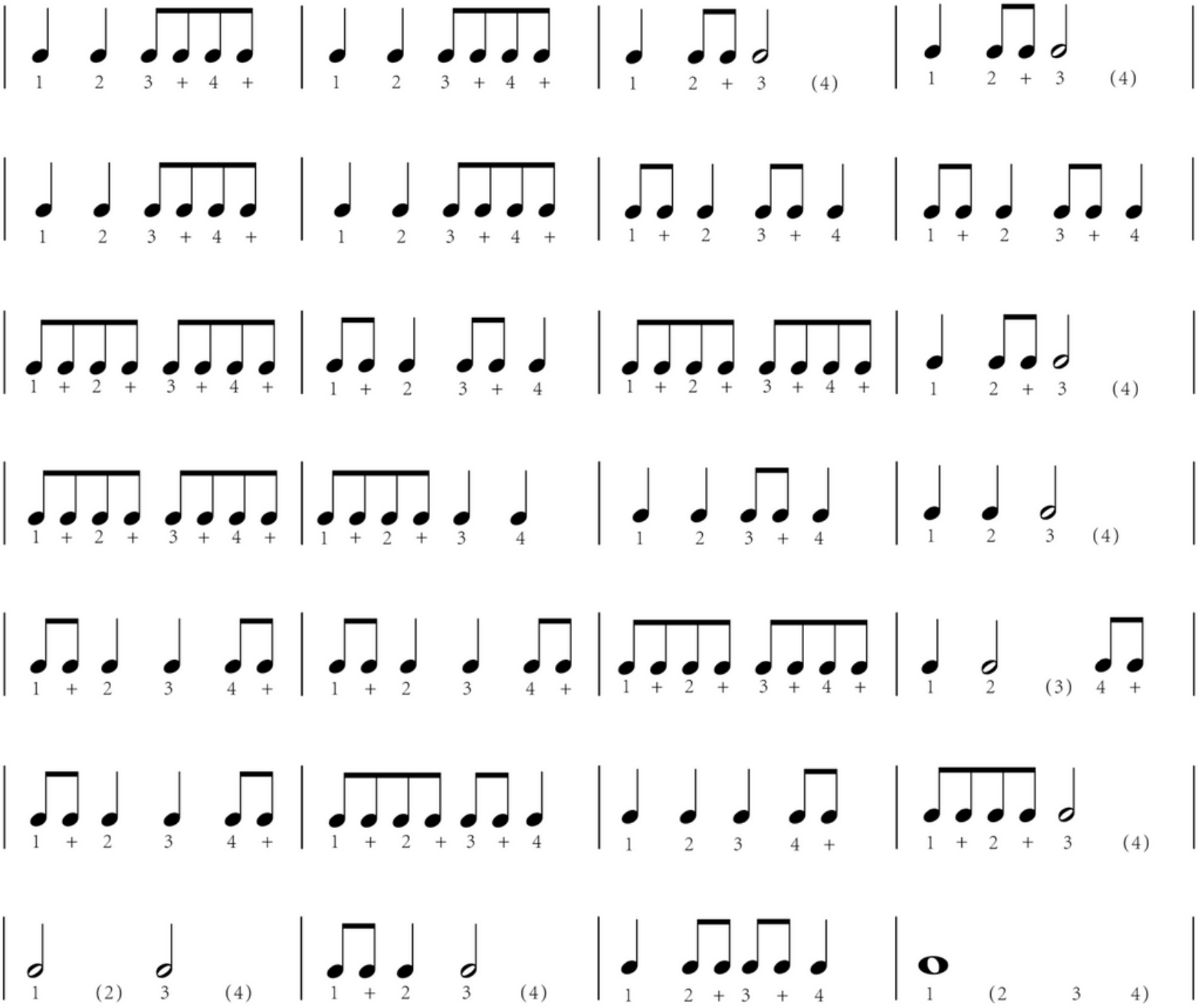
Beat counts surrounded by parentheses do not get strummed - count them quietly and steadily.



Eighth Notes

	Value	*Symbol*	*Counts*
Quarter Note	1 beat		
Eighth Note	1/2 beat (two notes per beat)		

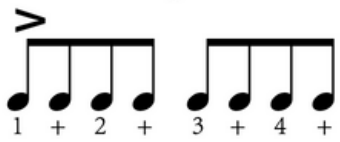
Eighth notes are played a speed of two per beat. Two eighth notes can fit into the space of a single quarter note. Play each rhythm with downstrokes while tapping your foot on the downbeats.



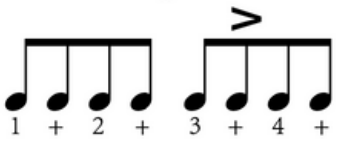
Accents

An accented strum is played (and counted) louder than the surrounding strums. Non-accented strums can be created by playing just a few notes of the chord (usually the low/bass notes), while accented strums are performed by strumming the entire chord. Practice each of these measures on a loop.

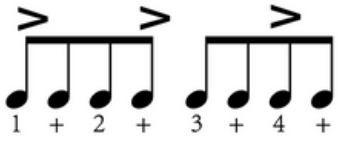
Accenting the 1 Beat



Accenting the + of 3

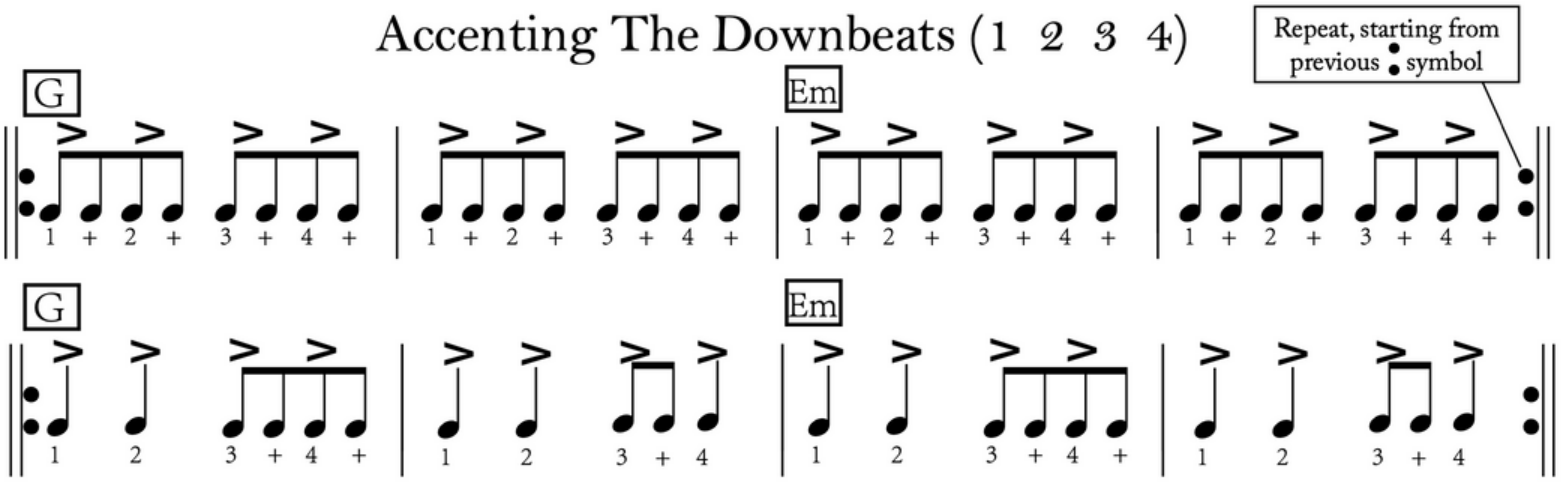


A Common Accent Pattern

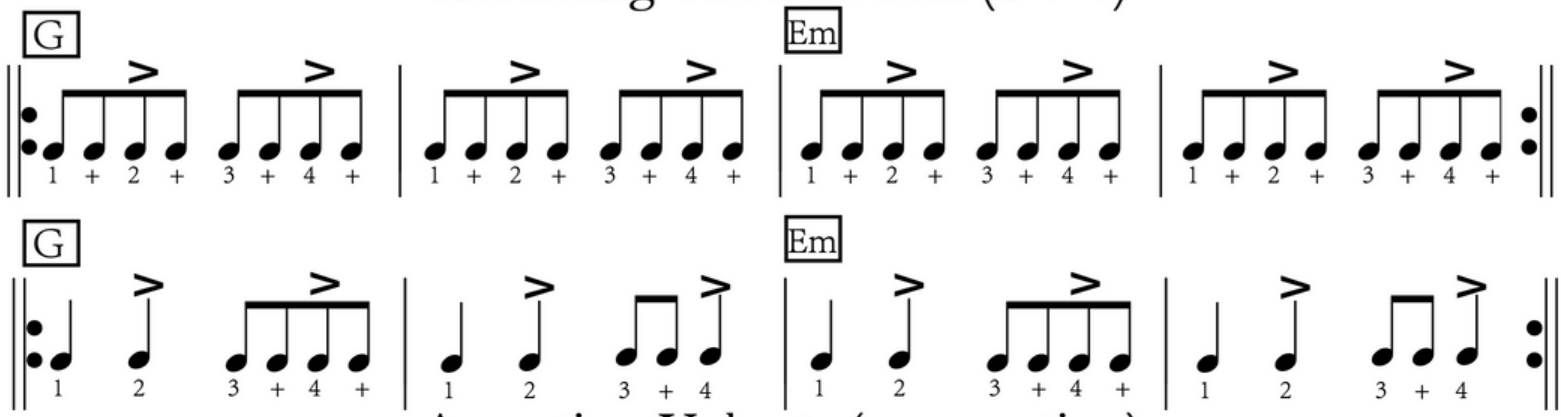


Tap your foot on each quarter note, and count each strum out loud. Say the accented counts louder than the surrounding counts. Play each line twice, then move on to the next line. Play the two chords, G and Em, as indicated in these charts:

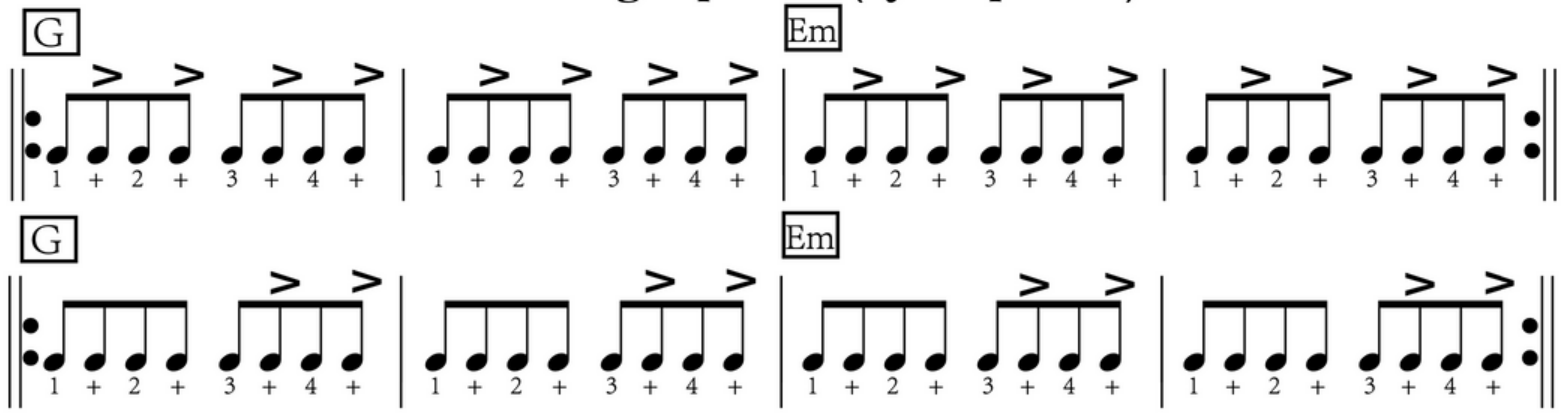
Accenting The Downbeats (1 2 3 4)



Accenting The Backbeat (2 + 4)

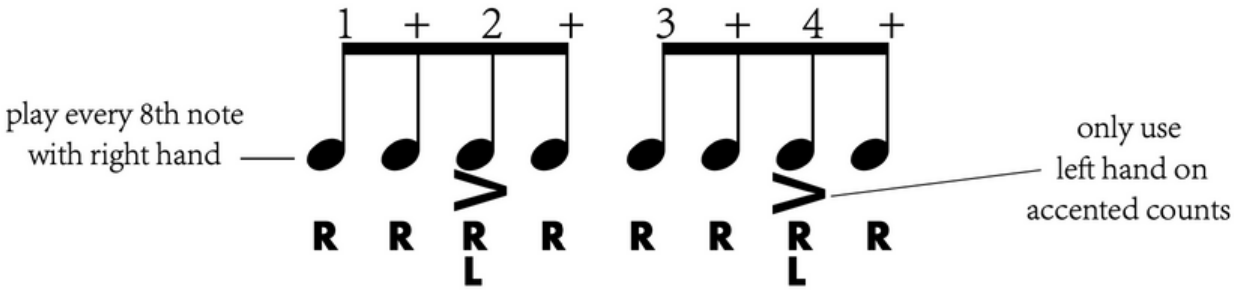


Accenting Upbeats (syncopation)

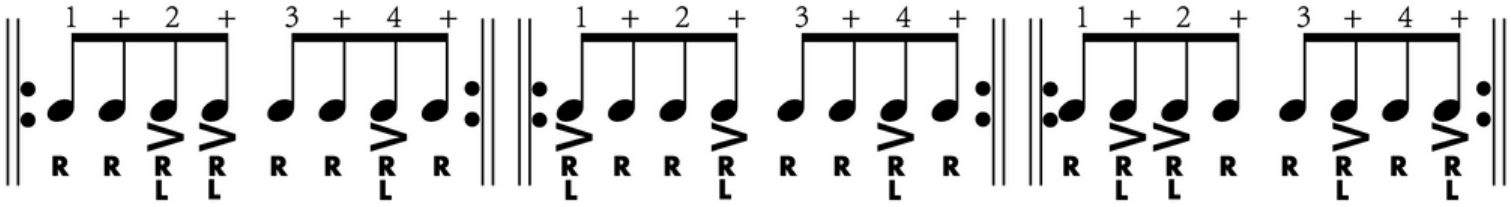


Using Your Hands

Use your Right(R) and Left(L) hands to learn, practice, and play variations of rhythms. Start by playing and counting steady 8th notes with your right hand. Only use the left hand for accented counts - on these counts, both hands will play together. Once this is comfortable, reverse the hands.

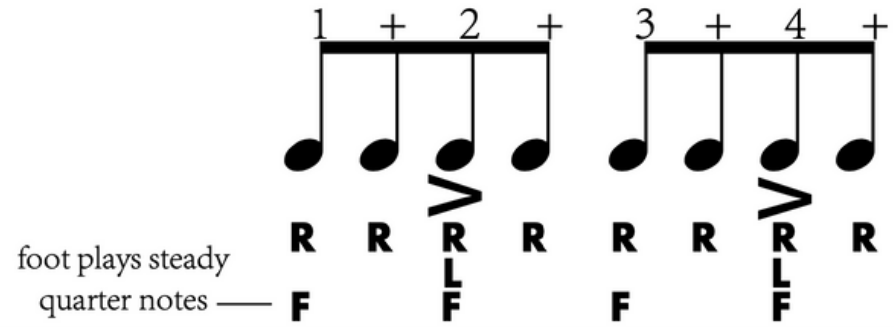


Practice each of these 1-measure rhythms on a loop. Count out loud, say accented counts louder.



Adding The Foot

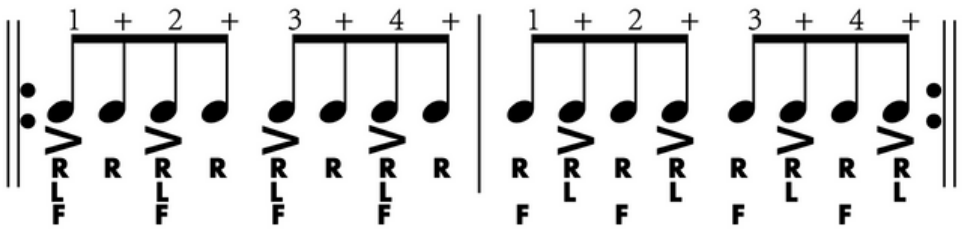
Tap your foot on each down beat (1 2 3 4)



Once this is comfortable, try the keeping the foot going while playing the other three rhythms shown above.

Syncopation vs Downbeats

Practice this 2-measure loop while counting out loud. Make sure to say the accented counts louder to help get a better feel for saying and playing syncopated offbeats (2nd measure) versus strict downbeats (1st measure) and how they feel against a steady quarter note (the foot)



Alternative Method:

-Clap every 8th note

-Tap your foot on the quarter notes

-Only count/say the accented beats

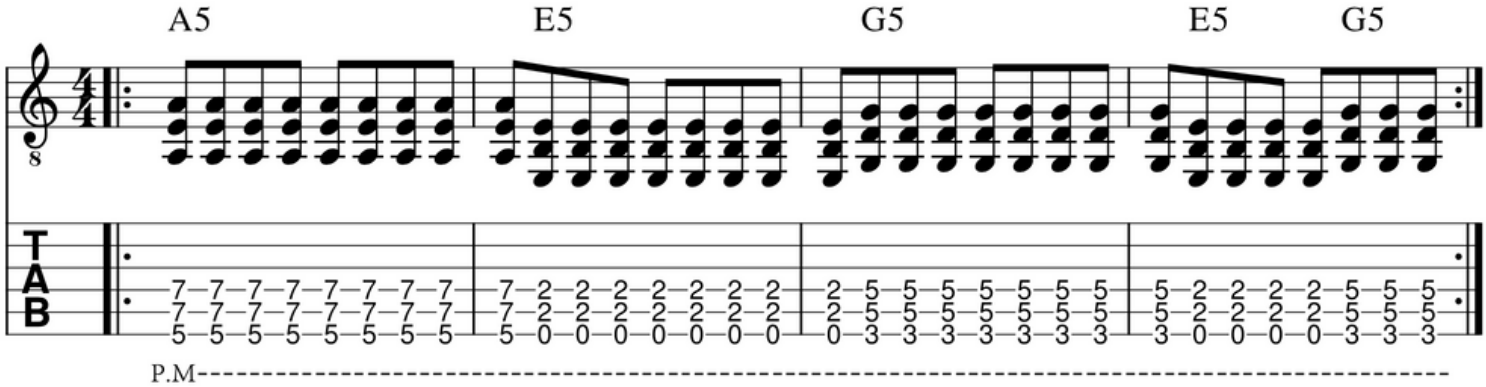
Palm Mutes

A palm mute is created when the palm of the hand rests against the strings as they're being picked/ strummed. The part of the palm that is used is at the bottom of the hand, under the pinkie. It can rest naturally against the strings without impeding small pick movements.

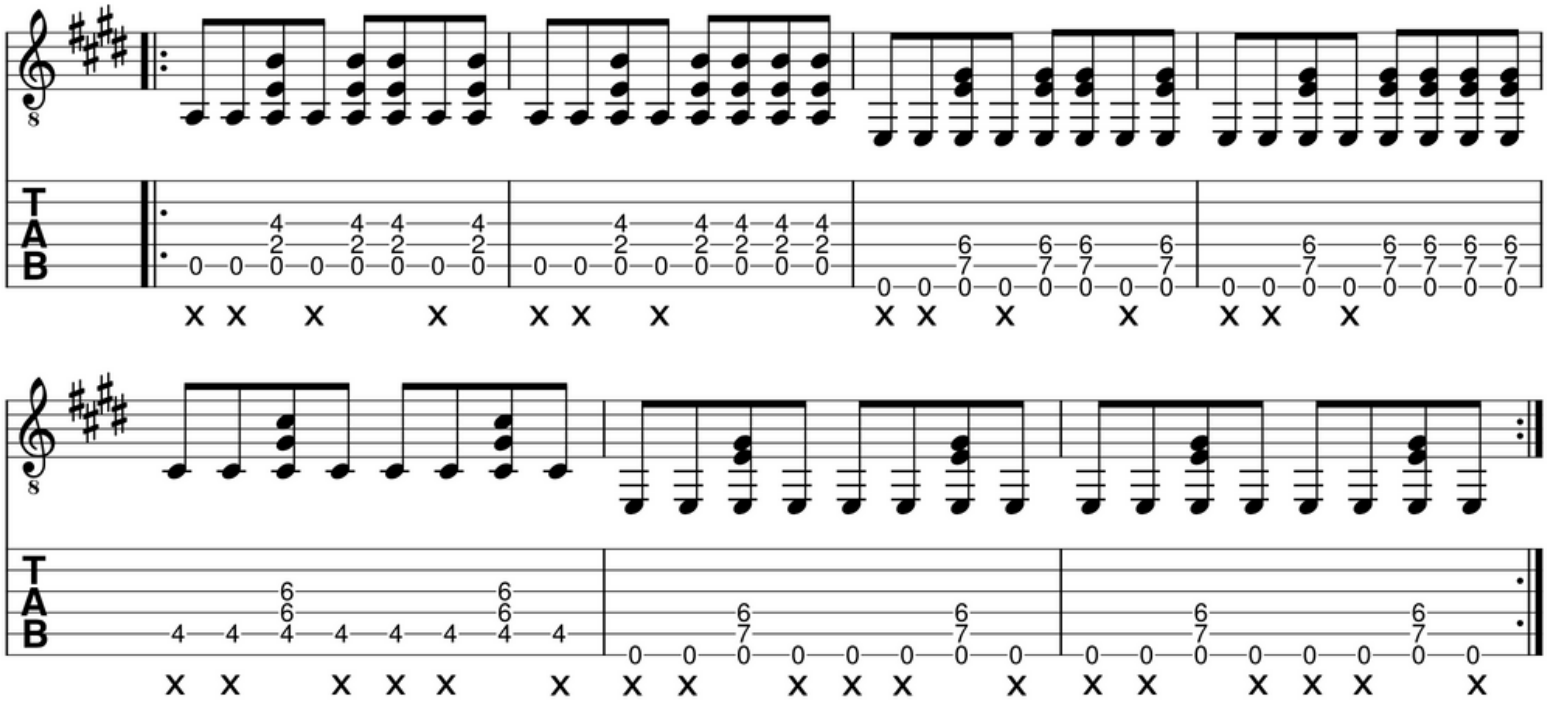
The palm must rest on the strings near the bridge where the strings end. If the palm is too close to the neck, the palm mute will not have any discernable pitch. If the palm is too close to the bridge, it can miss the strings completely and not create the desired sound.

Palm mutes are usually designated with an X symbol or the letters P.M. beneath the note.

Every note in this exercise is palm muted. The switches mostly occur after the 1 beat. It is a similar progression and style to "Rolling In the Deep" by Adele.



This progression uses palm mutes to create accents in a straight 8th note rhythm. Write in the accents only. It is a similar rhythm to what is hear in "Everlong" by Foo Fighters.

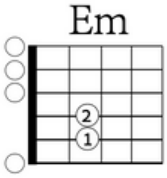


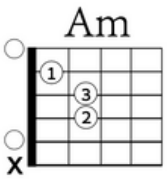
Upstrokes + Strumming Technique

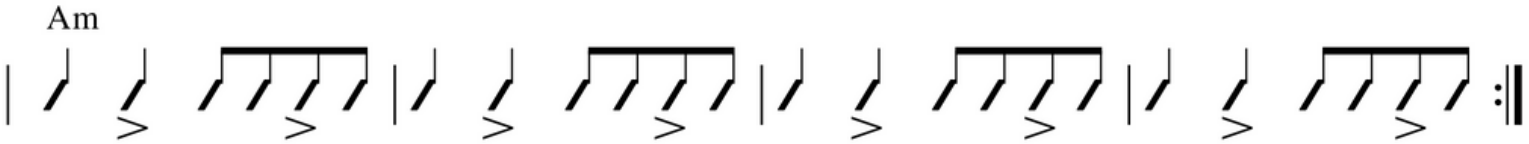
A proper strum takes many hours of practice to develop. It should feel and sound smooth in both directions. The strumming motion is created by twisting your forearm in a spindle-like fashion, while maintaining a slight bend in the wrist. Add in a slight amount of arm movement (generated from the elbow. up and down), and you have a strum that can contact all the strings without digging in to them. While you'll need to grip the pick tightly, it is important to **keep your arm and wrist loose**.

Downstrum ⊓ Upstrum ∨

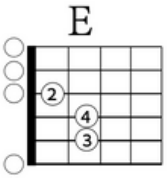
Play the following exercise with and without accents. Focus on developing a consistent, smooth strum.

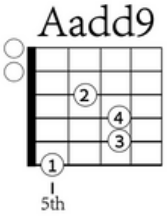


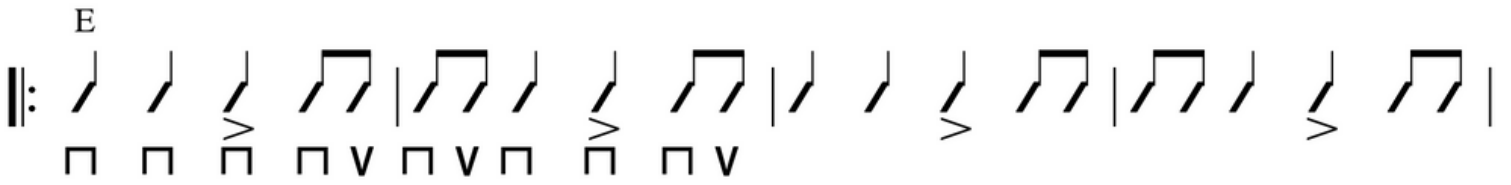


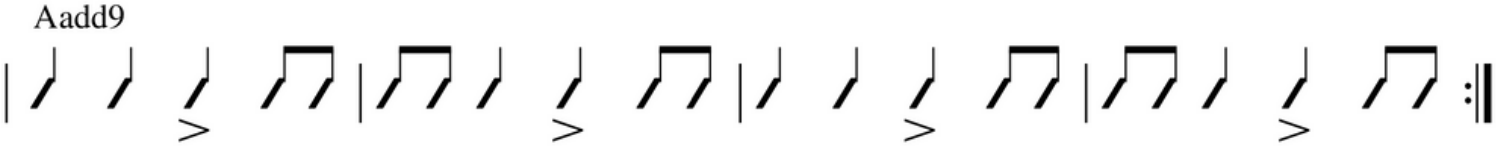


Play the following exercise with and without accents. Make sure you are tapping your foot on each quarter note, and speaking out loud on each strum.





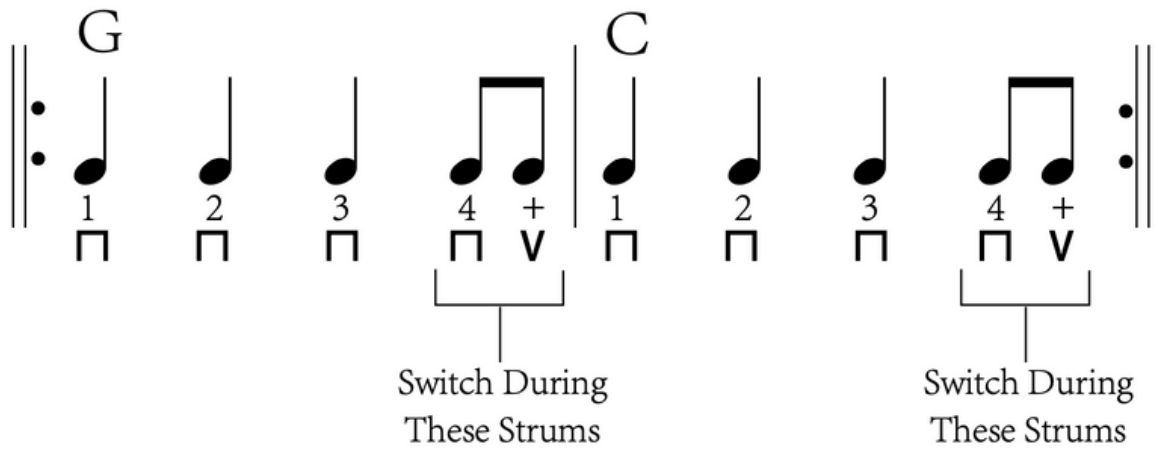




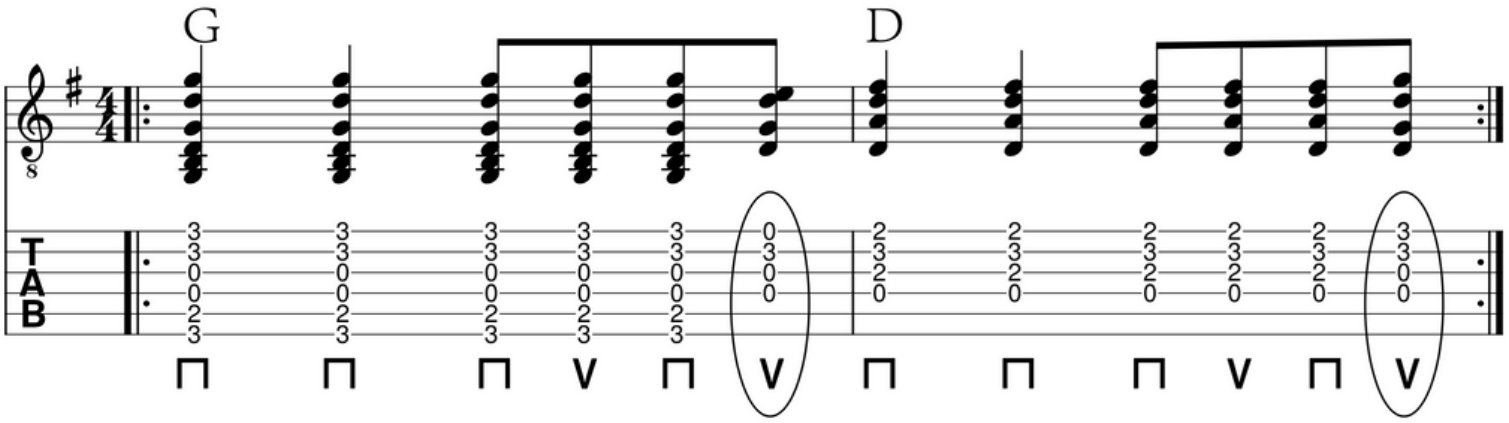
Faster Chord Changes

The last few strums of each measures can be thought of as a transitional moment. During these strums, the fingers can begin moving towards the next chord, in order to land there right on the one beat.

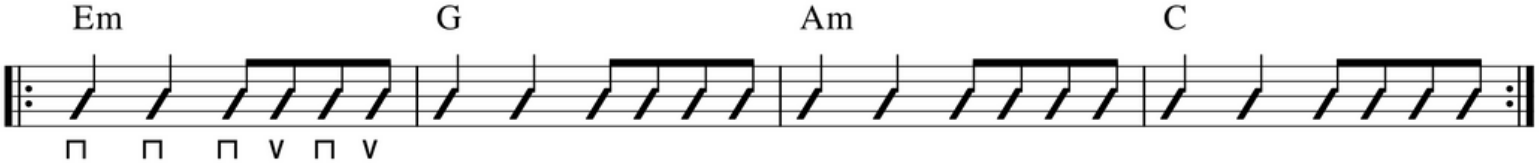
It sounds better to play the wrong thing at the right time, than it does to play the right thing at the wrong time. Missing the 1 beat is a guaranteed way to sound sloppy, but playing sloppy chords BEFORE the 1 beat doesn't sound bad (as long as they're played in time!)

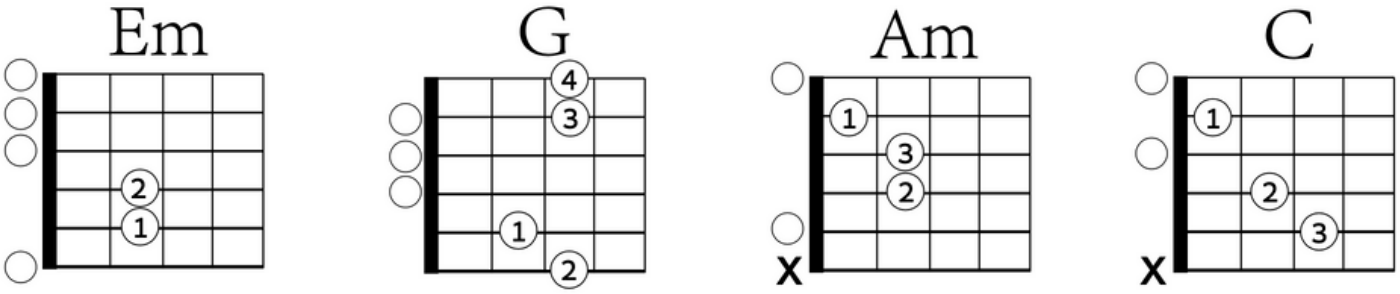


In this exercise, we switch between G and D while keeping the ring finger anchored on the second string. The last 8th note of each measure will be a transitional strum.



Practice the above techniques on this simple 4 chord loop using the chord shapes and fingerings provided.

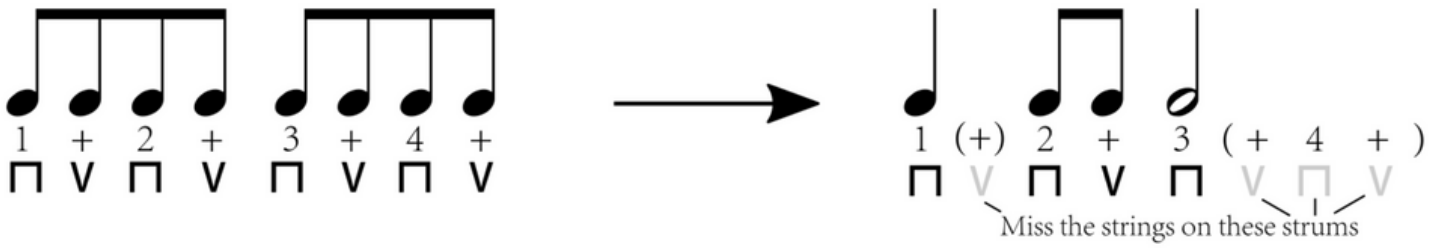




Alternate Strumming

A very common way to organize strumming patterns is to only play downstrokes on the downbeats, and upstrokes on the upbeats.

When you are not strumming a note, your hand should continue to move up or down, and completely miss the strings to create the spaces in between strums.



This is the same exercise from an earlier lesson, but is meant to be played with alternate strumming instead. Write in the correct counts and strums (down strum on 1 2 3 4, up strum on "+"). Tap your foot on each quarter note and say the counts out loud while strumming. Keep your hand moving!