

Strumming

Many guitarists complain that their strumming is not adequate for what they want to play and don't know what to do about it. There are many reasons why someone would feel that way, but mostly the problem lies in limited knowledge and technical facility. There are many different types of strum patterns and techniques used in modern music so this lesson is only to whet your appetite and are only a fraction of what there is to play.

Many guitarists think that strumming should come naturally, but that is a common myth. To play chord progressions and strum patterns like those seen below is not easy and takes a lot of practising to master. Playing some of these strums in a band/jamming situation, with complicated chord patterns, or singing and strumming simultaneously could make them much more difficult.

The best way to improve your strumming is to begin with an easy pattern and gradually work up into more difficult patterns. The strum patterns below begin with the easiest, which is Ex 1 and gradually get more difficult with Ex 9 the most difficult. So make sure you can play a pattern very well before moving on to the next one.

The best way to practise these exercises is to take a chord progression you already play in one of your favourite songs and assign one chord per bar to start. You could also play a blues progression, or use a simple progression like this G, Em, C and D7. Having a metronome or drum machine will help you to keep good time, which is very important in rhythm playing.

Before beginning any exercises it is very important that you can recognise the down and up stroke symbols which are written above the music. They are easy to memorise - the open end of the symbol is the way that you strum.

Ex 1 is a 4 beat strum which you play on beat one and let ring for 4 beats. Ex 2 is what musicians call "4 to the bar" strumming. Play a down strum on each beat of the bar making sure to stay in time. The first two exercises might seem very easy, but it can get very difficult especially if one is playing a jazz chart or similar. It might surprise you that professional level players encounter strums like in Ex 1 & 2 regularly.

Exercises 3 through to 8 are very common 8th note grooves. When counting the beat it is important to play down strokes for beats 1,2,3 and 4, while play up strokes on all the in between + beats.

Ex 8 and 9 are syncopated rhythm patterns where the strums are falling on the up beat, or on the count of +. The strums on the counts I have indicated in brackets are not played. Syncopated strum patterns can be very difficult at first so make sure to take it very slow at first.

Once you have all the strum patterns well learnt it is important to see if you can hear them on your favourite recordings. You also might get some new songwriting ideas from the above strum patterns.

▣ Down stroke
∨ Up stroke

Ex 1
Ex 2
Ex 3

Count 1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4
1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Ex 4
Ex 5
Ex 6
Ex 7

1 2 3 + 4
1 2 + 3 4
1 2 + 3 + 4
1 2 + 3 + 4 +

Ex 8
Ex 9

1 2 + (3) + 4
1 2 + (3) + (4) +

Happy Practising
Kevin.

To hear the music for this lesson visit <http://www.guitar.co.nz/strumming-your-guitar/>
Each example is played once followed by a one bar rest.

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