

# Part 1. Strumming and Rhythms

## A. Free Strumming

What you are going to learn to do is make up interesting rhythms as you go play. We call this "Free Strumming." Instead of learning one specific rhythm for this song, and another specific rhythm for that song, memorizing, memorizing, you will be able to make up changing rhythms as you go along. You will be improvising, and eventually varying the rhythm within the song. That makes a rich, interesting sound, is easy to do, and develops your rhythm sense in a very useful way.

Note: **counting out loud is very useful while learning this.** You have been using your voice for many years, but have only been strumming a Strumstick for a short time. Counting out loud gives you an audible reference for what you are trying to do. Counting in your thoughts does not help anywhere near as much as out loud. You want your ears involved, and your voice, so it is tangible. You DO NOT necessarily have to count while you strum; count BEFORE you strum to set the pace and establish what you are trying to do.

### 1. The Steady Beat

Count out loud 1, 2, 3, 4 at a slow but steady pace. Count several times, and feel how steady and clock-like you can do it. Now strum down once for each count, trying to keep that same steady march-like feeling. Don't do anything with the fretboard, just strum the open strings. Keep counting steadily (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4), and strumming down at each beat you count. Make sure that each strum is crisp and sure, not dragging its way across the strings. A good way to ensure a crisp strum is to pretend that there are 9 strings on the strumstick, 3 above and 3 below the actual ones, and move so as to hit all 9 of them. The larger motion will result in a fast speed across the strings, and your hand will come to a stop and reverse direction in the air before or after the strings, not in the middle of the strings.

Do this step until you get a little bored. Trust me, it is a real foundation element.

### 2. Adding Offbeats (or half beats)

Notice that you bring the pick up between counts? The count, in this case the down strum, is called the "beat," and 1/2 way between beats, when your pick comes up, is the "off beat."

We can count "1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +" as a way of counting the off beat (for the + sign, say the word "and", or maybe "an"). Count "1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +" a few times, while strumming down on the beats again. Notice that your hand moves down on the numbers, and moves up on the +'s. Don't interrupt the beat, just keep moving steadily, and notice the "+" is where you are moving up.

Next, instead of simply moving up on "+", actually strum up on the "+". You may have to twist UP a bit harder. Count "1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +" and strum downup downup downup downup. It will throw you off at first, stay with it. Count out loud first to get the

rhythm in mind, then try counting and strumming together. The beat (1 2 3 4) stays the same tempo whether you do the "+"s or not. Do this for a little while.

Go back to the steady beat (1, 2, 3, 4) for a little while, then do the offbeats (1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +) for a while. Notice that sounds are happening twice as fast when you add the offbeats.

### **3. Random Offbeats**

Now we are ready to get fancy! Try this count, OUT LOUD, over and over, without strumming: "1, 2, 3 + 4 +" . (This rhythm sounds like "fee, fie, fiddle faddle). Then try strumming it: that would be, down, down, downup downup. If you find yourself stopping the steady down/up motion of your hand, go back to the steady beat for a while. THE BEAT GOES ON, the offbeats go in between. Some people call them half beats, by the way.

Let's try another one - how about 1+2 3 4 ("fiddle fee, fie foe) downup, down, down, down. Try that for a while. You can add upstrums after ANY down strum, like 1 + 2 + 3 4, or 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +, or 1 2 3 4+, etc. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO MEMORIZE any of these rhythms. Simply get used to strumming a beat and adding upstrums into it, anywhere you happen to. Practice all of this for a while, before going to the next step.

### **4. Leaving Out Beats**

We are going to leave out a down strum (producing an empty space). END OF SAMPLE