

Rhythm Playing Basics

Rhythm guitar provides the pulse or rhythm for a song, and provides the harmony that supports the other instruments and voices. The rhythm guitarist is typically expected to play a sequence of chords, called a chord progression, around which the song is constructed. There is no clear defining line between a rhythm and lead guitarist, and if there is only one guitarist in the band, or if the songs require it, the guitarist may have to play both lead and rhythm at different times. (CD track 4).

Example 1: Four quarter notes per bar, all performed with downstrokes.

In the rhythm chart to the left, the two numbers in the top staff tell you that there are four quarter notes per bar. The bottom staff shows the strumming pattern. In this first example there are four even beats in the bar (count 1,2,3,4) and they are performed with downstrokes or strums.

Example 2: Four main beats with downstrokes, including offbeats (count 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &).

This second example still has the four main beats, performed with downstrokes but also includes offbeats. So now the count will be 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, the & representing the offbeat. The strumming will now be downstrokes on the main beat and upstrokes on the offbeat.

Example 3: Downstroke on the 1st beat, silent upstroke; downstroke on the 2nd beat, silent upstroke; downstroke on the 3rd beat, play an upstroke, downstroke on the 4th beat, silent upstroke.

This third example should be performed as follows: Play a downstroke on the first beat, then a silent upstroke (lifting clear of the strings); downstroke on the 2nd beat, silent upstroke; downstroke on the 3rd beat, play an upstroke, downstroke on the fourth beat, silent upstroke.

Example 4: Downstroke on the 1st beat, silent upstroke; downstroke on the 3rd beat, silent upstroke, beat 4 down, then silent up.

In this fourth example, we follow the same principles as before with beats 1, & and 2 sounded. The upstroke after beat 2 is silent, play a downstroke on beat 3, then a silent upstroke, beat 4 down, then silent up. As you start to speed up you will find a rhythm starting to emerge

Example 5: Downstroke on the 1st beat, silent upstroke; downstroke on the 3rd beat, silent upstroke, beat 4 down, then silent up.

This last example follows the same principles as before with two 'silent' offbeats during the bar. Practice each example varying the chord shape, then perhaps combine two rhythms into one longer rhythm. concentrate on developing an even tempo (speed).