The Strumming Ladder

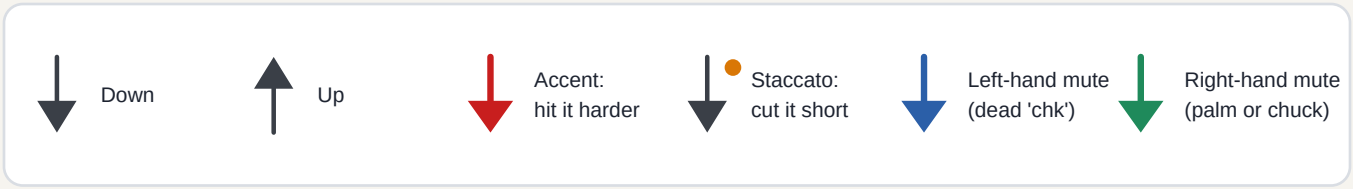
115 strumming patterns in 10 levels, each with the songs it is heard in

The one rule: the hand never stops

Your strumming hand swings like a pendulum, down and up, in time with the count. In eighth-note patterns it goes **down on every number and up on every '+'**. In sixteenth-note patterns it goes **down on the number and the '+', up on the 'e' and the 'a'**.

A pattern is nothing more than a choice of which swings touch the strings and which pass by in the air. That is why every pattern in this booklet can be played without thinking about direction - the count tells you. It is also why they are in this order: each rung removes or adds one or two strokes from a pattern you already know.

How to read the diagrams



The box holds the count for one bar; an arrow above a count means strum there. **Bold counts are played. Greyed-out counts are missed** - the hand still swings past, but touches no strings. Say every count out loud, the grey ones too. A **B** in place of an arrow means pick only the bass string of the chord.

How to climb

1. Rhythm first, no chord. Learn the strumming hand on its own. Rest the fretting hand lightly across all the strings, without pressing, so every strum gives a dead 'chk' and no notes. Strum the pattern like that while counting out loud. Add a chord only when the hand runs by itself.

2. Slow metronome. 60 bpm for eighth-note rungs, 50-60 bpm for sixteenth-note rungs. Move up about 10 bpm at a time.

3. One chord, then two. Loop the pattern on one chord for a minute, then over a change such as G to C. The pattern must not hiccup at the change.

4. Play it with the record. Put on one of the listed songs and strum along - on dead strings, as in step 1, if you do not know the chords. When you can hold the rung through a whole song, climb to the next one.

The ladder at a glance

1 Quarter notes — rungs 1-5
2 Straight eighth notes — rungs 6-22
3 Compound time and waltz — rungs 23-27
4 Syncopated eighth notes — rungs 28-47
5 Triplets and shuffle — rungs 48-67
6 Syncopated triplets — rungs 68-75
7 Muting: left hand and right hand — rungs 76-83
8 Straight sixteenth notes — rungs 84-97
9 Syncopated sixteenth notes — rungs 98-110
10 Swung sixteenths — rungs 111-115

Level 1 - Quarter notes

One strum per beat. The job here is a steady hand and clean chord changes - nothing else.

1 Half notes: two strums



HEAR IT IN

When We Were Young – Adele (intro) • Sweet Caroline – Neil Diamond (intro) • Sign of the Times – Harry Styles (chorus) • Supermarket Flowers – Ed Sheeran (verse)

One strum on beat 1, one on beat 3, and let each ring for two beats. Count all four beats out loud. Slow ballads often start like this before the full strum comes in.

2 Half notes, then one long strum



HEAR IT IN

One Call Away – Charlie Puth (intro) • Supermarket Flowers – Ed Sheeran (verse, first two of four bars)

The easiest two-bar pattern: two strums in the first bar, one in the second that rings for all four beats. Keep counting through the long strum.

3 Half notes, then a step



HEAR IT IN

Let It Go – Idina Menzel (from Frozen; verse, slow)

Two strums per bar, with one extra strum on beat 4 of the second bar to lead back to the start.

4 Four on the floor



HEAR IT IN

Ring of Fire – Johnny Cash • Simple Man – Lynyrd Skynyrd • Knockin' on Heaven's Door (verse) – Bob Dylan • Say Something – A Great Big World • Jar of Hearts – Christina Perri (chorus)

All downstrokes, one per beat. Let the hand rise silently on each '+' - that silent lift is the upstroke you will add later.

5 Quarters with a pickup



HEAR IT IN

Comfortably Numb – Pink Floyd • High and Dry – Radiohead • Come and Get Your Love – Redbone • Every Rose Has Its Thorn – Poison

Your first upstroke: a light flick on the '+' of 4 that pushes into the next bar. Later, try hitting just the bass string on beat 2.

Level 2 - Straight eighth notes

Two slots per beat: '1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +'. Downstrokes land on the numbers, upstrokes on the '+'. The level starts with every slot played and then takes upstrokes away; the all-downstroke and bass-note patterns come after. Nothing is skipped on the beat yet.

6 Constant down-up *aka alternate strumming*

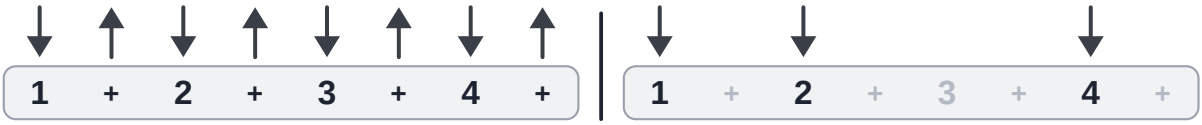


HEAR IT IN

Zombie – The Cranberries • Sweet Home Alabama – Lynyrd Skynyrd • White Winter Hymnal – Fleet Foxes • Songbird – Oasis • Cheerleader – OMI • Johnny B. Goode – Chuck Berry • Mr. Tambourine Man – Bob Dylan

The hand's natural motion with nothing left out: down on every number, up on every '+'. Every other pattern in this level is this one with strokes removed. Accent beats 2 and 4 slightly so it grooves instead of sounding like a machine.

7 Constant down-up, then a breather



HEAR IT IN

Happier – Ed Sheeran

A full bar of down-up, then a bar of three slow strums on beats 1, 2 and 4. The hand keeps the same motion in both bars; in the second it mostly misses.

8 Three upstrokes



HEAR IT IN

Hey, Soul Sister – Train • Love Story – Taylor Swift • Last Christmas – Wham! • In My Life – The Beatles • The Man Who Can't Be Moved – The Script

Constant down-up with one stroke removed: the hand misses the strings on the '+' of 1. The long first beat makes the bar breathe.

9 Down, down-up

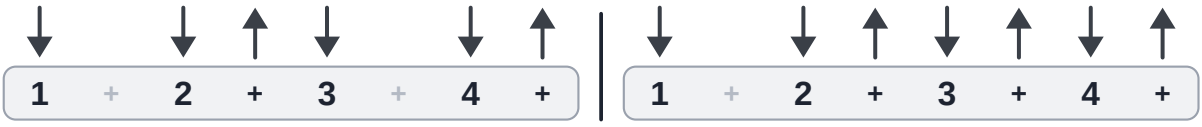


HEAR IT IN

Let It Be – The Beatles • Stand By Me – Ben E. King (easy version) • American Pie – Don McLean • Over My Head (Cable Car) – The Fray • She's Not There – The Zombies

A two-beat cell (down, down-up) played twice. Works on almost any slow song.

10 Plain bar, busy bar



HEAR IT IN

The Sound of Silence – Simon & Garfunkel • Wonderful Tonight – Eric Clapton • Grenade – Bruno Mars (verse)

Many songs repeat a strum every two bars, not every bar. This one is the previous rung followed by rung 8. The second bar fills the gap after beat 3, which gives the pair a sense of question and answer.

11 Two upstrokes



HEAR IT IN

Straight and Narrow – Teenage Fanclub • Patience – Guns N' Roses • California Stars – Wilco • Lost in My Mind – The Head and the Heart

Now the '+' of 1 and the '+' of 2 are both missed: quarter notes in the first half of the bar, eighths in the second half.

12 Quarters, then eighths

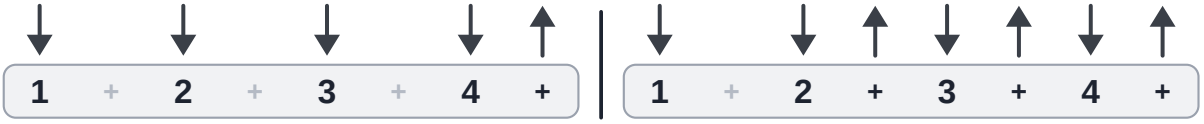


HEAR IT IN

Misery Business – Paramore

Rung 4, then the previous rung: a bar of four downstrokes, then a bar that breaks into down-ups at the end. The contrast between the two bars is the hook.

13 Pickup bar, busy bar



HEAR IT IN

Vampire – Olivia Rodrigo (first chorus)

Rung 5, then rung 8. The single upstroke at the end of bar 1 announces the busier bar.

14 Down-up on beat 2 only



HEAR IT IN

Crazy – Gnarls Barkley • Sweet Child O' Mine – Guns N' Roses (acoustic arrangement)

Four downstrokes with a single upstroke after beat 2. A good test of control: the hand must miss the strings on three of its four upswings.

15 Driving eighths, all down



HEAR IT IN

Have You Ever Seen the Rain – Creedence Clearwater Revival • Free Fallin' – Tom Petty • Chasing Cars – Snow Patrol • Get Back – The Beatles • Yellow – Coldplay • Bad Moon Rising – Creedence Clearwater Revival • Times Like These – Foo Fighters • Walk on the Wild Side – Lou Reed

Eight downstrokes. This breaks the down/up rule on purpose: the hand has to come back up without touching the strings twice as often, which gives the pumping rock sound. Keep the wrist loose.

16 Downstroke drive with gaps

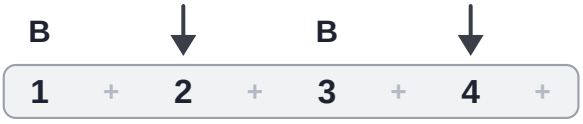


HEAR IT IN

I Love Rock 'n' Roll – Joan Jett • Highway to Hell – AC/DC

All downstrokes again, but leave the '+' of 2 and the '+' of 4 empty. The gaps are what make the riff punch - classic power-chord rock.

17 Boom-chick: bass, strum



HEAR IT IN

Hey There Delilah – Plain White T's • I Hear Them All – Old Crow Medicine Show

Also called: boom-chuck, alternating bass. B = pick only the bass string of the chord (the lowest note you would strum). Bass on 1 and 3, a downstroke on the higher strings on 2 and 4. The simplest country and folk accompaniment.

18 Boom-chicka: bass, down-up



HEAR IT IN

Folsom Prison Blues – Johnny Cash • Ring of Fire – Johnny Cash • Friend of the Devil – Grateful Dead • I Will Follow You Into the Dark – Death Cab for Cutie • New Slang – The Shins

Also called: Carter strum, country strum. The boom-chick with an upstroke added after each strum. This is rung 9 with a bass note in place of the first strum - the country and folk sound.

19 Bass notes with a run of strums



HEAR IT IN

Me and Bobby McGee – Kris Kristofferson • Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) – Eurythmics

Boom-chicka in the first half of the bar; in the second half the bass note is followed by three strums, up-down-up.

20 Bass, strum, then a run



HEAR IT IN

Take Me Home, Country Roads – John Denver • Blowin' in the Wind – Bob Dylan • Should I Stay or Should I Go – The Clash • Closer to Fine – Indigo Girls • It's the End of the World as We Know It – R.E.M.

One bass note on beat 1, a strum on 2, then straight down-up eighths through beats 3 and 4. A campfire favourite: it sounds full but leaves the first half of the bar open for the singer.

21 Strum, bass, strum



HEAR IT IN

Fix You – Coldplay • The First Cut Is the Deepest – Sheryl Crow • Savin' Me – Nickelback

The bass note moves to beat 2, between two full strums. Gentle and spacious, with one upstroke at the end to lead into the next bar.

22 Strum and bass in turns



HEAR IT IN

Imagine – John Lennon • Beautiful – Christina Aguilera • Sunshine (Go Away Today) – Jonathan Edwards

Downstroke on every beat, bass note on every '+'. It imitates a piano: chord in the right hand, single notes in the left.

Level 3 - Compound time and waltz

A change of count, not of difficulty. Until now every beat split into two; in 6/8 it splits into three, and in 3/4 the bar has three beats. The strumming is even and unsyncopated, so nothing here is harder than level 2 - it only needs a new way of counting.

23 Six-eight: six downstrokes *6/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

House of the Rising Sun – The Animals • Everybody Hurts – R.E.M. • Until I Found You – Stephen Sanchez (chorus) • The Night We Met – Lord Huron

Compound time: two beats per bar, each made of three. Six downstrokes, leaning on 1 and 4. Count 'ONE two three FOUR five six'.

24 Six-eight with gaps *6/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Perfect – Ed Sheeran (chorus) • Until I Found You – Stephen Sanchez (verse)

Leave out counts 2 and 5. Each half of the bar becomes long-short: the lilting ballad feel.

25 Six-eight with upstrokes *6/8 time*

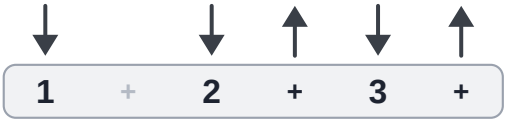


HEAR IT IN

Hallelujah – Jeff Buckley • All I Want – Kodaline

The hand alternates down-up on the six counts. Miss count 2, play everything else. The most common strummed 6/8 pattern.

26 Waltz strum (3/4) *3/4 time*



HEAR IT IN

Norwegian Wood – The Beatles • Annie's Song – John Denver • Iris – Goo Goo Dolls • Nothingman – Pearl Jam

Three beats per bar, each split in two - simple time, not compound, but it sits here because the bar counts in three. Down on 1, then down-up, down-up.

27 Waltz with a push, then the waltz strum *3/4 time*



HEAR IT IN

Riverwide – Sheryl Crow

The only two-bar pattern in three found in the song data, and harder than the rest of this level: bar 1 strums beat 1 and then only the '+' of 2 and of 3, so beats 2 and 3 are skipped. Bar 2 is the plain waltz strum. Come back to it after level 4 if the skipped beats throw you.

Level 4 - Syncopated eighth notes

Syncopation starts when you skip a downstroke ON a beat: the hand still goes down, but misses the strings. An upstroke with no downstroke after it is the sound of syncopation.

28 Miss beat 3



HEAR IT IN

This Mess We're In – PJ Harvey feat. Thom Yorke

Constant down-up, but the hand ghosts past the strings on beat 3. Say '3' out loud while you miss it.

29 Miss beat 2



HEAR IT IN

(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding – Elvis Costello

The same idea one beat earlier: the upstroke after beat 1 hangs over beat 2. It feels like the bar trips forward at the start.

30 Old Faithful: down, down-up, up-down-up

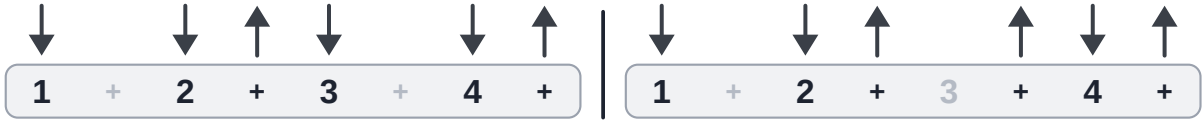


HEAR IT IN

Brown Eyed Girl – Van Morrison • Stand By Me – Ben E. King • How to Save a Life – The Fray • Hey Ya! – OutKast • Wish You Were Here – Pink Floyd • Patience – Guns N' Roses • I'm Yours – Jason Mraz • Layla (Unplugged) – Eric Clapton • Wonderwall – Oasis (simplified; see rung 110)

Also called: folk strum, island strum. The most used strum in pop and rock - if you learn one pattern from this booklet, make it this one. Layla (Unplugged) uses it with a swing feel.

31 Down, down-up, then Old Faithful

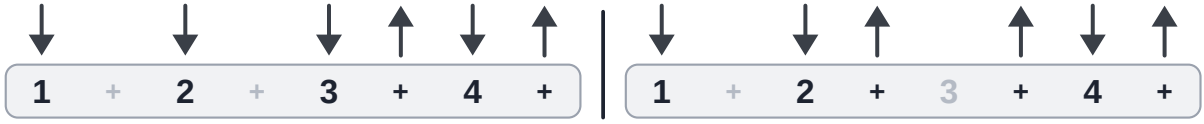


HEAR IT IN

As It Was – Harry Styles

A plain bar from level 2, then Old Faithful. Only the second bar skips beat 3, so the plain bar gives you time to recover.

32 Two upstrokes, then Old Faithful



HEAR IT IN

Peaceful Easy Feeling – Eagles

The same idea with rung 11 as the plain bar.

33 Old Faithful, cut short



HEAR IT IN

Warning Sign – Coldplay • Desire – U2 • All of Me – John Legend (chorus)

Old Faithful without its last upstroke. Ending on the downstroke of beat 4 leaves a breath before the next bar - useful when the chord changes on beat 1.

34 Miss beat 4



HEAR IT IN

Shallow – Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper • Losing My Religion – R.E.M. (intro) • She Will Be Loved – Maroon 5 (intro and verse)

Straight through beat 3, then the upstroke after 3 hangs over beat 4 and the last upstroke pulls you into the next bar.

35 The long pause



HEAR IT IN

Riptide – Vance Joy (intro and verses) • Lay Down Sally – Eric Clapton • Radioactive – Imagine Dragons • Little Talks – Of Monsters and Men (chorus) • The A Team – Ed Sheeran (intro) • First Day of My Life – Bright Eyes

Two beats of space, then a quick up-down-up. In country and folk, play only the bass note on beat 1 (the 'train beat').

36 One push



HEAR IT IN

Sweet Child O' Mine – Guns N' Roses (acoustic arrangement) • Don't Stop Believin' – Journey (chorus)

Just two strums: down on 1, then an upstroke on the '+' of 2 that rings across beats 3 and 4. Keep the hand swinging through the silence so the next bar starts in time.

37 Push and answer



HEAR IT IN

Is She Really Going Out with Him? – Joe Jackson

The push from the previous rung, answered by a down-up on beat 4. The strums fall in a 3 + 3 + 2 grouping - the tresillo again (next rung), this time made with gaps.

38 Tresillo accents *aka 3 + 3 + 2, the 'Clocks' rhythm*



HEAR IT IN

Clocks – Coldplay • Glycerine – Bush • Downtown Train – Tom Waits

Eight even downstrokes, but lean hard on 1, the '+' of 2, and 4. The accents group the eighths 3 + 3 + 2 - the tresillo, a rhythm that came into pop from Cuban music. The hand plays straight; only the accents are syncopated.

39 Off-beats after the one

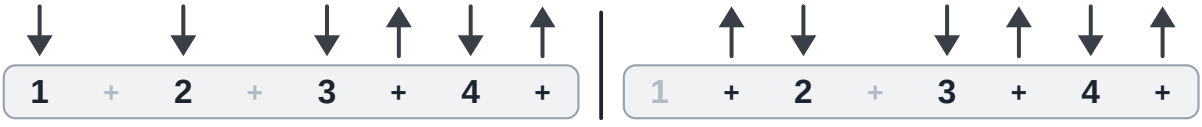


HEAR IT IN

Stitches – Shawn Mendes (intro and verse) • Amsterdam – Guster

Beat 1 is the only beat you hit. After it, every strum is an upstroke on a '+'. Tap your foot hard on 2, 3 and 4 - they are silent in the hand.

40 Two upstrokes, tied over



HEAR IT IN

Friday I'm in Love – The Cure • My Sweet Lord – George Harrison • Welcome to Paradise – Green Day • Lovesong – The Cure

A push across the bar line, the one thing a single bar cannot show. Bar 1 is rung 11; its last upstroke rings over beat 1 of bar 2, which you skip. Count '1' out loud anyway and come back in on the '+' of 1. The most common two-bar strum in the song data.

41 Push across the bar line



HEAR IT IN

Patience – Guns N' Roses

The same push as the previous rung, starting from rung 9: the last upstroke of bar 1 rings over beat 1 of bar 2, which you skip. This is syncopation stretched over two bars.

42 Push, then a gap



HEAR IT IN

Island in the Sun – Weezer

As the previous rung, but bar 2 also skips beat 2: two upstrokes in a row before the downstroke on 3.

43 Down, down-up, tied over



HEAR IT IN

Tears in Heaven – Eric Clapton (variation) • Ain't No Mountain High Enough – Marvin Gaye

Bar 2 is bar 1 with its first downstroke missing and an upstroke on the '+' of 1 and of 2.

44 Old Faithful, tied over



HEAR IT IN

Times Like These – Foo Fighters (verses) • Journey to the End of the East Bay – Rancid

Old Faithful in both bars, but the second starts on the '+' of 1: beat 3 is skipped in each bar and so is the downbeat of bar 2.

45 Two upstrokes into Old Faithful, tied over



HEAR IT IN

Just Like Heaven – The Cure • Minsan – Eraserheads

Bar 1 of 'Two upstrokes, tied over' with bar 2 of the previous rung.

46 The long pause, tied over



HEAR IT IN

California Stars – Billy Bragg and Wilco

Rung 35 with its first downstroke missing in the second bar. The up-down-up at the end of bar 1 leads straight into the '+' of 1.

47

Miss beat 4, tied over



HEAR IT IN

Losing My Religion – R.E.M. (intro)

Bar 1 skips beat 4; its last upstroke carries across the bar line, and bar 2 skips beats 1 and 2. The famous mandolin-like drive of the intro below.

Level 5 - Triplets and shuffle

Three even strums per beat: count '1 + a 2 + a 3 + a 4 + a'. The rungs start with every count played, first all downstrokes and then alternating, and take strums away one at a time. Then the middle count of every beat is left out. That gap is the shuffle, or swing: the long-short feel of blues, rock and roll and a great deal of folk. The shuffle rungs thin out the same way, one upstroke at a time. Every beat is still played, so nothing here is syncopated yet.

48 Triplets, all downstrokes *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

You Are the Reason – Calum Scott (intro and verse) • The Night We Met – Lord Huron

Start here: twelve even downstrokes, leaning on the first of each three. Only practical at slow tempos, which is exactly where it is used: slow ballads.

49 Downstroke triplets, one count out *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

We Belong Together – Ritchie Valens

The same downstrokes with the '+' of beats 1 and 3 left out, so those two beats get a longer first strum. Keep counting the missing '+'.

50 Downstroke triplets with a rest *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Put Your Head on My Shoulder – Paul Anka (chorus) • Panalangin – APO Hiking Society

A full triplet on beats 1 and 3, one strum on beats 2 and 4 that rings for the rest of the beat. The doo-wop ballad strum.

51 Slow triplets: one strum, then three *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Perfect – Ed Sheeran (pre-chorus)

The triplet is now left only on beat 4: one strum on beats 1, 2 and 3, then all three counts of beat 4 to push into the next bar. This is the 12/8 slow-dance feel. Count every '+' and 'a' out loud even where you do not strum.

52 Triplets, alternating *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

All My Loving – The Beatles

Strict down-up alternation through all twelve counts. Because three is odd, beats 2 and 4 start on an upstroke - that is the whole difficulty, so stay on this rung until it is comfortable. The next four rungs take one strum away at a time. Accent the first of each three whichever direction it falls.

53 Alternating triplets, one strum out *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Practice rung – the first step from full triplets towards the patterns with gaps

The alternating triplets with a single strum missing: the '+' of beat 1. The hand still makes the upward move there, it just misses the strings.

54 Alternating triplets, two strums out *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Before You Go – Lewis Capaldi • O Come to the Altar – Elevation Worship • Hallelujah – Jeff Buckley

Now the '+' of beat 3 goes too, so both halves of the bar are the same: down, (miss), down, up-down-up.

55 Alternating triplets, beat 1 held *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Practice rung – one strum away from the next rung

The 'a' of beat 1 goes as well: beat 1 is one long strum, and beat 2 comes in on an upstroke after two silent counts. Beat 3 stays as in the previous rung.

56 One strum, then a triplet *12/8 time*



HEAR IT IN

Heather – Conan Gray • Reckless Love – Cory Asbury

A held strum on beats 1 and 3, a full triplet on beats 2 and 4. The last strum to go is the 'a' of beat 3. The triplets still start with an upstroke; the hand keeps swinging through the gaps.

57 The shuffle *aka swung eighths - swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Tush – ZZ Top • La Grange – ZZ Top • Rock and Roll – Led Zeppelin • Folsom Prison Blues – Johnny Cash • Pride and Joy – Stevie Ray Vaughan • Hallelujah – Leonard Cohen • You've Got a Friend in Me – Randy Newman

A triplet with the middle count left out: down on the beat, up on the 'a'. The hand is back to plain down-up, but long-short instead of even. From here on the diagrams keep the triplet count so you can see the gap.

58 Shuffle with a long first beat *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Ring of Fire – Johnny Cash • Don't Be Cruel – Elvis Presley • Big Iron – Marty Robbins • Lucky – Jason Mraz (chorus)

The shuffle with one upstroke left out, the 'a' of beat 1. Everything else is the same.

59 Down, down-up, swung *swing feel*

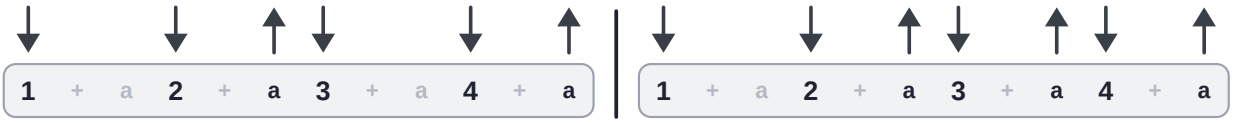


HEAR IT IN

What a Wonderful World – Louis Armstrong (verse) • Happier Than Ever – Billie Eilish (verse) • Back to Black – Amy Winehouse • With a Little Help from My Friends – The Beatles

The previous rung with the 'a' of beat 3 left out as well: a long strum, then a shuffled down-up, twice per bar. The most common gentle swing accompaniment.

60 Plain bar, busy bar, swung *swing feel*

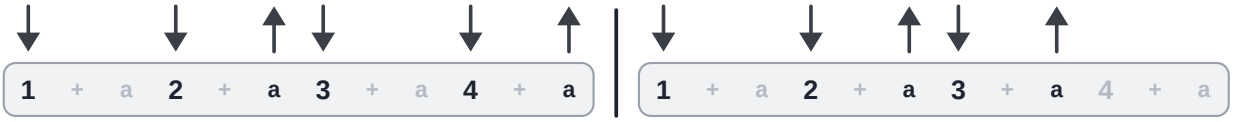


HEAR IT IN

With a Little Help from My Friends – The Beatles • Holiday – Green Day

Rung 10 with a shuffle feel: the previous rung, then rung 58.

61 Down, down-up swung, then a stop *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Back to Black – Amy Winehouse (pattern 1)

The swung 'down, down-up' bar, then a bar that runs through beat 3 and stops, leaving beat 4 silent.

62 Shuffle with space *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Holiday – Green Day • Happy Together – The Turtles • Wagon Wheel – Old Crow Medicine Show • Sweater Weather – The Neighbourhood

The shuffle with the 'a' of beats 1 and 2 left out: one strum on beats 1 and 2, shuffled down-ups on beats 3 and 4. The swung version of 'Two upstrokes' from level 2.

63 Swung quarters with a pickup *swing feel*

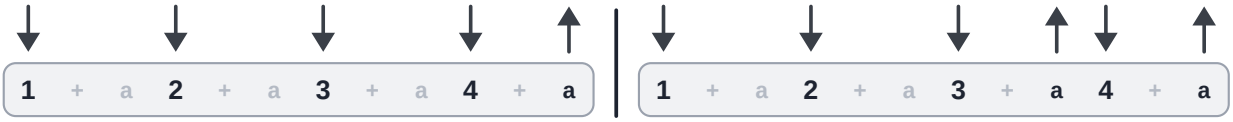


HEAR IT IN

Count on Me – Bruno Mars • God Only Knows – The Beach Boys (intro) • All I Want for Christmas Is You – Mariah Carey

Four strums on the beats and a single swung upstroke on the last 'a' to lead into the next bar.

64 Swung pickup bar, then shuffle with space *swing feel*

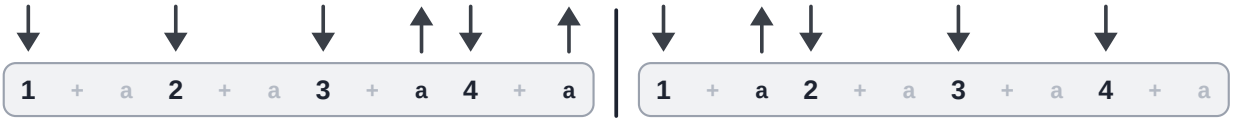


HEAR IT IN

The Weight – The Band (verse, line 1)

The previous rung, then rung 62: the second bar adds one more swung upstroke.

65 Shuffle with space, then the answer *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Bad Moon Rising – Creedence Clearwater Revival (intro and verse, part 2)

Rung 62, then its mirror image: the swung down-up comes first and the plain strums last.

66 Swung bass-and-strum *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

A Horse with No Name – America • I'm Yours – Jason Mraz • Sweet Virginia – The Rolling Stones

Bass note on 1 and 3, strums everywhere else, all shuffled. Lean on beats 2 and 4.

67 Swung boom-chicka *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

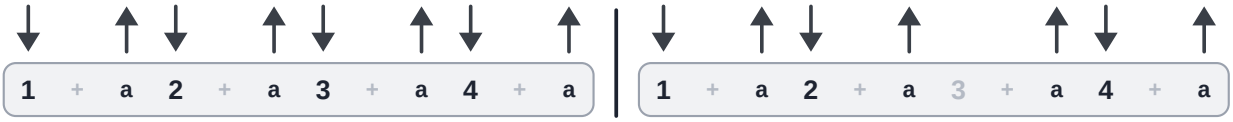
The Cape – Guy Clark • Rhubarb Pie – John Fogerty • Shame – The Avett Brothers

The previous rung without the upstroke after each bass note: bass, down-up, bass, down-up, all swung.

Level 6 - Syncopated triplets

The syncopated-eighth patterns of level 4, played with the triplet feel. A beat is skipped and the upstroke before it - now on the late 'a' of the triplet - hangs over the gap. If level 4 is solid, the hand already knows these; only the timing is new. The first rung alternates a plain shuffle bar with a bar that misses beat 3, and each rung after it takes one more strum away.

68 Shuffle, then miss beat 3 *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Practice rung – one missing strum, with a plain bar to recover in

One bar of the plain shuffle, then the same bar with the downstroke on beat 3 left out. The hand still moves down on beat 3; it only misses the strings. Loop the two bars until the gap stops pulling you off the beat.

69 Miss beat 3, swung *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Crazy Little Thing Called Love – Queen • Layla – Eric Clapton (verse variation)

The second bar of the previous rung on its own: a full shuffle with only beat 3 left out. Rockabilly rhythm guitar lives here.

70 Old Faithful, swung *swing feel*

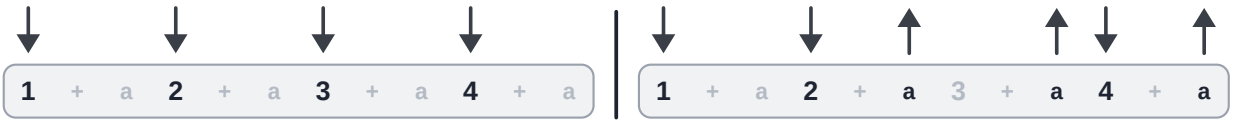


HEAR IT IN

With a Little Help from My Friends – The Beatles • You Were Meant for Me – Jewel • Happy Together – The Turtles • Wagon Wheel – Darius Rucker • Grow Old with You – Adam Sandler

The previous rung with the 'a' of beat 1 left out as well, which makes it rung 30 with a swing feel.

71 Swung quarters, then Old Faithful swung *swing feel*

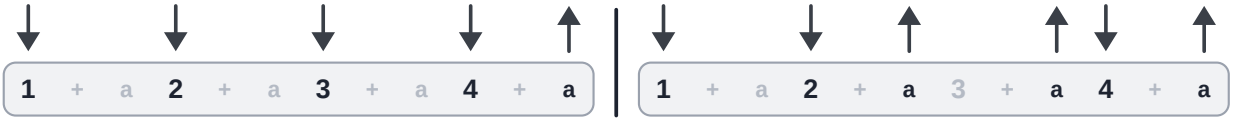


HEAR IT IN

Love Me Do – The Beatles

Four plain strums, then Old Faithful swung. The plain bar resets the beat before each syncopated one.

72 Swung pickup bar, then Old Faithful swung *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

The Weight – The Band (verse, line 2)

The previous rung with a swung upstroke at the end of the plain bar.

73 The long pause, swung *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Skinny Love – Bon Iver • Sweater Weather – The Neighbourhood (instrumental and bridge)

Old Faithful swung without the 'a' of beat 2: two strums, a long gap across beat 3, then a shuffled up-down-up to finish the bar.

74 Bass note, then Old Faithful swung *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Harvest Moon – Neil Young • Ripple – Grateful Dead

Old Faithful swung, with only the bass string on beat 1. The gentle country-folk lope.

75 Old Faithful swung, tied over *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Death Bed Coffee for Your Head – Powfu

Rung 44 with a swing feel: the downbeat of bar 2 is skipped and the last upstroke of bar 1 hangs over it.

Level 7 - Muting: left hand and right hand

Silence and 'chk' sounds are part of the rhythm. The left (fretting) hand mutes by letting go; the right (strumming) hand mutes by touching the strings. Same eighth-note motion as before - only the sound changes.

76 Left-hand mute: ring, then choke



HEAR IT IN

Practice rung – the basis of every percussive strum that follows

Left hand. Play two beats ringing, then release the pressure of the chord without lifting off - fingers stay touching, slightly flattened - and strum two beats of dead 'chk'. No pitch should sound. Squeeze again on beat 1.

77 Strum and scratch

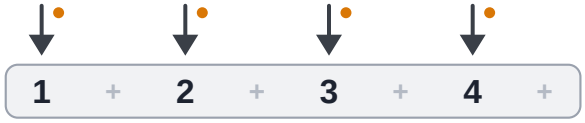


HEAR IT IN

Photograph – Def Leppard • Panama – Van Halen

Left hand. One beat of chord, one beat of scratch. The fretting hand pumps: squeeze, release, squeeze, release. Keep the strumming hand moving evenly; only the fretting hand changes the sound.

78 Staccato: strum and cut

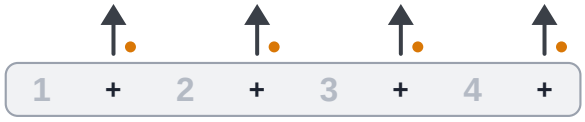


HEAR IT IN

Practice rung – the same cut is used on the off-beats in the next rung

Staccato means short. Strum, then kill the chord straight away so each strum is a clipped 'chop' with silence after it. With fretted chords, relax the left hand right after the strum (as in rung 76, but after the chord has sounded). With open chords, drop the side of the right hand onto the strings instead.

79 Staccato off-beats *aka the reggae skank, ska upstrokes*

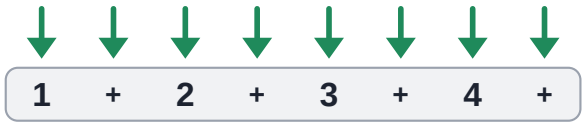


HEAR IT IN

No Woman, No Cry – Bob Marley • Stir It Up – Bob Marley • Three Little Birds – Bob Marley • Stuck in the Middle with You – Stealers Wheel

The reggae and ska 'skank': every beat is skipped and only the '+'s sound, each one cut short. Tap your foot on the beats or you will drift onto them.

80 Palm mute

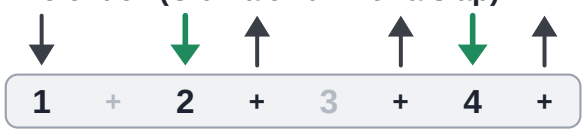


HEAR IT IN

Enter Sandman – Metallica • You Really Got Me – The Kinks / Van Halen

Right hand. Rest the edge of the palm on the strings exactly where they leave the bridge and play all downstrokes. You should still hear the notes, but tight and thuddy. Too far from the bridge and the note dies. Lift the palm for the chorus to open the sound up.

81 The chuck (Old Faithful with a slap)

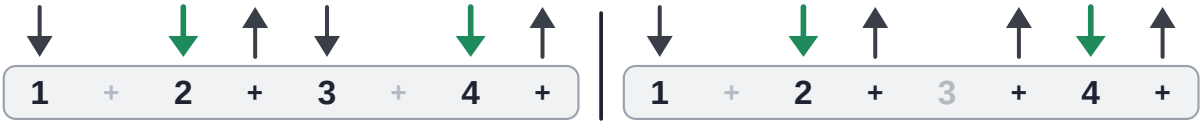


HEAR IT IN

I'm Yours – Jason Mraz • Riptide – Vance Joy

Also called: chunk, slap strum. Right hand. Rung 30 again, but on beats 2 and 4 the palm lands on the strings at the same instant as the downstroke, giving a snare-drum 'chk'. The upstroke after it rings normally.

82 Chucks on 2 and 4, then the chuck strum

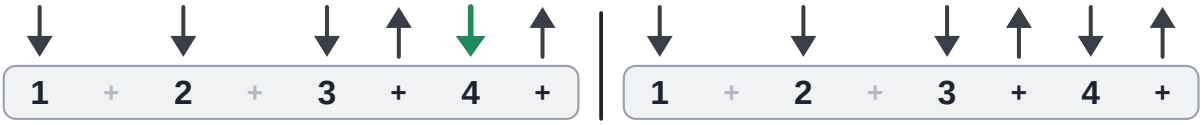


HEAR IT IN

What Makes You Beautiful – One Direction

Bar 1 is 'down, chuck-up' twice, with every beat played; bar 2 is the previous rung, which skips beat 3.

83 One chuck, then none



HEAR IT IN

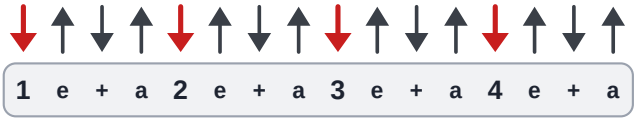
Mr. Jones – Counting Crows

Rung 11 in both bars, with a chuck on beat 4 of the first bar only.

Level 8 - Straight sixteenth notes

Four slots per beat: '1 e + a'. The hand now moves twice as fast: down on the number and the '+', up on 'e' and 'a'. The level starts with all sixteen strokes and takes them away a few at a time, first the 'e's, then the 'a's, then the '+'s. Start at 60 bpm.

84 The sixteenth engine *aka straight sixteenths*



HEAR IT IN

Creep – Radiohead (second half of the chorus) • Lego House – Ed Sheeran

An exercise more than a song pattern: sixteen even strokes, accent on each number. Every pattern from here on is this motion with strokes left out.

85 Engine with a breath



HEAR IT IN

Simple Man – Lynyrd Skynyrd (verse)

The engine with two strokes left out: the 'e' of beats 1 and 3. The hand still moves up there and misses the strings.

86 Gallop into a full beat



HEAR IT IN

Can't You See – The Marshall Tucker Band

The 'e' of beat 2 goes as well, so beats 1 to 3 are 'down, down-up' and only beat 4 is still a full four.

87 The gallop *aka galloping rhythm*



HEAR IT IN

Second Hand News – Fleetwood Mac • Crazy – Gnarls Barkley

Now every 'e' is gone. 'Down, down-up' on every beat: count '1 + a 2 + a'. Accent the number and it sounds like a galloping horse.

88 Indie-rock strum



HEAR IT IN

Save Tonight – Eagle-Eye Cherry • D'You Know What I Mean? – Oasis • Dani California – Red Hot Chili Peppers (acoustic versions) • Let It Be – The Beatles • Knockin' on Heaven's Door – Bob Dylan • Ziggy Stardust – David Bowie • Boulevard of Broken Dreams – Green Day • Take Me to Church – Hozier

The gallop without the upstroke on beats 1 and 3: eighth-note downstrokes with a quick upstroke on the 'a' of 2 and of 4. The hand keeps the sixteenth motion throughout.

89 Eighths with a pickup



HEAR IT IN

Hey Jude – The Beatles • Eleanor Rigby – The Beatles • Beautiful – Christina Aguilera • Walk Away – Kelly Clarkson

Eight downstrokes on the numbers and '+'s, with one quick upstroke on the last 'a' of the bar. The indie-rock strum with only the last upstroke kept.

90 Slow strum with a flick



HEAR IT IN

Father and Son – Cat Stevens • Don't Look Back in Anger – Oasis • Angel from Montgomery – John Prine • Boulevard of Broken Dreams – Green Day (verses)

The indie-rock strum without the '+' of beats 1 and 3: one strum on beats 1 and 3, then 'down, down-up' on beats 2 and 4. The long strum lets the chord ring; the flick on the 'a' keeps it moving. A ballad staple.

91 Quarter notes with a flick



HEAR IT IN

Can You Feel the Love Tonight – Elton John • Angels – Robbie Williams • Alright – Pilate

One strum per beat, and 'down, down-up' only on beat 4. The sparsest pattern that still needs the sixteenth-note hand.

92 Gallop with a breath

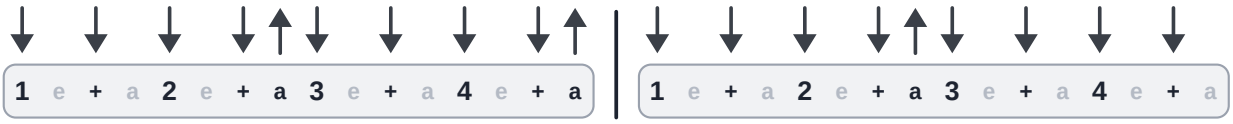


HEAR IT IN

Free Fallin' – Tom Petty • Teardrops on My Guitar – Taylor Swift

The gallop, but beats 2 and 3 alternate with plain eighths so the bar breathes. Watch the '+' of 2: it is a downstroke with no upstroke after it, and beat 3 brings back the upstroke on the 'e'.

93 Indie-rock strum, then without the last flick

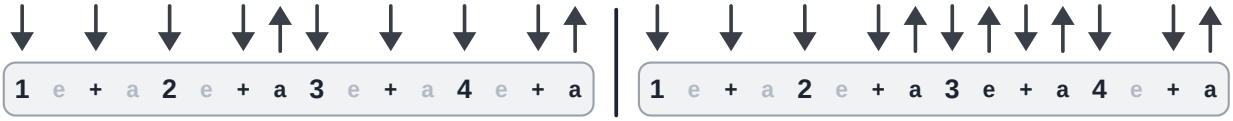


HEAR IT IN

Starman – David Bowie (intro)

Rung 88 twice, leaving out the final upstroke of the second bar so the pair comes to rest.

94 Indie-rock strum, with a run

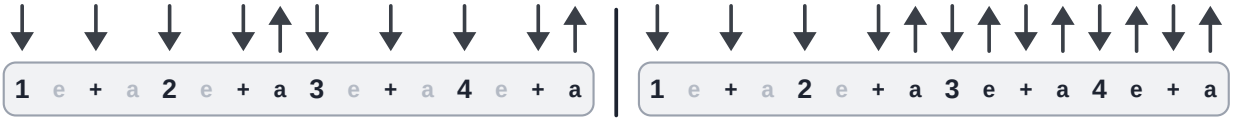


HEAR IT IN

No Surprises – Radiohead

Rung 88, with a run of sixteenths through beat 3 of the second bar.

95 Indie-rock strum, then a long run

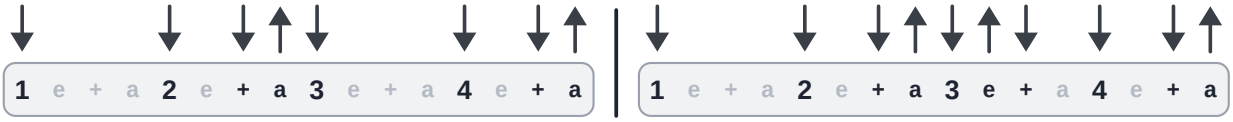


HEAR IT IN

Where Is My Mind? – Pixies (intro and verse)

As the previous rung, but the run of sixteenths fills all of beats 3 and 4 of the second bar.

96 Slow strum with a flick, with a run

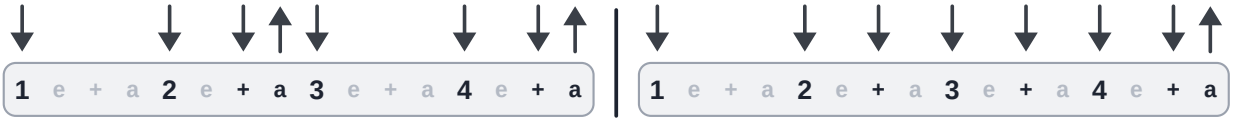


HEAR IT IN

Fake Plastic Trees – Radiohead

Rung 90; the second bar adds a down-up on beat 3.

97 Slow strum with a flick, then eighths



HEAR IT IN

For What It's Worth – Buffalo Springfield (chorus)

Rung 90, then a bar that switches to steady eighth-note downstrokes from beat 2, with one flick at the end.

Level 9 - Syncopated sixteenth notes

The same trick as the syncopated eighths, one size smaller: skip the downstroke on a beat or on an '+' while the hand keeps its sixteenth-note motion.

98 Old Faithful, double time



HEAR IT IN

Good Riddance (Time of Your Life) – Green Day • Riptide – Vance Joy (chorus) • Someone Like You – Adele (chorus)

Rung 30 squeezed into two beats and played twice per bar. Beats 2 and 4 are skipped; you come back in on the 'e'. Good Riddance adds a swing feel and bass-note picking.

99 The long pause, double time

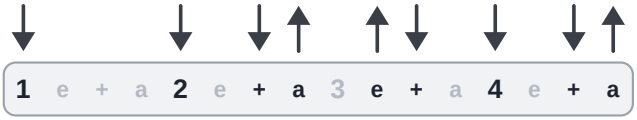


HEAR IT IN

Riptide – Vance Joy (intro and verse) • Don't Think Twice, It's All Right – Bob Dylan

The long-pause strum from the syncopated eighths, played twice per bar. Beats 2 and 4 are silent, and so is the '+' before them.

100 Slow start, skip beat 3

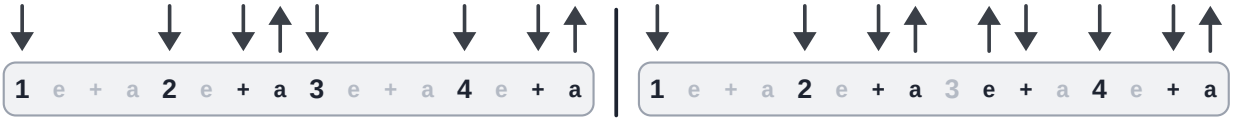


HEAR IT IN

Three Little Birds – Bob Marley • One – U2 • Travelin' Soldier – The Chicks • Time to Pretend – MGMT

A long strum on 1, 'down, down-up' on 2, then the upstroke on the 'a' of 2 hangs over beat 3. Only one beat is skipped, which makes this the gentlest syncopated sixteenth strum.

101 Slow strum with a flick, then skip beat 3



HEAR IT IN

TV – Billie Eilish

Rung 90 from level 8, then the previous rung. The two bars differ only on beat 3: played in bar 1, skipped in bar 2.

102 Skip beat 3

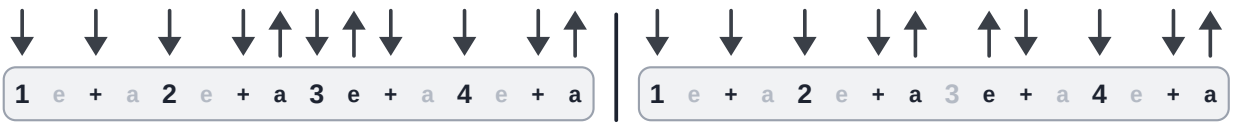


HEAR IT IN

Knockin' on Heaven's Door – Bob Dylan • Price Tag – Jessie J • Fireflies – Owl City • I Will Remember You – Sarah McLachlan • Sunny Came Home – Shawn Colvin

The indie-rock strum with beat 3 missed. The 'a' of 2 pushes across the middle of the bar and you land again on the 'e' of 3.

103 Fill beat 3, then skip it

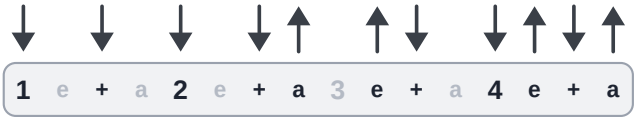


HEAR IT IN

Starman – David Bowie (verse)

Bar 1 plays down-up-down through beat 3; bar 2 is the previous rung, with the downstroke on beat 3 left out.

104 Skip beat 3, busy ending

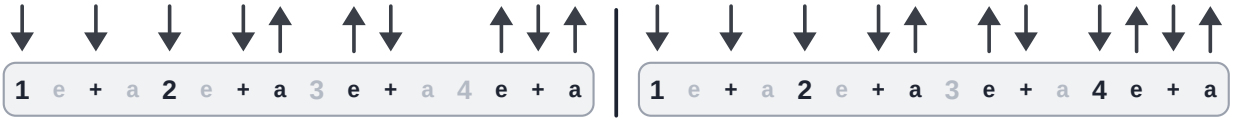


HEAR IT IN

Fast Car – Tracy Chapman (strummed arrangement) • Into the Mystic – Van Morrison • A Million Dreams – The Greatest Showman

As the previous rung, but beat 4 fills up: 'down, down-up-down-up'. The run at the end drives into the next bar.

105 Skip beat 3, two endings

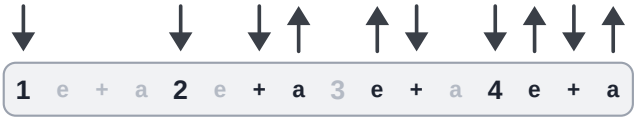


HEAR IT IN

Zombie – The Cranberries (intro)

Both bars skip beat 3. The first ends 'up-down-up' after a gap, the second is the previous rung.

106 Slow start, busy ending

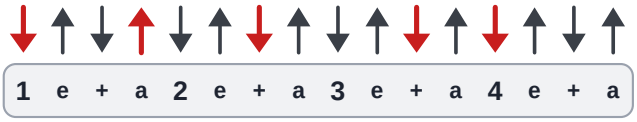


HEAR IT IN

Purple Rain – Prince • Scar Tissue – Red Hot Chili Peppers

Long strum on 1, skip beat 3, run of four on beat 4. Lots of space early in the bar, lots of motion late.

107 The Bo Diddley beat *aka 3-2 clave, hambone*



HEAR IT IN

Bo Diddley – Bo Diddley • Not Fade Away – Buddy Holly • I Want Candy – The Strangeloves • Magic Bus – The Who • (Marie's the Name) His Latest Flame – Elvis Presley

Keep all sixteen strokes going lightly and hit five of them hard: 1, the 'a' of 1, the '+' of 2, the '+' of 3, and 4. Say 'bomp, ba-bomp-bomp ... bomp, bomp'. Many players mute the light strokes with the fretting hand so only the accents ring.

108 Modern acoustic strum

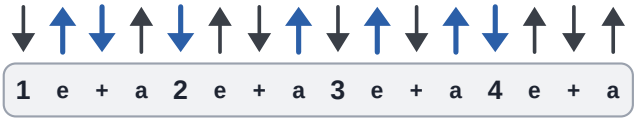


HEAR IT IN

Live Forever – Oasis (acoustic version) • Next step: Wonderwall – Oasis (the last rung of this level)

The Britpop acoustic sound. The 'a' of 2 ties into beat 3 - learn beats 2-3 on their own first. Wonderwall is built from the same vocabulary; one two-bar reading of it is rung 110.

109 Funk sixteenths with scratches

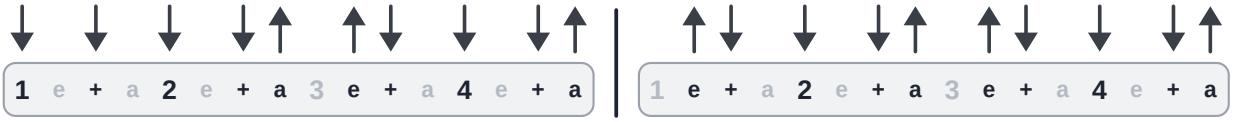


HEAR IT IN

Play That Funky Music – Wild Cherry • Le Freak – Chic • Let's Dance – David Bowie • We Are Family – Sister Sledge • I'm Coming Out – Diana Ross

Also called: chicken scratch. A typical funk figure, not a transcription - every funk song has its own. All sixteen strokes are played: the dark ones are the chord, the blue ones are left-hand mutes (rung 76). Use small chord shapes on the top strings and let the fretting hand do the rhythm.

110 Skip beat 3, tied over



HEAR IT IN

Wonderwall – Oasis

Rung 102 for bar 1; in bar 2 the downbeat is skipped as well, so the pattern is pushed across both the middle of the bar and the bar line. This is one teacher's reading of Wonderwall; other transcriptions differ in detail.

Level 10 - Swung sixteenths

The same long-short feel, one size smaller: every pair of sixteenths is swung. These are the sixteenth-note patterns of levels 8 and 9 with a bounce, so they come last.

111 The gallop, swung *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

7 Years – Lukas Graham

Rung 87 with each 'down-up' pair played long-short. Start slowly: the bounce disappears if you rush.

112 Swung sixteenths *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Hey, Soul Sister – Train

Down on the beat, then a run of swung sixteenths. The hand keeps the straight-sixteenth motion; only the timing bends.

113 Bass notes and a swung flick *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

Bubbly – Colbie Caillat • Wasting Time – Jack Johnson

Two bass notes, then 'down, down-up' with the last pair swung. Relaxed acoustic pop.

114 Old Faithful, double time and swung *swing feel*

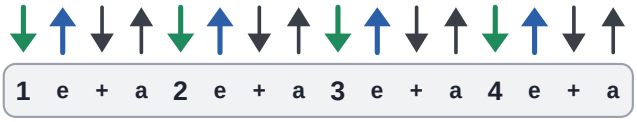


HEAR IT IN

Hey, Soul Sister – Train (simplified) • Good Riddance (Time of Your Life) – Green Day

Rung 98 with a swing feel: beats 2 and 4 are skipped and the sixteenths bounce.

115 Swung chucks *swing feel*



HEAR IT IN

I'm Yours – Jason Mraz

Every beat starts with a muted down-up and ends with a ringing one, all swung. The hand never stops and the fretting hand squeezes and releases once per beat.

About the songs

A strumming pattern is a teacher's reading of a recording, not a fixed fact: players vary the strum from bar to bar, sections differ, and lessons often simplify. The song pairings come from guitar-lesson and tab sites and were not checked against the recordings. Treat each song as a place where the pattern fits and can be heard, then let your ear refine it.

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