

Strumming Concepts

Strumming is a way to give rhythm to your song. It involves moving your arm/hand down and up over the sound hole, in a pendulum-like motion, while playing the strings in specific patterns. When the pattern is repeated over and over again, at a constant speed, whether fast or slow depending on the song, rhythm emerges.

Although there are techniques to enhance the sound of strumming (i.e. palm muting), the first skill to master in order to play is being able to keep a strumming pattern going at a constant speed while the other hand effectively switches chords at the appropriate time without interruption of either. Even if you do not totally master switching chords, it is of utmost importance to maintain rhythm through uninterrupted strumming. If you miss a chord, people may not notice, but if you miss your tempo/strumming, they will.

The exercises below are intended as practice to help you build rhythm skills. Practice these in the order presented, moving on to the next once you master each. Remember, though, that the pattern you select when playing a song depends on the song's tempo.

Instructions:

- Down arrows mean “strum down”; Up arrows mean “strum up”. No arrow mean you move your hand but do not touch the strings. For example, if you see two consecutive arrows pointing down ↓↓, you must strum down (down arrow), move your arm up without strumming (no arrow) in order to be ready for the next strum down (next down arrow). Can't move down unless you move up first, and vice versa 😊
- Before you attempt to play the pattern on your guitar, read out loud what is represented by the arrows. For example, if the arrows are ↓↓↑↑↓, read “down down up up down”. Read it repeatedly until you hear the rhythm emerge: “down down up up down, down down up up down, down down up up down, down down up up down”, etc.
- Practice the strumming pattern while muffling the strings over the fret board with the hand you would normally play chords. Play the pattern so that you hear the rhythm with “thumps” instead of sounds.
- Once you have mastered the pattern and can play it correctly without effort (if you can talk and strum it at the same time, you have accomplished the goal), play it with chords. Attempt to obtain a clear sound.
- Try to keep the pattern steady and clear as you switch chords, depending on the chords required by the song. The most important point is: **DO NOT STOP YOUR STRUMMING** and **DO NOT CHANGE YOUR TEMPO** even if you make a mistake with the chords.

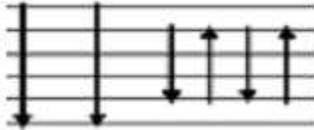
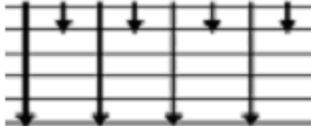
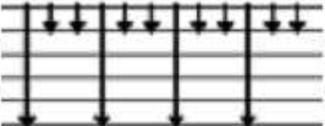
Strumming Exercises – Part I:

<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↓ ↓ ↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Simply strum when moving arm/hand down)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Strum every time, both down and up)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Or split as 3A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↓ ↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Or split as 3B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↑ ↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(3A and 3B are equivalent to a Waltz)</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↑</p> <p>(Notice this is the same as #2, only that one of the down strums is skipped. It is amazing what a difference in rhythm it makes.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓</p> <p>(We call this the “Universal Strumming Pattern” because you can use it to play most songs.)</p>

Strumming Exercises – Part II:

Notes:

- The short arrows indicate to strum just some of the strings, not all. If the small arrows appear toward the top, strum the top strings closer to you (6th, 5th, etc.); if in the middle, strum the middle strings, if toward the bottom, strum the bottom strings farther from you (3rd, 2nd, 1st).
- The Tempo (i.e. 4/4, 6/8) is part of the musical notation of the song (if you have the music sheet). The first number (underlined> tells you how many “sounds” you get per measure.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 6 (<u>4</u>/4)</p>  <p>(If you notice, this pattern corresponds with #3, except for the fact that the shorter arrows indicate to strum just some of the strings.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 7 (<u>6</u>/8)</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 8 (<u>3</u>/4)</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">(Another Waltz)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 8 (<u>4</u>/4)</p>  <p>(A very short arrow on the top string is also called a “base”. You may use this technique with any pattern to enhance sound. Simply replace a down stroke with a quick base pluck and you will see how professional it sounds!)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 8 (<u>4</u>/4)</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Strumming Pattern 8 (<u>12</u>/8)</p> 

Choosing a Strumming Pattern

Here's a few simplified hints to help you determine which strumming pattern to use, or to figure out a new pattern for a song:

- Listen to the music. Hear the beat.
- Tap your feet with the rhythm. This is what we normally do when we listen to music anyway.
- Since we don't play guitar with our feet, try to transfer the rhythm to the hand you strum with. First, rest it on your thigh and tap out the pattern. Start simply.
- Without the guitar, "strum" out the pattern using a motion like you would on your guitar.
- If the pattern you are trying does not work when strummed, change it until you are happy with it. If it doesn't work, probably you just need to simplify it.
- Now try it out on your guitar. Cover the strings with your left hand to muffle them. Strum the pattern and listen to see if it goes with the song.
- If your pattern does not work, make a few more adjustments. Try out slight alterations of your rhythm.

If you are playing with other people, or playing a song that you have never heard before, simply listen for a while. Get the feel for the general rhythm of the song, and cover the strings when you first try.