



Strums

Getting Started An Introduction to Strumming

One of the first skills a ukulele player learns is the art and craft of strumming – playing **rhythm**. This refers to an accompaniment technique suitable for the singer, singer/songwriter or someone who plays a support role for another instrument.



A Strum is the execution of a specific rhythmic pattern, at tempo in a particular style.

Strumming requires a specific set of skills. They are:

- Memorization of chords
- The ability to switch chords smoothly and
- The ability to choose and execute a suitable rhythmic strum

And, most importantly do ALL of this in tempo.

Though strumming looks natural to the casual observer, it is anything but natural to the beginning ukulele player. Even experienced players have difficulty in identifying and executing certain strums or rhythmic patters. Though this is one of those topics that is typically taken for granted, there is much to learn about rhythmic feels, accents, dynamics, strum direction, feel, percussive accents, idiomatic styles and tempo variation.

First and foremost, the subject of strumming is inseparably linked to rhythm. Read that last line again. *First and foremost, the subject of strumming is inseparably linked to rhythm.* Though an ability to read rhythm is helpful, it's not necessary to profit from these lessons.



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Strumming Fundamentals

If you're using a metronome, each click represents the so called down beat. The space between clicks is considered the up beat. The parallel to this without the metronome is the tap of your foot representing the down beat and the space between taps, the up beat. Down and up beats can be subdivided in many ways forming the basis of different strums. This is one area of music where math and count has a role. It is simply the sub-division of time and can be easily counted and tracked.

Preliminary Exercise

As a way to get started, set the metronome speed on 60 beats per minute BPM or just tap your foot slowly and evenly every second as there are 60 seconds in one minute. Strike any chord with a down stroke towards the floor, corresponding to the click or tap. Though this could be considered a strum, for our purposes, it's just a way to get familiar with the relationship between tempo, the speed of the beat and the down stroke.

Next, try to coordinate an up stroke (*i.e.* towards the ceiling) with the space between the clicks or taps. Don't be surprised that the up stroke is more difficult than the down stroke, There are two reasons for this discrepancy. First, the up stroke is fighting gravity, pulling away from the floor and takes more physical effort than the down stroke. The second reason is that the space between taps or clicks is more abstract and difficult to locate than the down and is consequently, more prone to error.

Go back to your metronome set at 60 or your slow even foot tap. This time, strike the up beats, the space between clicks or taps with down strokes. Though not as natural as the down stroke, there will be important applications for this seemingly "backward" stroking. Basically be able to stroke up or down on either the down or up beat.

Strumming Pattern Names

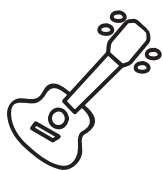
The names of the strums are usually named for the execution techniques used to play the strum or an artist that popularized the strumming style. In the `Ukulele world there's a lot of goofy names to describe various strums. Names like fan stroke, split stroke, the Formby strum, thumb roll-split stroke, etc...

The name is not indicative of the sound or style of the strum. Regardless, whether you execute a strumming pattern with a pick, your fingers, foot, teeth or any apparatus – it's still *rhythm* and strumming is all about "Rhythm". I'll use the *Modular Phonetic Rhythm* by Chuck Anderson system throughout any lesson involving rhythm – and rhythm is a big part of both melody and harmony or chords.

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Importance of Proper Strumming Stroke Direction

When using combinations of down strokes and up strokes, the up stroke typically needs to be used for the weaker upbeat with the down stroke occurring on the stronger downbeat. This ensure the listener - whether it's just you or an audience can track the downbeat or pulse of the music.

A common problem when learning strumming patterns is using the weaker up stroke on the stronger downbeat sending the wrong message as to the location of the downbeat or pulse of the music. The rhythmic pattern will be technically correct, but just doesn't quite sound right rhythmically. The downbeat is the strong part of the beat and can safely always take a down stroke or strum.

A general principle is, ALWAYS a down stroke on the down beat and down or up stroke on the up beat.

Learning A Strum

When learning a new strum or rhythmic pattern I recommend starting with a single chord or the muted chord. Start slow and build the tempo. Only after you've internalized and recognize the sound of the strum start switching chords. If fingerpicking is part of your style try the pattern as a broken chord – single notes.

On to lesson Two - The Muted Strum.

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