

CHAPTER 1: STRUMMING

Although presumably the easiest of guitar techniques, it's amazing how many guitarists neglect basic chord strumming. A strong command of strumming is probably the most important skill you can develop in acoustic guitar playing, especially if you intend to accompany yourself or someone else singing.

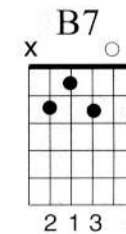
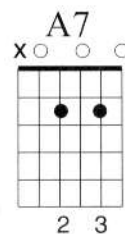
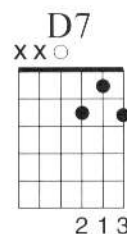
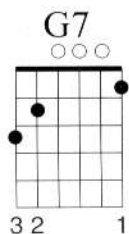
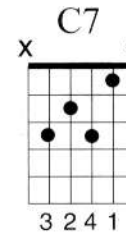
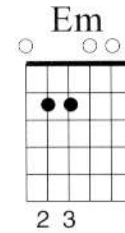
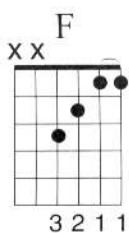
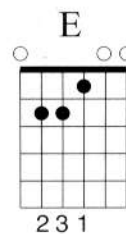
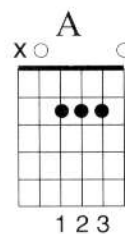
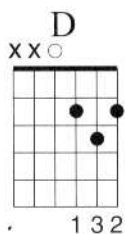
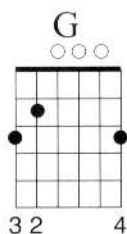
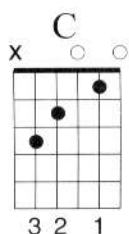
Learning chord shapes is only half the battle. A solid right-hand technique is a must if you want to be able to make people move! In this chapter, we'll work our way from basic to more intermediate strumming patterns, all the while observing how the techniques are applied in real songs.

Before we get started, let's take a look at some of the most common chords you're likely to encounter. When playing through these, keep the following in mind:

- Make sure all the notes in the chord are ringing out clearly. Try plucking each string individually; If one note sounds muted or muffled, chances are a finger is touching the string unintentionally or you're fretting too lightly.
- An "x" on a chord grid indicates that a string should not be sounding at all. In the case of a C chord, for example, you don't want the low E (sixth) string to ring. There are a few ways to accomplish this: 1) Allow the tip of your third finger to touch the sixth string, deadening it. 2) Bring your left-hand thumb over the top of the neck to lightly touch the sixth string. 3) Begin your strum from the fifth string.

I highly recommend one of the deadening methods (options 1 or 2), as the third method requires an impractical amount of precision when actively strumming. If you get into the habit of deadening the strings that you're not playing, you can strum away and not have to worry about avoiding certain strings. This may require a slight adjustment to your typical fretting technique, but nothing drastic.

- Don't get discouraged! If you're just beginning, your fingers are going to get a little sore at first. As you play more, you'll build up calluses on your fingertips.
- Fingernails are not your friends! Keeping them trimmed will make playing chords much easier.



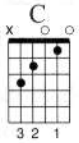
DOWNSTROKES & UPSTROKES

One of the most important factors in developing a solid strum technique is consistency. Your strumming hand needs to be a solid and steady timekeeper, and this is made much more difficult if you're having to think about how to strum each particular rhythm. If, however, you're consistently employing some basic strumming principles, you'll soon find that you can often leave your right hand on autopilot. The guidelines within this chapter should leave you adequately prepared to tackle almost any strumming pattern you encounter without giving it a second thought.

Try these first few examples. Pay special attention to the strumming indications: ▢ = downstroke, and V = upstroke. Notice that downstrokes are used for all the downbeats (1, 2, 3, 4), while upstrokes handle all the upbeats (the "and"s). This simple concept is very important to master, as it's fundamental to many more advanced strumming patterns. It may help to count out loud along with the examples at first.



TRACK 2

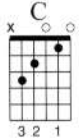


4/4

count: 1 ▢ 2 ▢ 3 ▢ 4 ▢ 1 ▢ V 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ V 4 ▢ V



TRACK 3

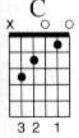


4/4

count: 1 ▢ 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ 4 ▢ V 1 ▢ 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ 4 ▢ V



TRACK 4



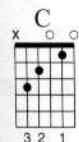
4/4

count: 1 ▢ 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ V 4 ▢ V 1 ▢ 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ V 4 ▢ V

In this next example, which consists of straight eighth notes, you may want to start experimenting with placing the accent (or stress) on different beats throughout the pattern. This simply entails strumming harder when you want to accent a beat. Try accenting beats 2 and 4 of each measure, for example, and notice how the pattern comes to life.



TRACK 5



4/4

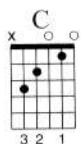
count: 1 ▢ V 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ V 4 ▢ V 1 ▢ V 2 ▢ V 3 ▢ V 4 ▢ V

MOVING FROM CHORD TO CHORD

When learning to transition between two chords, start out very slowly. In this example we're moving from C to G while maintaining the same strumming pattern. What you *don't* want to do is chug along on the C chord in tempo, then pause, and then pick the tempo back up for the G chord. Instead, start slow at the beginning and increase the tempo only when you're able to change chords without dropping a beat.



TRACK 6



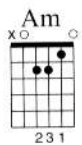
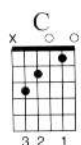
Play 4 times



Our next example uses four chords: C, Am, Dm, and G7. This example illustrates an important technical point to consider when changing chords: *common tones*. This means that two chords share one or more notes. This can often be exploited on the guitar. Notice the similarity between the C chord and the Am chord. The only thing that needs to happen is the movement of your third finger from the C note on the fifth string (fret 3) to the A note on the third string (fret 2). Your first and second fingers don't need to move at all. This lends a great continuity to chord changes. Even if only one finger remains stationary when changing chords, it makes for much smoother rhythm playing. This same thing happens again when changing from the Dm to G7. The first finger can remain on the F note on the first string.



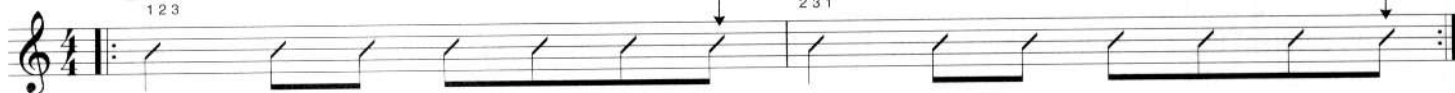
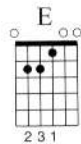
TRACK 7



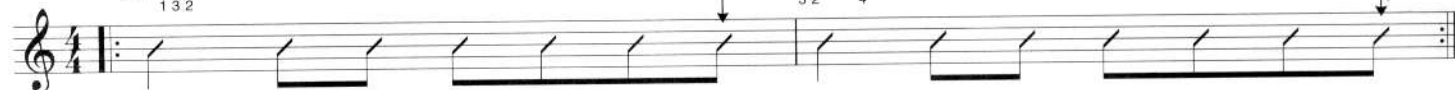
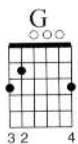
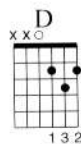
Next, we see another invaluable chord-changing tool: the *open-string strum*. When you're not able to leave a common finger in place during a chord change, you'll usually need a little more time to lift and replant all your fingers. To avoid breaking the rhythm, you can simply strum the top few strings with an upstroke while you change chords. If you listen closely to these next two examples, you'll hear that the last eighth note in each measure is actually the open top few strings. In most moderate-to-quick tempos, the effect will be negligible to the ear.



TRACK 8



TRACK 9



The last chord-changing concept we'll cover is the *muted strum*. While the open-string strum is commonly employed with open chords, the muted strum is often used when playing barre chords. (If you're unfamiliar with *barre chords*, you may as well learn them now because they're essential to know. They require you to lay a finger—across several strings on the same fret.) The following example makes use of E-form barre chords built off the sixth string. When moving between barre chords, the fret-hand pressure is temporarily released, creating a muted, percussive sound when strumming. Again, this effect is usually not noticeable at moderate tempos. If barre chords are new to you, don't expect to nail these right away; it may take a while to build up the strength needed to play them cleanly. NOTE: Some players prefer to fret the sixth string by wrapping their thumb around the top of the neck, barring only the top two strings with their first finger. Experiment with both methods and see which one suits you.

TRACK 10

Diagram of G barre chord at 3rd fret: 1 3 4 2 1 1. Diagram of Am barre chord at 5th fret: 1 3 4 1 1 1.

Here we see the A-form chords built off the fifth string. On the major form, the third finger is usually used to barre across strings 4, 3, and 2. String 1 may be muted by the third finger as it begins to slightly bend backward.

TRACK 11

Diagram of D barre chord at 5th fret: 1 3 3 3. Diagram of Em barre chord at 7th fret: 1 3 4 2 1.

Syncopation

To *syncopate* means to place a stress on a weak beat. Syncopation plays a major role in many strumming patterns, so it's essential to gain a strong command of the technique. In the following example, we're accenting the "and" of beat 2. Notice that the strumming pattern still pairs downstrokes with downbeats and upstrokes with upbeats. This requires a "ghost stroke" on beat 3. By ghost stroke, I mean your right hand continues in a downstroke motion, but your pick does not contact the strings. If this feels awkward to you, realize that you have already been employing ghost upstrokes; they just weren't apparent. In the first example of the chapter, for instance, you strummed all downstrokes in a quarter-note rhythm. In order to do this, you had to bring your pick back up during the "and" of each beat (the upbeat) without contacting the strings. This essentially reverses that; you're bringing your pick down without contacting the strings.

TRACK 12

Diagram of A barre chord at 2nd fret: 1 2 3. Diagram of E barre chord at 2nd fret: 2 3 1.

Here we're accenting the "and" of beat 4. This is another common syncopated rhythm you're bound to encounter.

TRACK 13

Diagram of Am barre chord at 2nd fret: 2 3 1. Diagram of Em barre chord at 2nd fret: 2 3.

Now let's take a look at some classic strumming riffs that make use of all the elements we've looked at so far.

MAGGIE MAY

Chords: A, G, D

TAB

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TRACK 14

BAND ON THE RUN

Chords: C, Fmaj7

TAB

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SHOW ME THE WAY

Chords: D, Dmaj7, Bm, B^b, C

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