

How to Play Ukulele Strumming

Introduction

The life of a ukulele strummer is full of ups and downs. This ebook should guide you through the potential pitfalls and towards a good grasp of strumming techniques, patterns and ideas.

Unlike most strumming guides, this isn't just going to show you a few strumming patterns and leave you to it. It should give you a fundamental understanding of how to construct strums, how to work out a strumming pattern for a song and how to come up with strums of your own.

The basis of any strumming pattern is the rhythm. One of the most common traps beginners fall into is letting their strumming wander around the beat. Which is why we'll be looking at a number of techniques you can use to make sure your strumming stays tight with the beat.

To make sure you find a method that suits you, I'll be going over a few different techniques. Two in particular: the legitimate musician way that everyone else teaches, and the dorky way that works for me.

How I work out strumming patterns whilst looking like a complete dork.

1 Strumming Basics

The fretting hand might all the glory with its flash-Harry, show-off tricks. But it's the strumming hand that is the most important when it comes to sounding good. Having a solid sense of rhythm and a good strumming technique is the most important skill to develop.

So in this section of the book we'll be examining the all important fundamentals of good strumming technique.

1.1 Strumming Hand

Getting your strumming hand position right can be a little tricky. You have to make sure it's strong enough to strike the strings firmly and clearly, but if you tense your hand it will quickly become tired. In this section we'll be looking at how to combine a loose, comfortable hand position with a firm strum.

Put your strumming hand (usually your right hand) directly in front of your chest and make it into a light fist. Keep your hand fairly relaxed; your fingers shouldn't be pressing into your palm. Now point your index finger at your left boob (or right boob if you're left handed).

To give your strumming finger extra support, steady it by placing your thumb on top of it in the middle third of your finger. You can add more support by having your strumming finger rest between you thumb and your middle finger. Here's what it looks like:



Many people prefer to have their fingers open rather than in a fist. Like this:



Both methods provide good support for your strumming finger, so use whichever works best for you.

1.2 Holding the Ukulele While Strumming

How you hold the ukulele will partly depend on whether you're standing up or sitting. When you are sitting, you can enlist the help of your legs and balance it there. If you watch great players like Roy Smeck and Jake Shimabukuro, you'll see them resting the uke on their thigh when they play.

Resting it on your thigh also helps with one of the most important aspects of holding the ukulele: minimising the amount of contact with your body. Because the ukulele is so small, it's very easy to choke all the tone out of it. If you hold the ukulele too tightly, you'll stop the wood vibrating and dampen the sound. To let it ring out, you have to hold it as lightly and little as possible.

It's much more tricky to do this when you strum standing up. There are two points of contact with the ukulele: the forearm of your strumming arm and the underside of your fretting hand. Your forearm will usually make contact with the body of the ukulele just behind the bridge. It can take a bit of juggling of these two positions to make sure the ukulele doesn't slip at different points in your playing. This only really comes with practice.

One important aspect of holding the ukulele is to keep it angled away from your body. This lets the back of the uke breathe and will give you a fuller, louder sound. You should aim to have only the back corner touching your body.

1.3 Where to Strum

Each ukulele has its own 'sweet-spot' i.e. the point where strumming sounds the best. If you strum too close to the bridge (where the strings are tied to the body of the uke) the sound will be tinny and lacking in resonance. If you strum too far down the string, it sounds too undefined.

For the smaller sized ukuleles - soprano and concert - the sweet spot is usually around the part when the neck of the ukulele hits the body. For tenor ukuleles it's a bit further towards the uke's soundhole.

Experiment with where you strum until it sounds right to you.

Of course, some times you might want to change how the uke sounds. You might want to make it sound more trebley - so you move closer to the bridge.

1.4 How to Strum

My general rule for strumming - as with pretty much everything else in life - is to do as little as possible. You don't want to strum any more than you have to.

So you want to strum mainly from your wrist. Having your whole arm going up and down - rather than just your wrist - will tire your arm out much too quickly (just ask any teenage boy). All movement should come from your wrist with your forearm just rotating to allow this. You can watch me doing this in Example 1.

When you strum make sure that you're not spending half your time strumming air. Your finger only needs to cover the strings. If you're strumming wildly up and down you'll tire yourself out and you'll not be able to strum as evenly as you otherwise would do or for as long. Using only your wrist to strum should mean that this is all you are able to do.

2. Rhythm Basics

To help you out with this section it's well worth getting a metronome. You don't have to buy one. There are plenty available for free download. I highly recommend [TempoPerfect](#) for the PC. Alternatively, there's [Metronome](#) for the Mac. Or you could use a web-based metronome like [webMetronome](#).

2.1 Tempo

Before you can start playing and creating strumming patterns for a song, you have to understand its tempo i.e. the speed of the song.

That's nowhere near as complicated to do as it sounds. If you've ever clapped along with a song, you know how to do it already. The speed at which you are clapping is the song's tempo and each clap is known as a beat.

Tempo is measured in beats per minute (bpm). A moderate tempo is around 100 bpm. 70 bpm would be a slow tempo. 180 bpm would be a very fast tempo.

You might have seen something like this at the start of tabs:

Moderate ♩ = 120

This tells you the bpm of the tune.

2.2 Bars

To make it easier to keep track of where you are, these beats are divided up into bars.

By far the most common length of a bar is 4 beats. That means you can count out each bar, "1, 2, 3, 4," and go through the whole song like that. You'll often hear musicians count out the beats before the song starts so the whole band know the tempo. Take a listen to [GUGUG doing I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend](#) for example.

Or you can do [what Feist did](#) and just count out the beats as part of the song. Try singing along with the "1,2,3,4" part of that song and keep repeating it the whole way through. Congratulations, you've just counted out your first song. Counting out songs in your head in this way is something we'll be doing often in this book.

The only other number of beats in a bar you're likely to come across regularly is three. One popular song with three beats in each bar is [Hallelujah](#).

Usually, the chord changes will fit with these bars: it could be that a chord lasts one bar, two bars or half a bar. It is also very common for a strumming pattern to be repeated for each bar.

2.3 Notation

If you have the standard notation for a song, it will tell you how many beats there are in each bar (in musical jargon it's called the time signature). At the start there'll be two numbers on top of each other. The top number is the one that tells you how many beats in the bar.

So four beats in the bar looks like this:



And three beats in the bar looks like this:



Don't worry about the bottom number for now as it's very rare you'll see anything other than 4 there.

2.4 Working Out Time Signatures

If you don't have the sheet music, it's fairly simple to work out the time signature in most cases.

One good place to start is by listening to the drums (if there are some). Most of the time you'll hear the bass drum playing the beats. Take a listen to [Dent May's *Oh, Paris!*](#) for example.

Once you've got the beat in your head, you need to find the first beat of each bar. This will usually be the strongest beat in the bar and the place where chord changes are made.

Oh, Paris! is like most songs in that the chord changes come right at the beginning of the bar (and occasionally in the middle of the bar). If you start counting to four along with the beats on the chord changes you'll be able to count along through the whole song.

As well as being the point where the chords change, the first beat of the bar will usually be emphasized by the vocal melody and often by other instruments as well.

Take a listen to [Tennessee Waltz](#). You can hear the 'um-pah-pah' sound. The bass, drums and guitar are all playing a strong beat on 'um' which is the 1. And the much weaker sounding 'pah-pah' is the 2,3. In fact, having 'Waltz' in the title is a dead giveaway that the song is in 3/4 since waltz simply means beats to the bar.

To simplify things down to just a ukulele, listen to Example 2. Here I'm doing just four down strums on the beat each bar and changing chords at the beginning of each bar. See if you can count out this tune.

Example 3 is a little more complicated. Here I'm doing both down and up strums with three beats in the bar. But I'm still changing chords at the beginning of each bar.

Once you get the hang of this, it will become completely natural.

To test yourself out, take a listen to Exercise 1. In these I'm strumming out chord progressions in either 4/4 or 3/4 time. See if you can work out which is which.

And here are a few real world examples for you to test your skills on:

[Elliott Smith - *Waltz #2*](#)

[Beirut - *Sunday Smile*](#)

2.5 Time Signatures and Metronomes

Whichever metronome you are using, you'll be able to set it to give you a number of beats in the bar. On TempoPerfect you use the drop down box next to the word 'Measure'. On webMetronome you use the bottom slider to select the number of beats in the bar. Both of these will emphasize the first beats of the bar with a different tone. webMetronome will also count out the beats

3 First Strumming Patterns

3.1 Down, Down, Down, Down

For starters, let's tackle the easiest strum there is: all down strums.

Make sure that you're only strumming with your wrist and not moving your arm at the elbow or you'll tire out too quickly.

In Example 4 I'm playing this along with a metronome set at 80 bpm and strumming down on each beat. Make sure you practice this slowly and only increase the speed when you can strum evenly on the beats.

3.2 Down, Up Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up

Since your hand is already going up and down when you're strumming just downwards, it's fairly simple to go ahead and add in the up-strums. So we'll be strumming at the same speed but this time hitting the ups as well as the downs.

You can count this out by adding 'and's in between the numbers:

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and

So you'll be strumming down on the numbers and up on the ands.

Example 5 has this strum again with the metronome at 80 bpm.

This is going to be the basis of all the basic strumming patterns we'll be covering in this book. You can create a huge range of strumming patterns just by playing this up, down pattern but missing out some of the strums. We'll be starting to do that in the next chapter.

3.3 Notating Strums

Unlike tab, there doesn't seem to be any generally accepted way of notating strums. So for this ebook I'll be using d for down strums u for up strums and dash - for when you move your hand either up or down but miss the strings so you don't strum at all.

So Example 5 (down, up, down, up, down, up, down, up) looks like this:

d u d u d u d u

And Example 4 (down, down, down, down) looks like this:

d - d - d - d -

They're notated to go along with a "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and" count. So they'd fit together like this:

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
d u d u d u d u

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
d - d - d - d -

3.4 Mnemonics

There are lots of mnemonic devices to help you get rhythms right. They work by matching the length of the strum to the word.

Traditional Method

The one I learnt at school is drinks based.

The idea is to do a strum for each syllable in the word. So where you have a 'd -' you'd say 'tea'. And where you have a 'd u' you'd say 'cof-fee' and do a down-strum on the 'cof' and an up-strum on the 'fee'.

So Example 4 would be said 'tea tea tea tea'.

Example 5 would be said 'coffee coffee coffee coffe'

My Method

My brain tends to reject anything that isn't ukulele based, so I have my own system.

d - = Flea

d u = Ka-la (down strum on the Ka, up strum on the La).

Example 4 = Flea Flea Flea Flea

Example 5 = Kala Kala Kala Kala

Be warned, if you say these out loud people will look at you like you're a mental. But I get that a lot anyway.

Feel free to make up your own system of these.

4. Strumming Patterns

The important thing to remember is that you don't always have to follow exactly what is being done by the person playing. The most important thing to get right is the number of beats in the bar (usually four) and where the chord changes occur (most commonly at the beginning of the bar).

Once you know those two things you can try out some of the different strumming patterns we'll be looking at in this section of the book and see which one you think suits the song best.

4.1 Ups and Downs

For this strumming pattern we're just taking the first half of Example 4 and bolting on the second half of Example 5 to get this:

Example 6

d - d - d u d u

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	-	d	-	d	u	d	u

If you're using the mnemonic way of counting it's Flea, Flea, Kala, Kala.

The chord progression I'll be using for this example, and all the examples in this section, is:

C F G7 C

4.2 First Choice Strumming Pattern

If you're ever stuck for a strumming pattern, try this one out.

Example 7

d - d u - u d -

Fitting in the bar like this:

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	-	d	u	-	u	d	-

It works in so many songs it's always worth giving it a shot to see how it sounds.

To get yourself used to more complicated rhythms such as this, try putting your ukulele down (heresy) and clapping out the the rhythm so you don't have to worry about ups and downs and holding chords.

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
x	-	x	x	-	x	x	-

If you want a mnemonic for the rhythm, try:

Flea, G-String, G-String

So you have a short 'G' and a long 'String'

You can use this strumming pattern for a whole bunch of songs. Here are a few:

GUGUG's versions of [California Sun](#), and [Ruby](#),
[Nevershoutnever's Did It Hurt](#),
[Zee Avi's Just You and Me](#)

You can extend this pattern by adding an up strum at the end:

Example 8

d - d u - u d u

This strum works well for Bishop Allen's song [Butterfly Net](#).

Mnemonic suggestion: Flea G-String Ka-ma-ka

4.3 More Strumming Patterns in 4/4

All the strumming patterns in this section are based off the simple d u d u d u pattern, you are just missing certain strums to create new patterns. When you are counting out the beats, the numbers will always be down strums and the 'and's will always be up strums.

The first beat of the bar will quite often be emphasized by using a long down strum (missing the first 'and' strum).

These next three examples use that technique

Example 9

d - d u d u d u

When you are strumming this carry on counting '1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and' in your head up and down in time with that. Just make sure you miss the strings when you are doing the first and.

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	-	d	u	d	u	d	u

Mnemonic suggestion: Flea, Kala, Kala Kala

Example 10

d - d u d - d u

Along with the counting, it looks like this:

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	-	d	u	d	-	d	u

Mnemonic suggestion: Flea Kala Flea Kala

Example 11

d - d u - u - u

Mnemonic suggestion: I couldn't think of a brand with a name short enough for an up-strum on its own; so I just say 'And'. So it's: Flea G-String Flea And.

But you don't have to start each bar that way. All these examples start with a down, up strum.

Example 12

d u d u d - d -

Kala Kala Flea Flea

Example 13

d u d u - u - u

Kala G-String Flea And

Example 14

d u - u - u d u

G-String Flea Kamaka

Example 15

d u - u - u - u

G-String Flea Flea And

You can leave gaps longer than one strum. As in this example:

Example 16

d - d u - - d u

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	-	d	u	-	-	d	u

Here you've got a long gap between the up strum and the next down strum. If you stop all together it can be a little tricky to get straight back into the rhythm. There are a few ways you can tackle this. Firstly, you can keep strumming as normal but miss the strings for both the down and the up.

Like this (with the missed strums in italics)

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	<i>u</i>	d	u	<i>d</i>	<i>u</i>	d	u

The same d u d u d u d u pattern as always.

Alternatively, you can keep the rhythm going by tapping your foot or nodding your head the whole way through. This one is my favoured method.

The other option is to count it out; either using the '1 and...' method or using a 'Flea' but not strumming it. So you'd say

Flea Kala (Flea) Kala

And not strum on the second Flea.

4.4 Chord Changes Within Bars

Chord changes don't have to occur only at the start of each bar. In this example the chords change each half a bar. The strumming reflects this by being the same for each half a bar. So we can use the strumming from Example 9:

d - d u d - d u

And change chords each half a bar rather than each bar like this:

Example 17

C F
d - d u d - d u
G7 C
d - d u d - d u

And you can change chords at other points in the bar as well. By changing on an up-strum, it gives the chords an off-kilter feel. The strumming in this example is exactly the same as Example 6 but it's given a completely new feel by changing chords on the third 'and'

Example 18

C F
d - d u - u d -
G7 C
d - d u - u d -

So if you're using the mnemonic method you'd play Flea G-String G-String and change chords on the 'G' of the second 'G-String'

4.5 Strumming Patterns in 3/4

Here are a couple of the most common strums in 3/4 time.

Example 19

d - d u d u

As used in [the Wellington International Ukulele Orchestra's version of *Blue Smoke*](#).

Example 20

d - d u d -

Which would suit Beirut's version of *Hallelujah*.

The mnemonics work just the same in 3/4 time. So 18 would be 'Flea Ka-la Ka-la' and 19 would be 'Flea, Kala, Flea'

4.6 Swing Strums

So far all the strums we've looked at have been even i.e. the length of the 1 has been the same as the length of the and.

But for many genres including blues, country, reggae and Hawaiian use swing time (also known as a 'shuffle'). In swing time the first part of the beat (the 1,2,3,4) lasts twice as long as the second part (the 'and's). So you're splitting each beat into three with the first two thirds being the down strum and the final third being an up strum.

Playing with swing is a natural, relaxed way to strum. Compare the first half of Example 20 - just down, up, down, up - played straight with the second half swung.

Example 21

d u d u d u d u

Mnemonic suggestion: Mar-tin Mar-tin Mar-tin Mar-tin (i.e. a long 'Mar' and a short 'tin').

And you can add swing to all the strumming patterns we've looked at so far. Here's Example 8 played with swing:

Example 22

d - d u d u d u

4.6 Strong Strums

One way to add more interest to a strum is to change force you use to play certain strums. By giving certain strums and extra umph you can change the feel of the strum quite dramatically.

Taking, for example, the simple down, up, down, up strum from Example 20 you could make the first strum the strong strum (indicated in bold):

Example 23

d u d u d u d u

Traditionally, the most common place to have the emphasis is on the first and third beats - known as the 'on' beats.

Example 24

d u d u **d** u d u

But in certain genres it's common to emphasize the 2 and 4 strums - known as the 'off' beats.

Example 25

d u **d** u d u **d** u

You can hear this in rock and roll music (where it is known as the 'backbeat') and particularly strongly in reggae and ska.

5. Chnks and Mutes

Chnks and mutes are a great way to make your strums more interesting and rhythmic

5.1 Chnks

Chnks are down strums but, instead of letting the chord ring, you immediately bring the underside of your hand down on the strings to give it a 'chk' sound. You can watch me doing it in Example 24.

Here's the strumming pattern I'm using in the video (I'm using X to indicate chnks):

Example 26

d u x u d u x u

Chnks are counted out exactly like strums:

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
d	u	x	u	d	u	x	u

This is the strumming pattern used in Noah and the Whale's *Five Years Time*.

In this example, the chord changes on the second and fourth 'and's so the changes come one beat before the start of the bar.

Example 27

C	F	G	F								
d	u	x	u	d	u	x	u	d	u	d	u

5.2 Mutes

Muted strums create a similar sound to chnks - albeit less aggressive - but you are using your fretting hand to do it rather than your strumming hand. The big advantage with them is that they can be done on up and down strums.

You create them by laying the fingers of your fretting hand across the strings. They need to be touching the strings but not pressing them down.

It doesn't matter what fret you do it at - although the higher up the fretboard you do it, the higher the tone - because it is used for rhythmic effect rather than pitch.

Once you've got the hang of it, you can use fewer fingers to the mute the strings. In Example 24 I'm playing the F chord with a down strum then muting the next three strums with my ring finger and pinkie. So the strum (with mutes indicated with brackets) goes like this:

Example 28

d (u) (d) (u) d (u) (d) (u)

I'm also releasing the pressure I'm holding the chord shape with when I'm doing the muted strums. This gives a little extra insurance that the strings don't sound when they're supposed to be muted.

Here's a strumming pattern similar to that used in *Betrayed by Bones* by Hellogoodbye

Example 29

d u (d) (u) d u (d) (u)

They are very useful for keeping time when strums are a long way apart. Here's an AC/DC style chord progression that uses them for this purpose

Example 30

G C D
d - (d) - (d) u d u

 C D C D C G
(d) - (d) - (d) u d u - u d u - u - u d

6 Working Out Strumming Patterns

When you are playing a song, you don't always have to follow the strumming pattern of the original exactly. If you listen carefully, you'll probably hear that the strum pattern changing throughout the song. It's not like chord changes which are fairly set. The important thing is to get the groove of a song.

Step 1: Work out the time signature.

For most pop songs, the time signature will stay the same through the whole song and, most commonly, will be 4/4 (four beats in each bar).

Step 2: Count along with the song.

Count out the '1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and' along with the song. Try to work out where the chord changes come in that.

Step 3: Notice where there are any emphasized beats.

And you don't just have to listen to the uke (if there is one) but any other instruments. Make sure you are strumming on this beat and possibly give it a little added emphasis.

Step 4: Slow it down in your head.

Listen carefully to the strumming until you've got a good idea of how it goes in your head.

Step 5: Clap out the rhythm

This is a really good way to separate out the strumming from the chords. Concentrating on one thing at a time simplifies it a great deal.

Step 6: Clap out the rhythm while counting the beats

Once you have the strumming rhythm and the beats together you can work out which need to be down strums and which up strums. Those on the numbers will be down strums, those on the 'and's will be up strums.

That's the sensible person's way of doing it at least.

Alternative Step 6: Look like an idiot

Or, if you're a total dork, you can do what I do. I slow the strum right down in my head and singing it in a, "Byow, da, dow, da, dow," way while I wave my arm up and down in an exaggerated strum. That way I can see exactly when I want to be strumming up and when I want to be strumming down.

And, no, I'm not making a video of me doing that. It's far too embarrassing.

Step 7: Happy Strumming

And remember, you can always just make up your own strums. So long as they fit within the time signature and they fit with the overall feel, you can strum whatever feels good to you. Try strumming them with some of the patterns we've looked at in the book so far and see what appeals to you.

6.1 Strumming Test

Take a listen to the MP3s in Exercise 2 and try to work out the strumming pattern for each.

They're all patterns we've looked at so far. The chord changes are the same for each C - F - G7 - C.

7 Advanced Strumming

7.1 Semi-Quavers

Just like we cut the beat in half to get '1 and 2 and...' you can do the same again to get notes that are a quarter of a beat long.

You can count them like this:

1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a

These are strummed down, up, down, up just as before only you have to strum twice as fast.

For the mnemonic I use Ko-A-Lo-Ha (but you have to say it quite fast).

Here's a strumming pattern that includes them:

Example 31

1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a
d u d u d u d u d u d u

Mnemonic suggestion: Kala Kala KoAloha KoAloha

And here's a Nirvana style way of doing it.

Example 32

G C
d u d - (d) (u) (d) (u) d - d (d) (u)

Bb Eb
d u d - (d) (u) (d) (u) d - d (d) (u)

Here's the strum with a constant count:

1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a
d u d - (d) (u) (d) (u) d - d - (d) (u)

And here's how I'd count it:

1 - - a 2 - and a 3 e and - 4 - and a
d u d - (d) (u) (d) (u) d - d - (d) (u)

Mnemonic suggestion: La-ni-kai KoAloha Kala and a

So you are doing muted strums for the 'KoAloha' and the 'and a'

In musical jargon the note lengths are referred to like this:

1 beat = Crochet

1/2 beat = Quaver

1/4 beat = Semi-Quaver

In the US they have different names for them:

Crochet = Quarter note

Quaver = Eighth note

Semi-quaver = Sixteenth note

7.2 Touch Strums

With touch strums, rather than strumming all the strings, you just hit the top two with a down strum.

Rather than making the strum weaker as you might expect, it actually serves to emphasize it. It is particularly useful when you're looking to create the um-pah-pah sound in 3/4 time.

In Example 33 I'm doing a touch strum followed by two normal down strums.

7.3 Triplet Strums

Triplet strums are very common amongst ukulele players - much more common than in guitar playing.

With triplets you have three strums where you'd normally have two. That means you can't use the normal down,up strumming. Instead, there are a few ways of playing strums in groups of three.

My favourite method is to strum down with your index and middle finger together. Then up with your index finger and up with your middle finger. You can see this demonstrated in Example 34.

Another method is to strum down with your index finger, down with your thumb then up with your index finger (as in Example 35).

You can put it together with standard strums for a pattern like this (with the TTTs being your preferred triplet strum).

Example 36

TTT d u TTT d u

Mnemonic suggestion: Swag-er-ty Mar-tin Swag-er-ty Mar-tin

7.4 Changing Bar Lengths

Although most songs have the same bar length through the whole song, it isn't always the case. Take *Hey, Ya!* for instance (as performed by the Wellington International Ukulele Orchestra).

Here there's a basic strumming pattern with four beats in each bar:

d - d u - u d -

Use this pattern once for the G chord and twice for the C chord.

But when you get to the D chord you strum down just twice then use the same pattern for the E chord. This creates a bar of 2/4 for the D chord.

Example 37

G

d - d u - u d -

C

d - d u - u d -

C

d - d u - u d -

D

d - d -

E

d - d u - u d -

E

d - d u - u d -

8 Strumming and Genres

Most genres of music will fit quite comfortably within the strums we've looked at so far in the book. In this section we'll be looking at strums that fit within certain genres.

8.1 Blues Strumming

For strumming a blues pattern, just down, up, down, up is very common. But make sure that you give it plenty of swing.

One very common way to play a blues chord progression is to play a C chord for a down, up. Then C6 like this for a down, up:

2003

Then repeat both of those to make a full bar.

Example 38

C C6 C C6
d u d u d u d u

Mnemonic: You do the C chord for a Mar-tin, then the C6 for a Mar-tin.

You can do a similar thing with the F chord (F6 has the same chord shape as D minor).

Example 39

F F6 F F6
d u d u d u d u

You can put these together with a G chord (no need for the G6) in this way:

Example 40

C - 4 Bars
F - 2 Bars
C - 2 Bars
G - 1 Bar
F - 1 Bar
C - 2 Bars

This is known as a '12 Bar Blues' as is the fundamental part of most blues tunes. And also, when speeded up, most rock and roll songs.

8.2 Bo Diddley Style Strumming

Bo Diddley was the king of rhythm. He's often credited as being the forerunner of the heavily rhythmic funk style of playing.

His strums often used mutes and emphasized unexpected strums (known as syncopation).

Example 41

d - (d) u (d) (u) d - (d) (u) d - d - (d) (u)

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
d - (d) u (d) (u) d - (d) (u) d - d - (d) (u)

8.3 Reggae and Ska Style Strumming

Reggae and ska are unusual in that there is a very strong emphasis on the 'and's with the 1,2,3,4 rarely being played at all.

Take a listen to [The Specials' A Message to You Rudy](#). You can hear the guitarist, Lynval Golding, strumming just on the 'and's (there's a count at the start to help you out).

Also, the strums are very short - he's releasing the chords almost as soon as he's strummed them.

In this example I'm aping that by stopping all the strings ringing with my left hand just after strumming. It makes it easier to do that if you play chords with more notes, so the progression I'm using for this example is Bb - Eb - F - Bb.

Example 42

- u - u - u - u

I'm playing this all with up strums. But there's nothing wrong with playing down strums - that's what Golding is doing. Just make sure you keep it on the 'and's - which is trickier than it sounds since we're used to playing down on the beats.

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
d - d - d - d

It's also common to double up these strums as Bob Marley does in [Stir It Up](#):

Example 43

1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a
d u d u d u d u

The introduction to *Stir It Up* creates a very interesting effect. Because the guitar is the only

instrument playing, it sets the beat. So you might think he's playing this:

1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a
d u d u d u d u

It's not until the drums come in that it becomes obvious where the beat is.

(You can hear in both those songs that the drums emphasize the 2 and 4 beats (as we mentioned earlier). These two factors create a bit of a problem when you're trying to play reggae just with ukuleles.)

8.4 James Brown Style Strumming

Before James Brown came along, RnB music was very similar to reggae in that it emphasized the 2 and 4 beats. But James Brown insisted that the emphasis had to be on the first beat.

The strumming patterns for his songs can be very rhythmically complex and tricky to get.

Example 44

1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a
d u (d) (u) d u x u x u x u - u d u