

STRUMMING PATTERNS (ukulele or guitar)

Strumming involves repeating patterns of down and up strums. Up strums should usually be lighter than down strums. Here are typical strum patterns with some verbal approximations to help you remember them. 4 beats to the bar (4/4) is by far the most common time signature so most of these patterns fit that, but waltz (3 beats to the bar, 3/4) and 6/8 time are also quite common. These rhythms all involve smooth, regular down/up movements of the strumming hand, which I call the 'matrix' - no jerky movements or sudden changes of direction. Often there is a 'ghost' - a hand movement with no contact with the strings, i.e. no strum.

/ = down strum
 ^ = up strum
 (3) = 'ghost' (movement but no strum)



Down strokes only, the simplest 4/4 pattern. Think 'Hey Jude'. Can get boring without embellishments but a good starting point, especially when practising chord changes.

/ / / /
 1 2 3 4

Straight rhythm. Regular. Up strokes exactly central between down strokes, like a clock ticking. There are variations on this that remove one or more up strums but the matrix is the same.

/ ^ / ^ / ^ / ^
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &
 tick tock tick tock tick tock tick tock

Shuffle rhythm. Up strokes not central but displaced nearer to the following down stroke. Common in traditional blues. The strumming hand has a momentary delay before the up stroke.

/ ^ / ^ / ^ / ^
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &
Humpty Dumpty Humpty Dumpty

Swing rhythm. Like shuffle but with alternate up strums omitted. Very common in jazz standards, country & many popular songs. More uptempo than shuffle but with the same delay before the 'up' - this is what imparts the swing.

/ / ^ / / ^
 1 2 & 3 4 &
Hump.....Dumpty Hump....Dumpty

'Island' rhythm. I also call this 'Latin 1'. Very common in Caribbean, 'tiki', tropical & Latin music, but also fits many other popular songs. Note there is a 'ghost' (no strum) on beat 3, just the down movement within the matrix.

/ / ^ ^ / ^
 1 2 & (3) & 4 &
get....yourself.....together

Tango rhythm. I call this 'Latin 2'. This time the 'ghost' is on beat 2. Not exclusive to accompanying Argentinian dance steps! Think 'Sloop John B'.

/ ^ ^ / /
 1 & (2) & 3 4
who let the dogs out

Waltz rhythm. 3/4 time. Up stroke between 2 and 3 usually works well but could also occur elsewhere.

/ / ^ /
 1 2 & 3
please walk away

6/8 rhythm. Works best with just 1 up stroke as shown. The '8' means quavers, quicker beats, roughly half the time value of the crotchets in 4/4 or 3/4 time.

/ / ^ / / /
 1 2 & 3 4 5 6