

STRUMMING 101



HOW TO STRUM YOUR GUITAR LIKE A PRO!

LEARN AND MASTER FIVE ESSENTIAL STRUMMING
PATTERNS FOR ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC GUITAR

DAN THORPE

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To listen to the audio examples throughout this book you can either click the links where appropriate to listen them on a web page or alternately you can download ALL the audio [HERE](#) for free where you can play them in your favourite music player.

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Introduction

Most guitarists spend a huge amount of time on everything **EXCEPT** rhythm guitar. They spend way too much time on chords, scales and simply noodling around.

So much so that they don't have the time to work on some of the things that really count – things such as **RHYTHM GUITAR**.

If guitarists were more efficient, most would be much better players in a much shorter space of time. One area that lacks any efficiency whatsoever is their rhythm playing, and in particular – **STRUMMING**.

It doesn't matter if you are a pop guitarist or a metal guitarist, at some point you are going to want to strum the guitar.

Ask yourself, how many exact strum patterns do you actually know how to play?

In my experience of teaching beginners, intermediates (and even some players who would otherwise be experts) is that **hardly any know how to strum like a pro**.

What I would like you to do is stop reading for a second, pick up your guitar and play me your **favourite strum pattern**.

Then come back and read the rest.

What often happens when I ask a student to play me a strum pattern is:

- I either get given a blank look and they say they don't know any

Or ...

- They give me a blank look, think of a song in their head and then play the strum pattern from that song.

Be honest, is this what you just did?

There is nothing wrong if you did, you just haven't been made aware of the importance of being able to call on a variety of different strum patterns at will.

How great would it be if you were able to strum a certain pattern on your guitar at any given moment – and one that relates to the exact feel you are after.

Most guitarists can do this stuff with chords i.e. They can play minor chords for when they want to hear sadder sounding music, or major 7th chords for a jazz feel...

BUT...

They can't do this with strum patterns, and to be honest **the rhythm is often more important than the chords!**

That being said, it is relatively simple for most guitarists with even just a bit of playing experience to learn specific strum patterns, practice them, and be able to call on them at will when a certain song or style requires it.

Not only will it make you a better sounding player, your understanding of rhythm will improve, your timing will improve and your **ability to create stunning rhythm parts of your own will increase dramatically!**

Many guitarists dream of becoming a session musician and why not?

It is possible.

To do so though, you will need a big repertoire of strum patterns to call on.

Reading Strumming Patterns

Before we play our strum patterns we need to be able to **properly read them**.

Reading strumming patterns for the guitar can be a bit daunting at first. Once you get the hang of it you will be fine.

Stick with it as it is a very useful skill to learn.

When reading a strum pattern, use your eyes to guide you but make sure you follow your **ears**.

After all music is meant to be listened to so it must **sound** right.

When you are fairly new to guitar it can be almost impossible to correctly work out the strumming patterns that many guitarists use.

One of the best ways to get comfortable strumming is to learn certain popular strumming patterns and **learn lots of songs that use those patterns**. Some songs have subtle variations of certain patterns and you will get to know these over time.

If you are not sure how to read rhythms, this chapter will show you. Have a look at the chart below to get you started on some of the abbreviations. They will all make sense as we work our way through the chapter.

D = Down strum

U = Up strum

v = Accent

Numbers = quarter notes

AND = eighth notes

`e` and `a` = sixteenth notes

Ok, here we go.

There are **4 beats per bar** in most music in the western world.

This is called **4/4 time**.

We simply have 4 evenly spaced out beats per bar.

When you put the radio on, most of what you will hear will be in 4/4 time.

These four beats are called **Quarter Notes**.

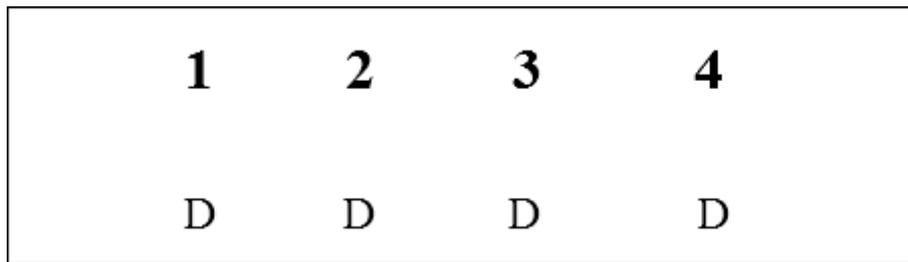
Quarter Notes

The quarter notes (or four beats) are represented by numbers as shown in the diagram below.

Quarter notes occur in music on the **downbeat**, or where you would simply tap your foot.

They are called quarter notes because you divide the bar into four evenly spaced out quarters.

4 quarter notes = 1 whole bar



If you are strumming your guitar and you played all quarter notes you would strum **4 down strums**.

Eighth Notes

Next, we are going to break these beats down into smaller chunks.

The word `AND` in between each beat is how you break down each beat into smaller sections. These are called **eighth notes** and there are 8 per bar.

You are simply filling in the spaces in between the beats.

If we add in eighth notes to the quarter notes shown above, there are STILL 4 beats in the measure BUT now we have **an extra strum in the gaps**.

To count eighth notes we add the word “and” in **between the numbers**. Count four nice and evenly: **1, 2, 3, 4**. Those are your quarter notes.

Now add an “and” in between each number you count – keeping the counted numbers you spoke in the exact same “place”: **1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and...**

You are filling in the spaces don't forget. You now have 8 counts. The 4 numbers, plus the four “ands”.

If you are strumming your guitar and you played all eighth notes you would strum **8 strums** which would consist of **4 down strums and 4 up strums**.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U

Sixteenth Notes

If you played a bar of sixteenth notes, you would play 16 notes per bar. These sound pretty fast and will take most beginners a lot of practice to be able to play.

To count sixteenth notes, you use the vowels `e` and `a`.

Again these **fill in the spaces** - just like `and` does for eighth notes:

Count 1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a.

If you are strumming your guitar and you played all sixteenth notes you would strum **16 strums which would consist of 8 down and 8 up in a continuous motion.**

1 E & A 2 E & A 3 E & A 4 E & A
D U D U D U D U D U D U D U

How to Supercharge Your Rhythm Skills

One of the best exercises you can do to improve your rhythm guitar skills is to:

- Set a metronome to a tempo of about 80 bpm
- Fret **ONE SINGLE NOTE** with the left hand
- Pick this note over and over until you feel yourself `lock in` with the click
- This is playing all **quarter notes**
- Then play the note with **eighth notes** and then play it with **sixteenth notes**.

Keep trying **one note length** until you are completely comfortable playing in perfect time with the metronome.

This one exercise alone will dramatically improve your rhythm skills and give you a much better understanding of rhythm as a whole.

Once you are confident doing the exercise over and over with one note length, instead of playing an infinite amount of bars, you can practice **ONE BAR of:**

- **Quarter notes**
- Then **Eighth notes**
- Then **Sixteenth notes**

Then switch between all 3 note lengths playing them for **JUST ONE beat each**.

The idea is to be able switch seamlessly from one note length to another. The less time it takes you to switch between the note lengths the more awesome your rhythm playing will be.

It will be difficult at first and may take you a few days or weeks to be able to do this comfortably but stick with it.

Practice it just for a few minutes each day and I guarantee you will be improving your rhythm skills dramatically.

Many students who have come to me for lessons have played for years and can't do this. They often have good understanding of chords and melodies but struggle with this fundamental rhythm skill.

This exercise is one of the first things I teach them and their playing almost immediately sees a big improvement!

I guarantee if you do this you will be getting a head start on most guitarists out there.

The Importance of `Getting in the Groove`

I recommend counting out loud and just get thinking in “time”.

Listen to the radio or your favourite songs and count the beats: **1, 2, 3, 4 (quarter notes)**.

Then keep counting the beats and add the “ands” (**eighth notes**).

Then, whilst keeping count add the “e and a” (**sixteenth notes**).

There are lots of different types of rhythm out there in western music such as the ones stated above plus other more advanced types such as **dotted rhythm and triplets**.

For the majority of music out there quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes cover so much ground and so many strumming patterns like you wouldn't believe.

If you want to be a good guitarist, you will definitely need to have a solid understanding of **quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes** as an absolute minimum especially before you think about the more advanced rhythms.

Recap...

Quarter note = 1 whole beat – There are 4 x quarter notes per bar.

Eighth note = 1/2 of a beat – There are 8 x eighth notes per bar.

Sixteenth note = 1/4 of a beat - There are 16 x sixteenth notes per bar.

Swing like a Pendulum, Strum like a Pro

When practicing strumming you should keep your arm moving **even when you don't intend to strum the chord.**

Imagine your arm is the pendulum of a clock. It just keeps on moving. The rhythm of a strum pattern comes from keeping your hand moving consistently, **but NOT making contact with the strings at certain points.**

Have you ever heard the saying in music?

“It's not the notes you play that matter, but the notes that you DON'T play that really matter”.

Well, that follows our principles. If we strummed every time our strumming hand passed over the strings, our rhythm would sound very dull and very samey.

It's these *misses* of the strings that create no sound when you pass your hand over the strings and this is what creates the RHYTHM.

Don't forget - keep your hand moving in the **down up** motion, but only make contact with the strings on the counts shown - where the **D's and U's** are.

For simpler eighth note strum patterns keeping that arm moving like a pendulum is essential and for most 16th note patterns it is still frequently used. There are however a few exceptions to this rule as you will see.

For the most part, focus on keeping that arm moving at a nice steady pace and your strumming will be easier and far more effective for it.

D = Down strum

U = Up strum

v = Accent

Numbers = quarter notes

AND = eighth notes

`e` and `a` = sixteenth notes

B1 – Bass note (usually the root note of the chord)

B2 – Bass note (usually next highest string up from the root)

Strumming is a huge subject and one you simply must be comfortable with to be the best guitarist possible.

Let`s get cracking learning 5 of the coolest and most useful strum patterns (and their variations ever)!

These are 5 of **the most commonly used patterns in rock, pop and indie music** - although they are used frequently in genres ranging from folk to metal too, so it really is essential that you learn them.

There are short chunks of songs or riff ideas that I have created using examples of all the strum patterns so you can hear how they sound.

If you are an experienced musician and can read music, I have added the standard notation rhythm for you too.

The 5 Essential Strum Patterns

Listening to the strum patterns in action

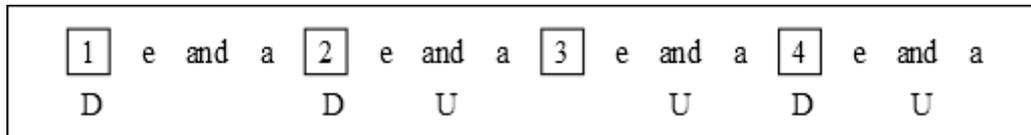
For all of these strum patterns there are two versions of the pattern for you to listen to and play along with.

Version 1 of each pattern is a little simpler and version 2 is where we spice it up with a tasty variation.

I have included all the chords and the necessary capo position (if needed) for each strum pattern so you can play along.

Strum Pattern 1 – The Ultimate Strum Pattern

Ultimate Strum Pattern 1



The first of our strum patterns is definitely one of the **most useful you will ever learn**.

It goes by many names, but I call it the **Ultimate Strum Pattern** as it really is unbelievably useful.

Once you master it and incorporate it into your daily playing, you will find that it will come in handy for loads of songs you will learn as well as for your own compositions.

The **Ultimate Strum Pattern 1** uses a combination of just **quarter and 8th notes**, so make sure you have a good understanding of these and are comfortable playing them before attempting the strum pattern.

Tip: The most difficult part of this pattern is the two UP strokes played one after the other on the `and` of beats 2 and 3. Get used to practicing playing continuous up strokes on their own if this strum pattern is a struggle at first.

There are no sixteenth notes in this version of the pattern so it's a great one to start with - it really is an incredibly popular pattern to strum on the guitar.

Listen to the `Ultimate Strum Pattern` 1 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

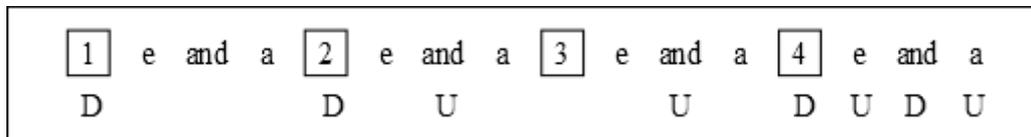
G Major, D Major, E minor, C Major

Play-along:

Capo 2nd fret

(G, D, Em, C) x 4

Ultimate Strum Pattern 2



The **Ultimate strum pattern 2** is the same as version 1 but this time we have added in **4 x 16th notes on beat 4 of the pattern**. This ramps up the energy at the end of the bar and moves us powerfully into the next bar.

Adding energy in this way is a common trick that a lot of musicians do – not just guitarists. We often hear how a drummer plays a drum fill at the end of a bar. They use the same principle.

During the audio example below I have played EVERY bar using this exact pattern so you can hear it for yourself.

In practice though, you may want to just **play this pattern every second or fourth bar** as a variation of the first pattern.

I like to use pattern 1 for 3 bars and then pattern 2 on bar 4.

There is nothing wrong in using this as a strum pattern in its own right though as it does crank up the energy and together with an added touch of overdrive (as heard in the example) it adds a rock/indie feel to the original pattern.

Tip: Just make sure you are really comfortable playing continuous 16th notes over a drum beat or metronome otherwise you may find the strums on beat 4 a challenge.

Listen to the `Ultimate Strum Pattern` 2 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

C Major, E Major, A minor, F Major

Play-along:

No Capo

(C, E, Am, F) X 4

The Ultimate Strum Pattern not only sounds awesome, but it makes for a great substitute for other more complex strumming patterns and is also a good `go to` strum pattern that **all guitarists can call on frequently and at will.**

Songs that use The Ultimate Strum Pattern

- Van Morrison - Brown Eyed Girl
- Green Day – Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)
- The Calling – Wherever You Will Go (Chorus)
- The Fray – How to Save A Life
- Outkast – Hey Ya!
- Maroon 5 – She Will Be Loved
- Foo Fighters – Times Like These (Chorus)

Strum Pattern 3 – The Modern Strum Pattern

Modern Strum Pattern 1

1	e	and	a	2	e	and	a	3	e	and	a	4	e	and	a
D			U	D			U	D	U	D		D	D		U



The Modern Strum Pattern derives its name from the fact that there are a huge amount of songs over the past 20 years that use it. From Bastille to Oasis to Passenger to Radiohead and more, this is a great strum pattern that **works brilliantly well over tempos of around 60-90 beats per minute.**

The Modern Strum Pattern uses a combination of **quarter, 8th and 16th notes**, so make sure you have a good understanding of these and are comfortable playing them before attempting the strum pattern.

Strum patterns such as this can be difficult to play all at once at first, **so I recommend building the strum pattern up a chunk at a time.**

- Start by playing the first two beats
- Then add the UDUD
- When you can play those two together add in the D DU on the last beat.

Tip: The upstroke just before beat 3 can be difficult to `ADD IN` at first, so feel free to omit it. Use the build up technique as described above, and when you can play the pattern add this little upstroke back in. It is an important part of the pattern as it ramps up the energy of the rhythm leading into beat 3.

Listen to the ` Modern Strum Pattern ` 1 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

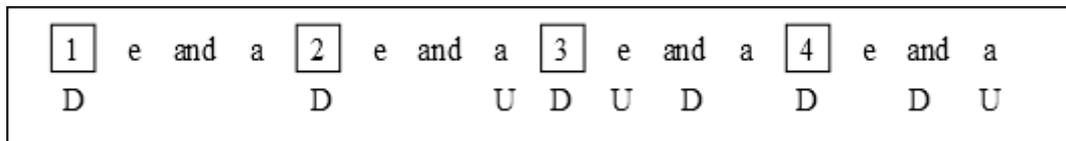
G Major, D Major, E minor, A minor

Play-along:

No Capo

(G, D, Em, Am) X 4

Modern Strum Pattern 2



The **Modern Strum Pattern 2** is exactly the same as pattern 1 BUT with the **eighth note on the `and` of beat 1 removed**. Take a look at both and compare the difference.

It is only **1 actual strum difference between two variations** of this pattern, but it does change up the feel of it nicely.

Tip: When writing or playing a song that uses this pattern, switching from bar to bar between the **Modern strum pattern 1 and Modern strum pattern 2 sounds great**. This adds a natural feel to the music and stops it from sounding robotic. Subtle variations are what the pro`s do when it comes to strumming and you should too.

Listen to the `Modern Strum Pattern `2 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

E minor, Cadd9, G, Dsus4/F#

Play-along:

Capo 6th fret

(Em, Cadd9, G, Dsus4/F#) X 4

Split bar: For version 2 of the Modern strum pattern we have a `split bar` which is when we break the bar into parts. The most common split bar type is to split it down the middle and **play two beats on each chord**.

That is what we have done here, so be prepared to change chords half way through each bar.

So, we play:

- 2 beats on Em
- 2 beats on Cadd9
- 2 beats on G
- 2 beats on Dsus4/f#

..And those 8 beats equal two bars of the strum pattern.

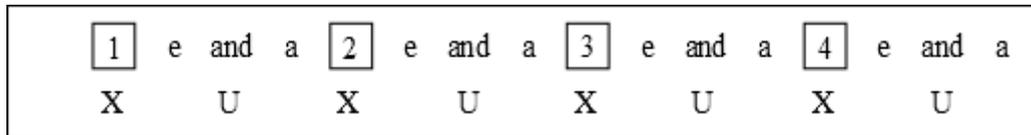
This adds a nice sense of urgency to the chord progression and it`s something you can try out in your own songs too!

Songs that use The Modern Strum Pattern

- Oasis – Live Forever
- Passenger – Let Her Go
- Bob Dylan – Knockin` on Heaven`s Door
- Ed Sheeran – Skinny Love
- Radiohead – Fake Plastic Trees

Strum Pattern 3 – The Reggae Strum Pattern

Reggae Strum Pattern 1



The Reggae Strum Pattern 1 uses a combination of **quarter and 8th notes**, which is great but it can make the strum pattern appear deceptively easy.

With reggae music the emphasis is on the `and` which is the offbeat in music. Anytime you emphasise or accent (play louder) on the `and` you are doing what is called **syncopation**.

There are many ways and many rhythms you can get from syncopation and this pattern is probably the most straight-forward.

The best way to play this pattern is to mute the strings with the left hand when you play a down stroke on the beat which gives you a percussive sound, and then play an upstroke while you have the chord fretted properly.

This gives us the:

- Percussive down stroke
- Clean chord upstroke

...That we are after.

Tip. In reggae music the up stroke is often cut slightly short. The upstroke doesn't run exactly into the next down stroke. So, try to cut it short by lifting the fingers of the left hand slightly BEFORE the next downbeat.

Listen closely to the audio example to hear exactly what I mean.

Listen to the `Reggae Strum Pattern` 1 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

G Major, C Major, A minor

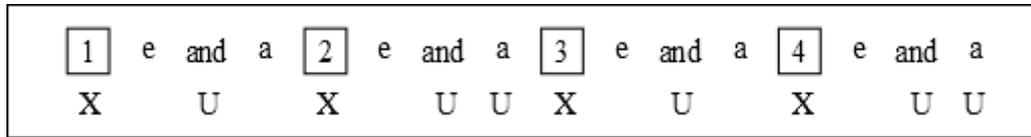
Play-along:

No Capo

(G, C, G, C, Am) X 4

Note: The G, C, G bars are all full bars but the last C and Am is a split bar.

Reggae Strum Pattern 2



The Reggae strum pattern 2 is one of my personal favourite strum patterns and one I use in a few of my own songs. We now **add in some 16th notes** to bring up the energy a little.

The two 16th notes are played as both upstrokes instead of Down, Up, as we want both strums to sound exactly the same.

We want to cut each of those Upstrokes short, just like we did the Reggae strum pattern 1.

This is a fair bit harder as they are both quick strums. This is where using open chords for reggae can be a little difficult.

If you can play barre chords, it can be much easier to play them here, as all **you will have to do to cut a note short is lift the pressure off the strings slightly**. This is enough to stop the sound dead and give us the effect we are after.

When using open chords it can be difficult to cut the sound short as the **open strings still ring out a bit**. Therefore you would have to bring your left hand around to kill the sound of all the strings which can be awkward.

Therefore, to get really good at reggae, you will probably want to master barre chords.

Listen to the `Reggae Strum Pattern ` 2 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

C# minor, F# minor, A Major,

Play-along:

No Capo

(C#m, C#m, F#m, AM,) x 4

Songs that use The Reggae Strum Pattern

- Bob Marley - Three little birds
- Bruno Mars - The Lazy Song
- The Police - Can't Stand Losing You
- UB40 - Red, Red Wine
- No Doubt ft. Lady Saw - Underneath It All

Note: Some legendary reggae guitarists claim that you should play this style of music using all down strokes for a more authentic sound. Personally, I think it sounds almost exactly the same using either down or upstrokes (as long as your upstrokes are of a high standard).

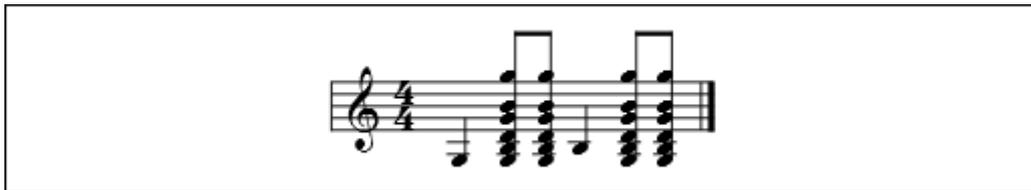
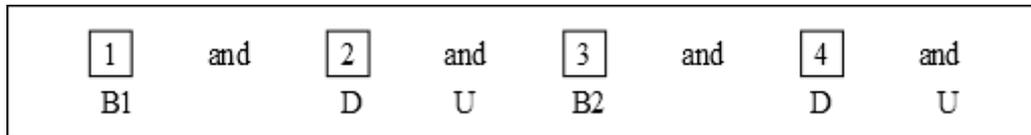
Once you can play both these reggae strum patterns, I would like you to practice playing them while switching the **upstrokes in the patterns for down strokes.**

Then you can decide which you like the sound of best!

If your upstrokes aren't great, you will probably prefer using all down strokes, but that is a sign your upstrokes need work! So keep practicing those upstrokes!

Strum Pattern 3 – The Country Strum Pattern

Country Strum Pattern 1



The Country Strum Pattern is a great sounding and very distinct strum pattern. The pattern is also frequently used in traditional and 60's folk music too, so you will be able to play a few different styles with it. With the recent resurgence of folk, country and traditional styles of music by bands such as Mumford and Sons, you will find that this pattern will definitely come in handy.

The Country Strum Pattern uses a combination of **quarter and 8th notes**, which you may think would make it the easiest strum pattern to play. The rhythm is undoubtedly the easiest but what makes this pattern a little tricky is the **pick a bass note, then strum the chord sequence** that it follows.

The pattern also frequently features an alternating bass note especially when played in classic country music.

Playing the country strum pattern at speed and accurately can be quite tricky at first, so practice slowly!

The alternating bass is shown above by B1 and B2. This means on the first beat you play bass note 1. In the chord of G Major, this would be the root which is the G on the 6 string.

On beat 3, you would play bass note 2, which is often the next string up, so on G Major, this would be the B note on the 5th string.

Just remember B1 is the root note and B2 is the note on the next string above the root or vice versa.

Tip: Make sure those bass notes are ringing out. They really are the backbone to this pattern and if you can't quite hear them the pattern loses its power, so experiment with hitting the bass notes a little louder until they are ringing through but not overbearing.

Listen to the `Country Strum Pattern` 1 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

G Major, C Major, D7

Play-along:

No Capo

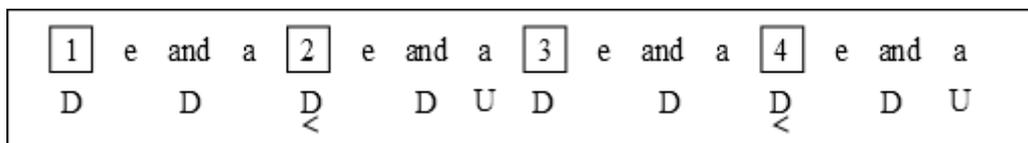
(G, G, C, D7) x 4

Songs that use The Country Strum Pattern

- Johnny Cash – A Boy Named Sue
- Brian and Michael - Matchstalk Men and Matchstalk Cats and Dogs
- Willie Nelson - Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain
- Bob Dylan – Blowin` In The Wind
- Gillian Welch – Orphan Girl
- Donovan – Catch The Wind

Strum Pattern 5 – The Indie Rock Strum Pattern

Indie Rock Strum Pattern 1



The Indie rock strum pattern uses a combination of **quarter, 8th and 16th notes** and is the hardest out of all five for most guitarists to master.

The accents on the 2nd and 4th beats are integral to this pattern. These accents are shown by the symbol shown under the down strokes on beats 2 and 4 in the strum pattern diagram above.

Loads of modern rock and indie songs use this pattern to great effect.

Tip: The accents are played on beats 2 and 4 and this usually where a drummer would more often than not hit the snare drum.

When we also accent these drum hits we are adding to the groove the drummer sets, so listen out for the snare drum on these beats and try to play the accent at exactly the same time as the drummer plays his or her snare.

Listen to the ` Indie Rock Strum Pattern ` 1 in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

A minor, F Major, C Major, G Major

Play-along:

Capo 2th fret

(Am, F, C, G)

Note: All bars in this example are split bars

Indie Rock Strum Pattern 2

1	e	and	a	2	e	and	a	3	e	and	a	4	e	and	a
D		D		D		D	U	D		D		D		D	U
P.M.						P.M.						P.M.			

P.M. | P.M. | P.M. |

On the **indie rock strum pattern 2** we add some palm muting and a bit of overdrive to rock up the strum pattern a touch. Hear how it has a very different vibe from version 1 because of these factors.

Palm muting is played by resting the side of the palm of your picking hand on the bridge where the strings meet the bridge. Try it now. Play a chord and instead of strumming it, play all down stroked palm mutes.

[Here is a great video](#) showing you exactly how to do palm muting if you have never learned it.

Ignore all the heavy talk. Palm muting can sound great on an acoustic guitar too!

Tip: You will have to vary exactly where you put your hand and experiment to get the best sound as too much palm muting kills the sound and not enough doesn't have any effect.

Listen to the `Indie Rock Strum Pattern 2` in action

[Click here to listen](#)

Chords used:

C Major, D minor, A minor, E minor

Play-along:

No Capo

(C, Dm, Am, Em) X 5

Note: All bars in this example are split bars

Songs that use The Indie Rock Strum Pattern

- Blur – Country House
- Eagle Eye Cherry – Save Tonight
- Red Hot Chili Peppers – Dani California
- Shawn Colvin – Sunny Came Home
- Oasis – D’You Know What I Mean?

There you go. These are **five awesome strum patterns** that you will no doubt use for the rest of your guitar playing days. Strumming is rhythm and is rhythm is the most important factor in music.

Master these strum patterns, and you will be head and shoulders above a lot of guitar players out there!

I sincerely hope you learned a lot from this guide and find it useful on your journey to mastering strumming.

Strumming like a pro is essential for all guitarists. It`s what separates the amateur to the professional.

Stick with it.

Keep working on your strumming and have fun with it!

Your audience will love you for it!

Thank you for reading this book.

Dan Thorpe

P.S. You can check out my other books on Amazon on my [author page](#). If you enjoyed it, I hope you could please leave a review, I will be forever grateful.

P.P.S Good luck with your guitar playing. I wish you all the best for the future and **thank you so much for reading.**

Other Books By The Author

- [Lightning Fast Guitar Chord Changes: 6 steps to rapidly improve the speed of your fingers](#)
- [Guitarists Get Theory: The really useful guide to music theory:just for guitar players](#)
- [How To Get An Awesome Live Guitar Sound: The Secrets To Getting A Killer Tone...Easily](#)
- [How To Play Barre Chords: The Simplified Guide For Chord Guitar Mastery](#)
- [The Intermediate Guitar Guide: Learn Embellishments, Ear Training, The Ultimate Warm-Up and More...](#)

Acknowledgements

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