

the quarter and eighth note strums

Ultimately, to create a full and professional-style strum, you want to gain the ability to switch between three strum patterns with ease. They're known as the quarter, eighth and 16th note strum patterns.

While getting good at switching between them takes a lot of work, the patterns themselves are almost jarring in their simplicity.

The **quarter note strum** is played by strumming a downstroke on each number — **1 2 3 4** — of a 4 count.

Similarly, an **eighth note strum** is played with downstroke on each number, as well as each "and" in the count — **1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and**.

Quarter note strum



1



2



3



4

 = DOWNSTROKE

Eighth note strum



1



and



2



and



3



and



4



and



the 16th note strum

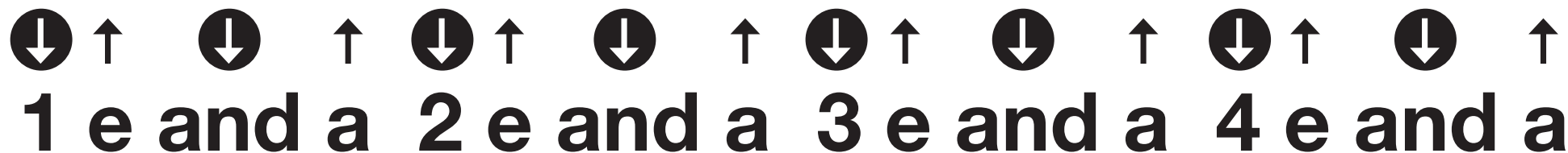
While all three strums require you to be comfortable with the downstroke motion on the guitar, unlike both the quarter and eighth note strums, the 16th note strum involves the **upstroke** motion as well. An upstroke is simply the reverse action of a downstroke.

To try one out, use a G chord and play a downstroke. When you reach the bottom of the stroke, come back up, reversing all the actions you made to do a downstroke. Make sure to hit all the strings on the way up, and do the upstroke fast enough to make playing all six strings sound like they are being played simultaneously. Go up and down a few times, and while you're getting comfortable with the motion, think about how on a trampoline, each time you reach the bottom, you're already practically on the way up — it's all one seamless motion. That's how your up and down strumming motion should be.

For the 16th note strum — **1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a** — play downstrokes on each number and each “and.” Play upstrokes on each “e” and each “a.”

The 16th note strum

↓ = DOWNSTROKE ↑ = UPSTROKE



Practice instructions

Mute the strings and play a slow 16th note count. Repeat it a bunch of times until you're comfortable with it. Resist the urge to speed up during the exercise. Then stop, pick a quicker tempo and repeat the process. The 16th note strum is most effective when it's played quickly, so work up to faster tempos, which will also help build a strong comfort level with upstrokes.

getting started with a metronome

The most foolproof way to get good at switching between the quarter, eighth and 16th note strums is to use a **metronome**.

A metronome is device, usually digital these days, that clicks out variable increments of time. It's works similar to way seconds tick on a clock, except you can adjust the click speed.

Metronomes are easy to use and find, with many available online for free. No matter how nice or complex the metronome, the only feature you really need is **the function that sets the beats per minute (bpm) for quarter notes**.

To get started using one, first, find one you like and set the bpm to click out only quarter notes. Then, adjust the tempo to 50 bpm.

Hit start, mute your strings and play downstrokes to the clicks. Do this step a few times without counting to get the hang of it.

Then, when you're ready, since each click represents a quarter note, apply the quarter note count — **1 2 3 4 REPEAT** — to the downstrokes and clicks. You can count either out loud or in your head, but **essentially, you're playing the quarter note strum to the clicks**.

When comfortable, stop, nudge the tempo up 1-2 bpm faster, and then repeat the process.



switching between the three strums

A metronome is so useful for switching between the quarter, eighth and 16th note strums because it takes out any guesswork. Each click is always a number in the four count and always a downstroke. Plus, using a metronome will help keep you from speeding up or slowing down in situations where you aren't using one.

To get started switching between the three strums, set your metronome to 50 bpm. Hit start and play a quarter note strum with muted strings, counting **1 2 3 4** repeatedly while strumming downstrokes on each click.

Once you've got confidence in your quarter note strum, it's time to switch to the eighth note strum. But before you actually attempt it, get the count going in your head first. When you feel like you have it right in your head, then try to strum it. If you did it right, you're still playing downstrokes on each click, but you're also playing a downstroke between clicks. Repeat it a few times and then go back to quarters. Switch back and forth a few times to get the hang of it. If you get lost, reset with a few bars of the quarter note strum and then try again.

Going to the 16th note strum is the same idea. From a quarter note strum, get the count in your head first, and then attempt to do it. If you did it right, you'll land downstrokes on each click while saying numbers, and in between clicks, you'll strum out "e and a." The strumming motion should be even and constant. If 16th notes at 50 bpm are too fast for you, use a slower tempo.

Quarter note strum



 = DOWNSTROKE  = UPSTROKE

Eighth note strum



16th note strum



How to practice switching between the three strums

Pick a starting tempo and switch back and forth between all three strums. When comfortable, stop, increase the tempo by 1-2 bpm and then repeat.

the 16th note feel

On its own, practicing the skill of switching between the quarter, eighth and 16th note strums is not enough to give you a professional-style strum. You also need the right approach.

As you practice switching between the strums, listen to how each one sounds. Quarter notes sound pretty empty next to the very full 16th notes, and eighth notes land somewhere in the middle.

This relationship in sound is important because it guides us toward how best to use them:

1. The **eighth note strum**, since it's neither too sparse nor too full, **serves as the basic foundation**. It's kind of like vanilla ice cream in an ice cream sundae.
2. A **16th note strum** is peppered throughout your eighth note strum to **emphasize, accentuate, create drive and fill space**. It's like all your sundae toppings — how much you use is pretty much up to you, but if you go overboard, you can't really tell what's what at a certain point.
3. A **quarter note strum** is used to **create dramatic space**, such as a full instrumental stop. Sticking with the sundae theme, the quarter note strum is sort of like the cherry on top. You definitely only need one, but you can make a pretty good dessert without them, too.

As a whole, the three strums combine to create the **16th note feel**, a term that basically means that eighth notes are the foundation, and 16th notes help fill it out.

It's crucial to practice the 16th note feel with a metronome as much as possible because songs have so many moving parts that you want your rhythm to happen as automatically as possible.

Working with a metronome not only builds the muscle memory necessary to achieve that, it also helps develop an intuitive sense of timing that serves as the glue for putting the whole approach together.

Practice instructions

Here's how to practice the 16th note feel:

1. Set your metronome to 50.
2. Get into eighth notes as quickly as possible. Play eighths a few times, and then switch to 16ths.
3. Play 16ths for a while, and then go back to eighths. Use quarters only to reset when you get off the click. Then, go straight back to eighths and 16ths.
4. When comfortable, stop, increase the tempo by 1-2 bpm and then, repeat.

Notes

- We use quarters so infrequently that you'll practice them enough by simply using them to get back on track.
- In the short-term, work toward being able to play 16th notes at 80 bpm. If you're serious, build to 100 from there.

switching strums within measures

In practice, it's pretty rare to strum one of the three strums all by itself for extended periods of time. In fact, most of the time, you only play them for one or two beats at a time, meaning you have to become comfortable switching between them within a single measure.

For example, here's a common count:
1 and 2 and 3 and 4 e and a REPEAT.

This measure mostly requires an eighth note strum, but then you have to switch to the 16th note strum for beat 4. After that, you return to the eighth note strum to repeat.

Here's another typical count you might see:
1 and 2 e and a 3 and 4 e and a REPEAT.

Here, you're essentially alternating between eighth notes and 16ths. In scenarios like this, it's important not get turned around and switch the 16ths to beats 1 and 3 rather than 2 and 4.

Ultimately, you won't have to consciously figure out every combination for every single measure, but if you practice the right patterns, you'll be ready for just about any situation that comes up.

Essential practice patterns

Realistically, there is an endless amount of patterns we can make within the 16th note feel. But, we do use certain ones a lot. So, set your metronome, mute your strings and work through these, taking special note of how they are prioritized.

Used often

- 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 e and a REPEAT
- 1 and 2 and 3 e and a 4 e and a REPEAT
- 1 and 2 e and a 3 and 4 e and a REPEAT

Important, but used judiciously

- 1 e and a 2 and 3 and 4 and REPEAT
- 1 and 2 e and a 3 and 4 and REPEAT
- 1 and 2 and 3 e and a 4 and REPEAT

Important, but used more for effect

- 1 e and a 2 e and a 3 and 4 and REPEAT
- 1 e and a 2 and 3 e and a 4 and REPEAT

Note: Use quarter notes to reset yourself when you get off the click.