

TIMING CONTROL

What I have tried to do in this chapter is present the most common rhythmic note groupings for today's rudimental player, focusing primarily on the correct rhythmic interpretation of 16th notes, triplets, sextuplets, 5's, 7's and 9's. Because there is mathematically no "stopping place" with the rhythmic values, rhythmic combinations and independence related to playing one hand against the other, I have chosen to limit the exercises in this chapter to what I feel is most applicable. This chapter includes:

- I. **TIMING CONCEPTS** – Hand motion and the basic math which is timing.
- II. **16th NOTE TIMING** – An in depth study of 16th note permutations.
- III. **TRIPLET TIMING** – An in depth study of rhythms in triple time and 8th note triplets
- IV. **DUPLE AND TRIPLE RELATIONSHIPS**
- V. **16th NOTES IN TRIPLE TIME and 16th NOTE TRIPLETS** (including sextuplets)
- VI. **THE NEXT LEVEL** – Polyrhythms, Quarter Note Triplets, Ninelets, 5/8 and 7/8, fivelets, sevenlets, and more.

Playing in time is one of the most important aspects of true musicianship. However, despite the importance of rhythmic accuracy, this area of development often does not get the attention and devotion it deserves. Younger players often would rather spend time on difficult rudiments instead of the basic timing patterns those same rudiments are built upon. Even though perfecting these timing patterns may seem a bit tedious, being able to play these rhythms perfectly in time is an ESSENTIAL SKILL for any musician. The essence of playing in time comes from the ability to feel an internal pulse while you play. For those of us who were not born with a natural sense of time, we have to train ourselves to internalize this pulse or groove. We do this through practicing with a metronome and playing MATHEMATICALLY CORRECT rhythms.

I. TIMING CONCEPTS

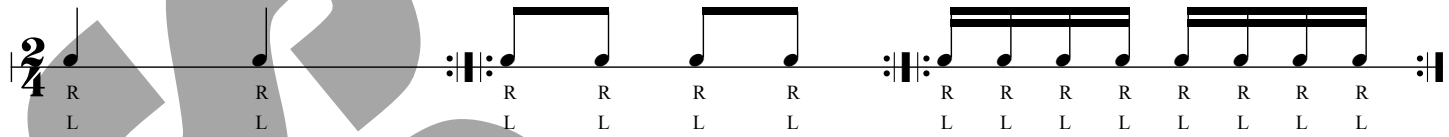
UNDERSTANDING MATHEMATICAL SUBDIVISIONS

To understand HOW to play in time, you must first understand the mathematical subdivisions of a beat and begin thinking of rhythms in terms of the amount of VISUAL space that each note takes up. To be mathematically correct, each note needs to take up a precise amount of space (think visually and not aurally). Below is a chart of the most common duple and triple note values in quarter time. It may help to refer back to it as you work your way through this chapter!

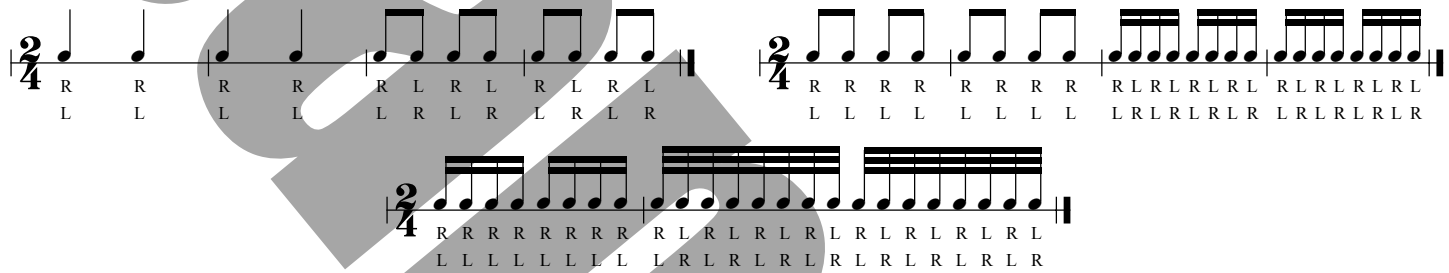
ESTABLISHING A CONSISTENT "LEAD HAND" MOTION

One of the easiest ways that I've found to get students to play simple rhythms in time is to first establish a consistent "lead hand" motion. The lead hand in any alternating rhythm is simply the hand that starts the rhythm.

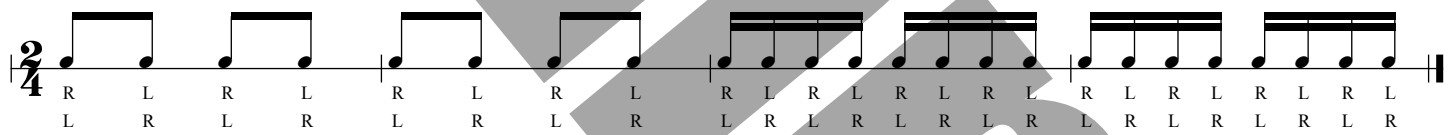
Spend some time practicing these "base" lead hand rhythms with a metronome. Watch that your hand motion is consistent and fluid throughout. Keep in mind that for quarter notes, the stick will "rest" after playing the note (stay down). For 8ths and 16ths, the stick will "float" or rebound to the up position.



Using the "lead hand" approach, you can come up with 3 very basic timing exercises just by "filling in" the alternating hand. Practice playing the lead hand on the drum and the filled-in hand on the rim or your leg.



Now, you can combine any of the "filled-in" rhythms to come up with more exercises. In the following example, I've combined patterns 1 and 2 into an easy timing exercise. You can come up with MORE with other combinations. Try 1 and 3. Or 2 and 3. Or 3, 2, and 1...

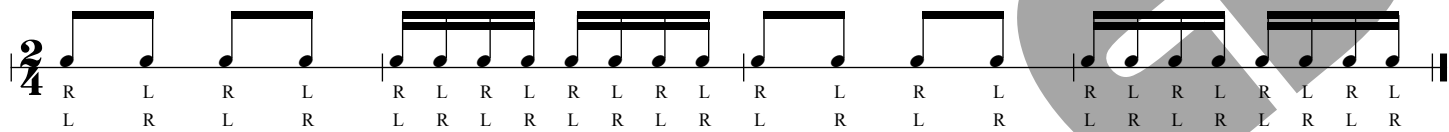


Important things to consider when working on ANY timing exercise:

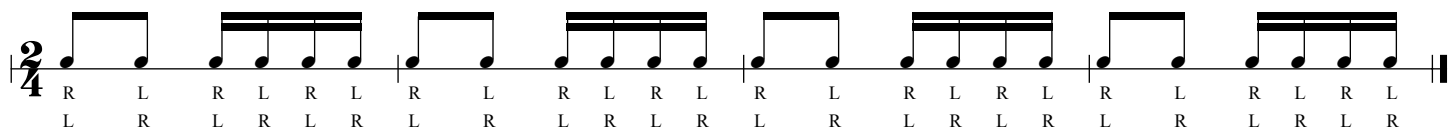
- Always use a metronome AND tap your foot (or mark time) while you play.
- Listen for consistency of sound between the hands (tap hum).

APPLYING THE 4-2-1 CONCEPT

To come up with hundreds (if not thousands) of exercises throughout this chapter, I'll often refer to the "4-2-1 concept". Simply put, it means that you'll play 4 counts of a pattern, then 2 counts of a pattern, then 1. Notice the exercise above uses the 4's of the 4-2-1 approach (4 counts of each pattern). The next exercise uses the same two patterns, but divides it into half (TWO counts of each pattern instead of FOUR):



And finally, ONE count of each pattern:



The point is that I can easily give you a ton of new exercises CONCEPTUALLY – and save a forest of trees in the process!

II. 16th NOTE RHYTHM PATTERNS

Before jumping in to the basic 16th note timing exercises, I think it's very important to first establish a solid understanding of each of the 16th rhythms that we'll be dealing with in this section of the timing chapter. In the exercise below, you'll see the "base" rhythm (often called the "check pattern") below the various 16th rhythms that you'll see in this section. Practice playing the base rhythm (bottom) on one hand while you play the 16th pattern (top) on the opposite hand. This will not only give you a solid understanding of the subdivision for each rhythm pattern, but it will also help develop coordination and independence between your hands.

Practice this exercise using the 4-2-1 concept (four counts of each pattern, then 2, then 1). Also try using an 8th note base rhythm instead of 16th. Don't forget to work with a metronome and tap your foot while you play!

APPROACHES TO STICKING 16th NOTE RHYTHM PATTERNS

One more item to discuss before moving on is two approaches to sticking rhythms:

Flow Sticking (sometimes called "Natural Sticking") – where the right and left hands have a constant hand motion and relationship to the beat (right hand on "1", "&", while the left is on the "e" and "ah").

Alternate Sticking – where the right and left hand always alternate, regardless of where the notes fall in relation to the downbeat.

FLOW STICKING

In the first exercise below, the lead hand maintains constant motion throughout (in this case, 8th notes). In the 2nd exercise, the same consistent motion is applied on the lead hand from measure 1 to 2, but in measures 3 & 4, it is the non-lead hand that continues in motion.

ALTERNATE STICKING

Alternate sticking takes much more awareness of time because you use multiple hand motions. There is still a rhythm to the motion, but the hands will "rest" or "float" more often, depending on the tempo and division of notes.

16th NOTE TIMING: 3 NOTE GROUPINGS

These exercises all have to do with 3 note groupings of 16th notes. The following two exercises map out the 4 basic patterns with both Flow Sticking (exercise 1) and Alternate Sticking (exercise 2):

Exercise 1: Flow Sticking

Staff 1: R L R, R L R, R L R, R L R, R L L, L R L, L R L, L R L, L R L, L R L

Staff 2: R L R, R L R, R L R, R L R, L R L, L R L, L R L, L R L, L R L, L R L

Exercise 2: Alternate Sticking

Staff 1: R L R, L R L, R L R, L R L, R L R, L R L, L R L, R L R, L R L, R L R

Staff 2: L R L, R L R, L R L, R L R, L R L, R L R, L R L, R L R, L R L, R L R

WITH THE "CHECK"

Work through these exercises using the 4-2-1 concept with a measure of check pattern between each rhythm. Here is the 4's with a check (4 counts of check followed by 4 counts of rhythm):

Now, 2's with a check:

And the 1's with a check. Don't forget to practice these exercises with ALL the sticking combinations above.

WITHOUT THE "CHECK"

You should also practice the rhythms WITHOUT a check pattern between each bar. Playing straight through the exercises above as written would give you the 4's. Here are the 2's and 1's:

When practicing the 1's with **alternate sticking**, it's important to realize that the sticking will **FLIP** from one pattern to the next (starting on the right in the first measure to the left in the second, or vice-versa) – and that will happen whether you're playing the exercise with a check or without.

16th NOTE TIMING: 2 NOTE GROUPINGS

These exercises all deal with two note groupings of 16ths. Practice tapping your foot to feel the downbeats. Use a fluid hand motion (not jerky), and relate each rhythm to the 3 note groupings above. The following two exercises map out the 6 basic patterns with both Flow Sticking (1) and Alternate Sticking (2):

The first staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R L / L R, R L / L R, R L / L R, R L / L R. This is followed by four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L. The second staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R L / L R, L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L. This is followed by four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: R R / L L, R R / L L, R R / L L, R R / L L. The third staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R L / L R, R L / L R, R L / L R, R L / L R. This is followed by four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L. The fourth staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R L / L R, L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L. This is followed by four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: R L / L R, R L / L R, R L / L R, R L / L R.

Work through all the patterns using the 4-2-1 concept – both with a check and without. Once you’ve practiced all those variations, try playing the patterns from back to front, or come up with other combinations!

16th NOTE TIMING: 1 NOTE GROUPINGS

These are some of the most difficult timing patterns because of the amount of space between the notes. Ask any percussion instructor which is easiest to play accurately – these patterns or any of the ones above – and they would choose any of the ones above! The fundamental truth to being able to play these rhythms in time is that you MUST subdivide the whole group of four 16ths! As always, use a metronome and feel each downbeat with your foot!

The first staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R / L, R / L, R / L, R / L. This is followed by four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: L / R, L / R, L / R, L / R. The second staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R / L, L / R, L / R, L / R. This is followed by four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: R / L, R / L, R / L, R / L.

Again, work through all the patterns using the 4-2-1 concept – both with a check and without. Realize that when you’re playing the 1’s with the Alternated Sticking, the sticking will flip from one measure to the next:

The first staff shows four measures of Flow Sticking (1) with sticking patterns: R L R L / L R L R, L R L R / R L R L, R L R L / L R L R, L R L R / R L R L. The second staff shows four measures of Alternate Sticking (2) with sticking patterns: L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L, L R / R L.

16th NOTE TIMING: COMBINING THE PATTERNS

Use the variations on the next page to practice combining the 3, 2 and 1 note groupings. There are a million variations that you can apply to these timing patterns (and I’m doing my part to save the trees by not including every possible one of them here). Start with the basics (apply the 4-2-1 concept, with and without the check, with both Flow and Alternated Sticking, off the right and the left), then come up with your OWN combinations!

TRIPLE TIMING: QUARTER NOTE TRIPLETS

Using the 3:2 polyrhythm example from the previous page, it's easy to understand the concept of the quarter note triplet – it is simply *three* quarters in the space of *two* beats (or *3 against 2*).

When beating time to the dotted quarter in 6/8 time, 3 quarter notes make up the 3 *against* 2 rhythm. Use the 8th notes as the *base* of the 3:2 rhythm:

The image shows two musical staves illustrating a 3:2 polyrhythm. The top staff is in 6/8 time, showing a dotted quarter note followed by two eighth notes, with a bracket above three eighth notes indicating a triplet. The bottom staff is in 2/4 time, showing a quarter note followed by two eighth notes, with brackets above two groups of three eighth notes indicating triplets.

The 3:2 polyrhythm can also be written in 2/4 time as a quarter note triplet. This time, use an 8th note triplet as the *base* of the 3:2 rhythm:

We have already discussed how hand motion can aid with timing in many ways. Here, we apply the hand motion concept to the forming of quarter note triplets. What I call the “Quarter Note Triplet” motion is present in these exercises (when you play just the lead hand of two 8th note triplets, you get a quarter note triplet).

- Notice how the exercises are notated differently for the same rhythms.
- Be able to feel the pulse of either the quarter note (4/4) or dotted quarter (12/8).

The image contains four lines of musical notation for handedness exercises. The first two lines are in 12/8 time, and the last two are in 4/4 time. Each line consists of a staff with rhythmic notation and corresponding 'R' and 'L' markings below it. Brackets above the notes indicate triplet groupings. The exercises alternate between quarter notes and eighth notes, with some measures containing rests.

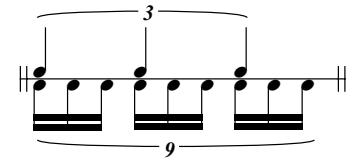
Here are a few more exercises to practice the timing and speed of quarter note triplets. A quarter note triplet is played the same way, and takes up the same amount of space, regardless of where it falls in a measure.

The image shows two lines of musical notation in 4/4 time. Each line consists of a staff with rhythmic notation and corresponding 'R' and 'L' markings below it. Brackets above the notes indicate triplet groupings. The exercises focus on the placement of quarter note triplets within the measure.

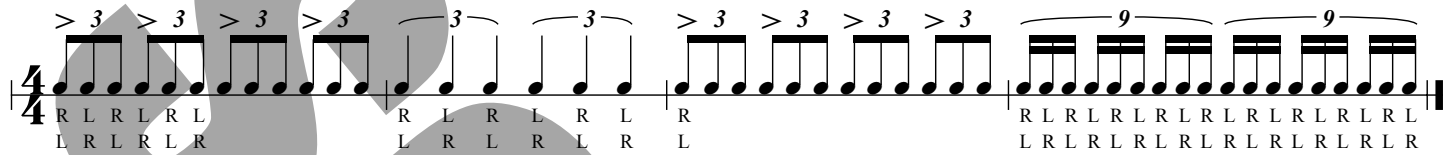
NOTE: Don't get thrown off by tuplet rhythms just because they look different when placed in different parts of the measure. A quarter note triplet is still a quarter note triplet, regardless what beat it starts on!

NINELETS

Having gone through sextuplets and quarter note triplets, ninelets are the next logical step in our timing journey. For the examples below, remember the quarter note triplet and 3 over 2. The same “3” pulse should be felt, but there happens to be 3 notes on each beat of the “3 pulse” or quarter note triplet:

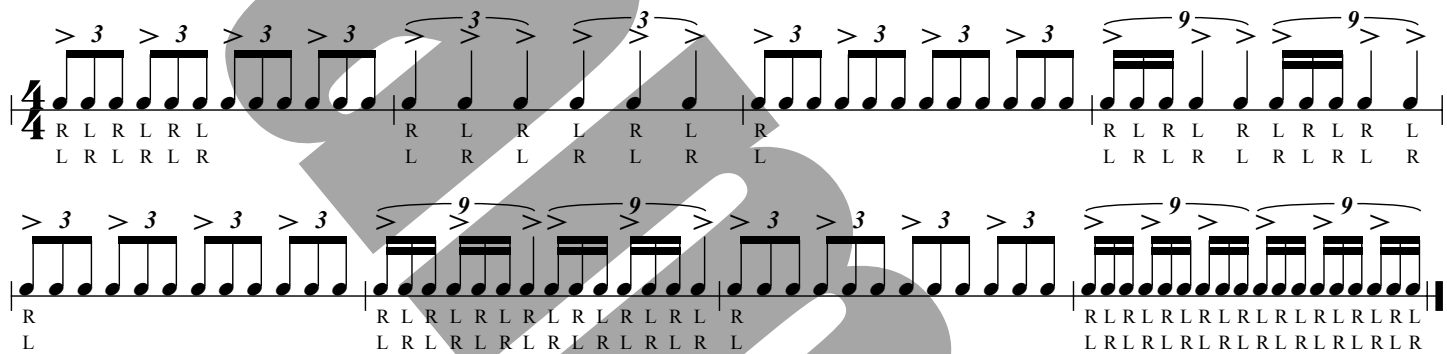


In this exercise, use the triplets in the first bar to establish the quarter note triplet pattern (lead hand motion) and then play ninelets in the fourth bar. Don't forget to tap your foot and use a metronome!



NINELET BUILD UP

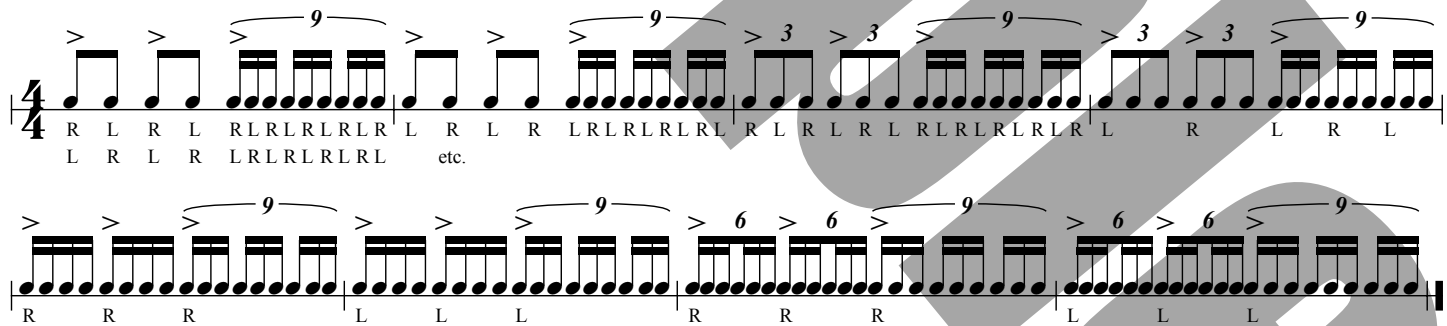
This exercise builds up the ninelet based off the quarter note triplet, one pulse at a time.



NINELETS AND OTHER RHYTHMS

Remember the spacing of the first two notes of a grouping and what will be faster or slower. HINT: Think mathematically: Since a ninelet has 9 notes over two beats vs. 12 notes over two beats in a sextuplet, the sextuplet is faster.

As you play each measure, listen for even spacing across the entire rhythm (don't simply start the rhythm, then speed up or slow down in the middle to “fit it all in”)!



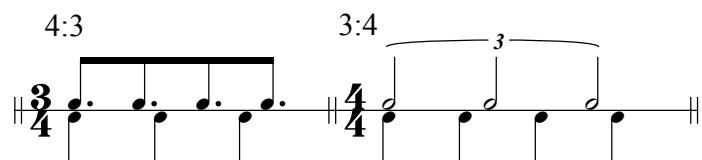
BUILDING THE 3:4 OR 4:3 POLYRHYTHM

There is one more fairly common polyrhythm that I need to cover before moving further into our timing adventure: three against four or four against three. Four over three is what happens when you play four notes in the space of three beats (or vice versa for three over four). Similar to the 2:3 and 3:2 polyrhythm learned earlier in the chapter, which rhythm is “against” or “over” the other based on the time signature and what note is getting the beat.

This polyrhythm can be learned through the phrase “Pass the bread and butter.”

Say that phrase out loud
now: “PASS THE BREAD AND BUTTER”.

Did you *really* just say that out loud? If not, go ahead, it will make sense in a minute!



ADVANCED TIMING PRACTICE

TIMING CHECK PATTERNS

Here, we are going to take an old exercise and put a new spin on it. This exercise is a variation of Tom Float's "Chugga-da" but adapting it for use with timing patterns. Keep the 8th notes constant and play mathematically correct rhythms.

1. 2.

Now try these variations in the space of the 8th notes:

Don't feel limited to the variations I have listed, feel free to come up with your own!

Here are a handful of exercises you can apply your vast rhythmic knowledge to. Remember to tap your foot and use a metronome!

This exercise has "fourlets" in the second, third and fourth bar. These rhythms are notated this way because the exercise is in 8 time (triple time). As a result, a grouping of four is unnatural for this time signature (similar to a triplet in quarter time). Think of these rhythms as four 16th notes played evenly over 3 8th notes or 4:3.