

Rhythm Guitar

(introduction)

If you have gone through Guitar Fundamentals Primer before starting work on Guitar Fundamentals Book 1, you will already be familiar with the concept of rhythm guitar. There is no actual instrument called a rhythm guitar although an acoustic instrument generally is the better choice for the job. The solid body electric guitar was originally designed as a "lead" instrument and most players use such light strings that chord playing is even more hampered. However, a sensitive touch will overcome some of these inherent problems. (It is very easy to produce a muddy rhythm guitar sound on an electric guitar.)

Lesson 13b is a catalogue of some rhythm guitar possibilities. Don't expect or try to learn them all in one sitting. The idea is to start with some of the basic rhythms and eventually work into some of the more complex styles. You do not have to complete learning all of the rhythms prior to moving to lesson 14 and so on. This catalogue of rhythms will serve as a reference guide for future songs and also some of the songs and exercises which have preceded.

Under each rhythm in the catalogue is a short description of the style and some suggestions as to what kind of song might be a good vehicle for that rhythm. Ultimately, the player should choose the rhythm that feels right for whatever song is in question. A teacher might help in making some wise decisions in this department.

Below are two basic rhythms with some commentary and advice. Mastery of these two styles is very important before you attempt any of the more complex styles.

The basic alternating-bass-chord style which was introduced in Guitar Fundamentals Primer works well in a lot of musical situations but does no justice to latin rhythms or rock beats. This could be called "4 to a bar."

An 8 to a bar style is more along the line of what one would do in a latin rhythm or a rock beat.



Rock beats, latin beats and jazzier rhythms in general depend on some element of subdividing the beat. The basic "4 to a bar" can not swing nor does it have the drive that is needed in a rock style song.

In the 8 to a bar rhythm, it is very important to relax the grip on the pick and especially so on the up stroke chord. Another feature is that the up stroke chord can be very thin in sound. In other words, even if you only strike one or two of the higher pitched strings on the up stroke, it is quite alright and in most cases, this is preferred. Generally, it is also better if you put a bit of a stress on the down beat which of course is the down stroke. Practice this with a variety of common chord fingerings.

Also practice converting the 8 to a bar rhythm into "jazz eighths." Count in the "bad Italian accent" manner to get the right feel.

Lastly, before you try to do anything fancy in the rhythm guitar department, you must know the standard fingerings of the chords in the song and you have to be able to do seamless chord changes. You can not be referring to chord diagrams when you play rhythm guitar.