

Catalogue of Rhythm Guitar Styles

All of the examples use a "C" chord but any chord will do. The rhythms depicted here all use some form of an **"alternating bass chord"** idea, assuming that the performances will be without a bass player. **This will be referred to as "ABC"**.

If a bass player is a part of your ensemble, the rhythm guitarist can do one of several things. The bass notes can usually be replaced by a rest, a low strum or a muted string strum. In the beginning, it is probably best to play the rhythms as suggested.

Another suggestion is that if there is a bass player present, you can still play the bass notes but turn the bass equalizer on your amplifier to a lesser setting. While this may not be the best solution, you will have less of a chance of colliding in sound with the bassist.

Choosing the appropriate rhythm for any song might take a bit of patience. Any rhythm pattern that you choose can also be made a bit more interesting by using some variations. Listen and look for the ends of melodic phrases and change the rhythm at these points for one measure or so. Keeping a keen ear is important.

THESE RHYTHMS ARE NOT THE ONLY POSSIBILITIES

Alternating-bass-chord style. (ABC)
Works well on folk, country, some swing but generally not on rock. Most rock ideas are generated by subdivisions of the beats. (eighth note ride)

Variation on ABC and works on similar styled tunes. With swing tunes, the eighths would be "jazz eighths." Works well in quick tempo folk and country music.

Variation on ABC. Notice that it is the reverse of the previous example. The two eighths at the end of the bar would be particularly effective in a swing. (kick beat)

Jazzier variation on the ABC, more along the line of a "comping" rhythm. (jazz style accompaniment)
If a bassist is in your ensemble, replace the bass notes with rests.

ABC "8 to a bar" works well on rock, soft rock, country rock, ballads, some latin tunes. In a basic latin rhythm with a bass player, all the strokes would be chord strokes and the "up beats" would be clipped.

Variation on 8 to a bar even though there are only seven strokes in the rhythm. The quarter note at the first beat emphasizes the beginning of each measure.

This is the reverse of the previous rhythm. It is also a variation on 8 to a bar but with a totally different nature because the quarter note starts the second half of the bar.

Variation on 8 to a bar but with only six strokes. Good on folk, fast country etc. Lots of country music has a swing rhythm.

8 to a bar variation with a "latin" influence. As soon as you add a syncopated element, the rhythm takes on a "latin" quality when played in straight eighths.

Special Note: None of the picking formulas are carved in stone.

"Beguine"----latin rhythm often used in old soft rock from 50's and 60's. Latin rhythms generally have an 8 to a bar feeling. With a bassist, one would substitute rests for the bass notes.

"Cha-Cha"feel. (latin style rhythm) This is a variation on the basic 8 to a bar. Sounds best with clipped chords. In a true cha-cha rhythm, all strokes would be chord strokes and the first, second and third up beats would be played staccato.

8 to a bar variation with a syncopated second beat. Common folk rhythm and for some reason, seems to be the one that everyone learns first.

Variation on the previous "folk" rhythm. This is the most common of all "folk" guitar rhythms. Perhaps even more readily learned by beginners than the previous one.

8 to a bar with a rock or a "bossa nova" flavour. Bossa Nova=Beat New or the "New Beat". A classic bossa nova is usually a two bar cycle. (not shown here)

8 to a bar with even more of a bossa nova feel. Hard to play this one fast with a pick.

Bass notes are usually more accurately struck with down strokes. Rhythms with these types of compounded bass notes are more effective when played fingerstyle.

Bossa nova variation can be used in a soft rock or anything with a latin groove. At a fast tempo, a fingerstyle approach would be better for accuracy and control.

Slight variation on the previous latin rhythm. This will also work on rock type tunes but it is not a heavy metal sound. Noise, is not covered in this catalogue of rhythms.

"Rhumba" style 8 to a bar. The bass notes produce an interesting syncopation. Can be a variation on the "beguine". A classic rhumba with a bassist could have the guitarist strumming a chord where the bass notes occur in this example.

WALTZES

Standard waltz

Jazz waltz

Viennese waltz

Slow waltz

Variation

Waltz tempos are often rather fast and the rhythm guitar will sound better if the chords are played quite staccato. (clipped) When a waltz is played at a slower tempo, the chords can be legato. (sustained) The Viennese waltz rhythm is a good one to mix in with a jazz waltz. Too many bars of the jazz waltz can become a bit tiresome.

Tempo does have a lot to do with the way you would play any rhythm guitar part. Faster rhythms as a general rule sound better with clipped chords.

ARPEGGIATED STYLE Players might experiment with the picking patterns.

Works well in slower ballads, folk or soft rock style tunes.

Variation on the previous rhythm with only one bass note in the measure.

A bit more of a rock feel in this variation. The bass notes will generate the effect and also the up stroke chord on the 2nd and 3rd beats if played very sharply.

ARPEGGIOS IN 3/4 TIME

All of the above arpeggio style waltz rhythms work best on slower tempos.

BLUES RHYTHMS: In particular, slower blues numbers have a very strong three way subdivision of the beat. This could be expressed in 4/4 time with eighth note triplets but is more easily written in a 12/8 compound meter.

Works well in slow blues and also in other slow ballads.

Variation with a moving bass line when there are several chords in one bar.

Arpeggio style perhaps more suited to ballads and such.

JAZZ RHYTHMS : (Swing style tunes)

Most of the rhythms shown here, and even some of the "latin" rhythms, can be used in "jazz" and "swing" type tunes except that the eighth note subdivisions then must be converted to "jazz eighths." In jazz eighths, the first eighth note is 2/3 of the beat and the second eighth note is 1/3 of a beat.

1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a: this gives a relaxed loping effect at a slow to medium tempo

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1--- a 2----a 3----a 4----a : as if counting with a strong Italian accent.

A final note is that rhythm guitar takes just as much if not more practice, than playing lead. The players who make rhythm guitar look effortless have spent hundreds of hours in developing the strumming technique. Do not expect to be good at this in any short period of time and be very persistent. Every practice session must include some rhythm guitar work.