Unlock the secret to decoding any strumming pattern by ear...in seconds!

Frustrated? Stuck in a rut?

Confused by the many so-called “experts” online and hard-to-grasp instructional books? Stop wasting hours of your valuable time trolling discussion forums and spend just a few minutes mastering these simple techniques that will refresh your approach to strumming the ukulele and will allow you to decode any given strum within SECONDS...BY EAR!

Practice the following concepts diligently and you will see your skill level skyrocket in a very short time with just a few minutes a day. You’d be surprised - when you look forward to practicing and you put yourself in that mental state of discovery mode, ten minutes easily turns into 30 minutes, 2 hours...all day!

But in the end, there is no substitute for LISTENING. Eric Clapton, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, Frank Sinatra - you can be sure they all spent a LOT of time sitting by their record player lifting that needle and replaying their favorite parts as they learned how to emulate what they heard.

So dust off those old favorites, revisit them with an open ear and HAVE FUN!

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Noteworthy Ukulele Players
(surprised at some of these names?)

George Harrison
Tiny Tim
Bill Tapia
Jake Shimabukuro
Benny Chong
Ohta San
Lyle Ritz
James Hill
Troy Fernandez
Abe Lagrimas
Byron Yasui
Bryan Tolentino
William H Macy
Greg Hawkes
Johnny Winter
Counting Beats

If you can’t count “them”, how can you keep “it”? Whether you’re playing solo, or in a group, a strong sense of timing and rhythm is of the utmost importance.

The most common time signature is 4/4 time which means that in a given song or piece of music there is an underlying pulse of four strong beats. In fact, 4/4 is so common, it’s also known as “Common Time” and is often represented on a sheet of music with the letter “C”.

Don’t worry - just because you didn’t know the terminology doesn’t mean you weren’t feeling it all along. Notice how you tend to tap your foot on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4 naturally when listening to a catchy song on the radio?

Ever been to a concert or event where they want to fire up the crowd by getting them to clap their hands together? You’ll know what I’m talking about if you’ve ever attended a Jewish wedding or seen the scene from the movie “The Deer Hunter”.

Let’s apply counting beats in common time as it relates to playing the ukulele.

Start with the C chord. Stick out your index finger like a record player stylus, strum across the strings down toward the ground and count “ONE”. Now move your hand across the strings toward the ceiling and say “AND”.

On the next downward strum count “TWO”, followed by an “AND” on the way back up. Repeat with “THREE AND FOUR AND” for one full measure (phrase) of 4/4 time. Be sure to give equal volume to both up and downstrokes. Yes, upstrokes feel a little weird at first but you’ll get used to it quickly. Consistent practice is key.

You’ll see quicker results when you practice strumming very robotically at first, with a certain emotional detachment. In a way, when we practice, we should “behave and feel like scientists, observing, dispassionately, the results of our experiments.”

*On Practising by Ricardo Iznaola

Other beat patterns

4/4 may be most recognizable to us but 3, 5 and even 7 beats in a measure are not uncommon. Here are some well-known examples:

Three Beats
Happy Birthday
Star Spangled Banner
Amazing Grace
Edelweiss
Rainbow Connection
Sweet Baby James (James Taylor)

Five Beats
Mission Impossible
Take Five (Dave Brubeck)
Everything’s Alright (From Jesus Christ Superstar)

Seven Beats
Solsbury Hill (Peter Gabriel)
Money (Pink Floyd)

Count out loud while you are practicing strumming. If you’ve been having a hard time coordinating singing and strumming, this will help you immensely.

“It takes a lot of devotion and work, or maybe I should say play, ‘cause if you love it, that’s what it amounts to. I haven’t found any shortcuts, and I’ve been looking for a long time.” — Chet Atkins
Swing vs Straight-style Strumming

Here are some well-known examples of songs in both styles:

Swing
Little Grass Shack
Tiny Bubbles
In The Mood
All Of Me
Pearly Shells
Love Me Do
Eight Days A Week
Can’t Buy Me Love
Five Foot Two
New York, New York
Bye Bye Love

Straight/“Rock”
Twist & Shout
La Bamba
Brown-eyed Girl
Under The Boardwalk
I Wanna Hold Your Hand
Rock You Like A Hurricane
(Just checking to see if you’re paying attention)

Swing strumming

Probably the most natural thing to do when one picks up the ukulele for the first time. This style of strumming swings - ala Tiny Tim, Count Basie big band - with the up a little softer than the down - ka-CHUNK ka-CHUNK ka-CHUNK. Think tropical breezes, sipping a drink, relaxing on a hammock under a palm tree...ahhhhh.....

See the sidebar on the left for some very familiar examples of this style.

Straight/“Rock and Roll” Strumming

I call this the rock strum because so many of the songs people love to play on the ukulele are simply adaptations of popular rock and pop songs originally written for guitar, such as “By Bye Love”, “Under The Boardwalk”, etc. Notice how these songs do not fit the image of a big band performing them alongside tunes like “Unforgettable” or “Fly Me To The Moon?

In this style of strumming we give equal volume and conviction to every beat - both up and down strums - with the consistency of a metronome. Of course, rarely will we play a song the whole way through like this and that’s where the magic of Ghost Strokes - the topic on the next page - comes in!

Visit www.UkuleleWebsite.com for a complete listing of products, including the video companion to this lesson. Plus:

- Advanced Strumming Techniques
- Create complete harmony/melody ukulele solos!
- A super-easy method to learn chords & keys
Strumming Variations

Using straight-style strumming, practice ghost strokes to get the familiar sounds of these well-known tunes (x = ghost stroke)

Blowin’ In The Wind (Bob Dylan)
1 x 2 x 3 & 4 &

Leather and Lace (Stevie Nicks)
1 x 2 x x & 4 &

Best Of My Love (Eagles)
1 & 2 & x & x x

Angel Mine (Cowboy Junkies)
1 x 2 & x & 4 &

Sister Golden Hair (America)
1 x 2 x 3 & 4 &
x & 2 x x & 4 &

“Ghost Strokes”

Here is where it gets fun! This is probably the single most important lesson you’ll ever learn on the subject of strumming and it will work equally well for both swing and straight “rock” styles and can be easily adapted to guitar and mandolin as well.

Ghost Strokes is a term originally used by drummers but I find it to be a perfect way to describe what one needs to do to emulate any strum while maintaining a strong sense of rhythm and pulse regardless of whether the tempo is slow or fast.

A ghost stroke can fall on either a downbeat or an upbeat and a variation/combination of both will produce familiar sounding grooves (see sidebar on the left).

Start with a repeating pattern of strumming all beats: 1& 2 & 3 & 4 &. Now replace all the “&”’s with a silent upstroke, completely missing the strings but moving your hand as if you were strumming them. If you had a volume control and it were turned off, people watching your strumming hand would not know that you were not producing a sound on those upstrokes. If you then turned the volume up, listeners would hear just 1, 2, 3, 4, like the beginning of “Benny and the Jets” (G chord) or “Sandman” by America (Em chord).

Try one of the patterns in the left sidebar.
(Note: the “Rock/Folk” pattern is one of the most prolific strum patterns out there)
Once you’ve played one a couple times, stop counting and focus on the sound itself as you assign the movement to muscle memory.
Muscle memory is important - at some point you have to stop thinking and start feeling.

The fun part comes from creating your own patterns as you practice omitting different beats at random and replacing them with ghost strokes. Sit down with your uke and play whatever comes to mind - you’re bound to stumble across a strumming pattern for that favorite song of yours that you’d been trying to figure out for the longest time.

Combining different strum patterns with different chord progressions such as C-G7-C, G-C-D7-G, F-Dm-Gm-C7-F, etc. will help keep things interesting and make it even easier to “discover” songs.

Check out the video companion to this report if you need even more clarity.

Several other strumming secrets will help you recreate the sounds you hear and the songs you love - see Report #5 for advanced techniques such as left hand muting and slapping. Feel free to contact me with any questions or feedback.

Enjoy!
- Mitch Chang
Take Your Skills To The Next Level!

The “Big Three” Chords: why you NEED to know them!

How would you like to instantly learn dozens - even hundreds of songs? Sound too good to be true? Well, the truth is that most any song can be boiled down to these “Big Three” chords. This is a must-know inside scoop that will have you slapping yourself upside the head saying, “After all these years...I never noticed that!” and “How come no one ever taught me this before?”

Here’s what you’ll learn in this lesson:

• How to instantly identify chord changes  
• How to easily and instantly transpose a given chord progression into your preferred key

DOWNLOAD THIS LESSON

The secret to instantly increasing your chord vocabulary

Did you know that it takes just one finger and the tiny bit of music theory in this lesson to increase your chord knowledge tenfold? Build upon the basic chord shapes you already know and add interest and spice to your playing. Breathe new life into those tired old songs you’ve been playing at the club, impress the other members - and have more fun!

Here’s what you’ll learn in this lesson:

• How to play fun, jazzy sounding licks...without knowing a “lick” of music theory!  
• How to finally let your imagination and true inner creativity come shining through

DOWNLOAD THIS LESSON

Improvising: How to hit the right note every time and sound like a pro!

Does the idea of improvising freak you out? Wish you could throw out some jazzy licks of your own once in a while instead of just strumming through the whole darn song? Want to be able to hang with the others at the jam session and actually contribute something? This lesson will fool your friends into thinking you’ve been doing this for years!

Here’s what you’ll learn in this lesson:

• How to play fun, jazzy sounding licks...without knowing a “lick” of music theory!  
• How to finally let your imagination and true inner creativity come shining through

DOWNLOAD THIS LESSON

Additional Resources

- Treasury of Ukulele Chords (Roy Sakuma)  
- The Ukulele - A Visual History (Jim Beloff)  
- Zen Guitar (Philip Toshio Sudo)

Kamaka Ukulele  
www.kamakahawaii.com

Koaloha Ukulele  
www.koaloha.com

Nalu Ukulele  
www.naluukulele.com

La Bella Strings  
www.labella.com

Lanikai Ukulele  
www.lanikaiukes.com

Visit www.UkuleleWebsite.com for a complete listing of products, including the video companion to this lesson

“Thanks a lot for this explanation. You gave me the keys to being able to figure out strumming patterns with much more accuracy”

“Thank you for being blessed with a talent for clear explanation and teaching.”

About Mitch Chang

A graduate of the University of Hawaii music program, Mitch has been teaching ukulele since 1994. A former student of legendary jazz ukulele musician Bill Tapia, Mitch’s ability to present clear, easy-to-understand lessons have earned him consistent praise and a loyal following.

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