

Jazzing Up Your Rock Playing part 2 - Rhythm

by [Dennis Winge](#)

In the Western world, there is perhaps no other genre of music that is as rhythmically adventurous as jazz. If you are a rock musician looking to increase your rhythmic vocabulary, you can look to jazz for some easy-to-use ideas. The 3 we will focus on here are: expansion, syncopation, and resolution.

I. Expansion

In very broad terms, the rock genre is more hard-driving than jazz. Rock's advantage is that the rhythms are immediately felt, so they are compelling. The disadvantage is, though, that they are generally less expansive. Can you have your cake and eat it too? Of course you can!

For every example that follows we are going to take a simple Dm vamp at a medium tempo. Many rock and blues guitarists, without even being consciously aware of it, will rely heavily on eighth note triplets, as played in example A, also demonstrated in [the video that goes with this article](#).

Example A – Eighth-note triplets

The image shows musical notation for Example A. The top staff is a treble clef in 4/4 time, featuring a sequence of eighth-note triplets: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, F4, E4, D4. The bottom staff is guitar tablature with fret numbers: 5 8 6 8 5 8 6 7 5.

Playing in this rhythm reminds me of the 'drums/ space' section of most Grateful Dead concerts. It's a wonderful feel because it has an underlying 6/8 to the 4/4 as in Afro-Cuban music. Jazz players, by contrast, can dip into this feel as well as many others, and often switch between them more fluidly.

Without going into specific examples in tablature, let's just focus on the number of notes per bar that are commonly played. (For the purposes of getting to the good stuff quickly we will ignore whole and half notes which generally are easily grasped and don't need analysis here, and we will also ignore half note triplets, as those are less common and could take a whole article to explain.) Here they are:

Rhythmic Value	Beats Per Bar
Quarter-notes	4
Quarter-note triplet	6
Eighth-notes	8
Eighth-note triplets	12
Sixteenth notes	16

Many guitarists in general (not just rock guitarists) aren't comfortable with certain rhythmic feels. Some will come naturally and others take practice. To see which ones you are less

comfortable with, simply practice playing different number of notes per bar as in the example B in the video.

Example B – common rhythmic feels in 4/4

Many of my students can play these rhythms fine, but when I ask them to toggle between two of them, they can't always do it. If you are having trouble going from one type of rhythm to the next, here's what I suggest: create a phrase that starts on beat 1 and ends on either 2 or beat 3, according to the following table. The number of notes in the phrase dictates the rhythm that will ensue.

Beats Per Bar	Notes in Phrase	Ending Beat
4	2	2
6	4	3
8	3	2
12	4	2
16	5	2

This might look confusing but just look at example C in the video.

Example C – using different number of notes to propel you into the feeling of the different rhythms.

II. Syncopation

Syncopation is simply any rhythm that could be considered unexpected. A common way to achieve this is by playing on the 'off-beats.' Notice that so far we haven't talked at all about rests. Once you are feeling one of the specific rhythms above, take time to allow space within it by using the equivalent rests as in example D.

Example D – Using rests with each rhythm.

Listen to the effect that even notes as slow as quarter notes get when they are displaced by rests in random places. It can sometimes be harder to introduce rests into your lines than attacks because the rests force you to feel beats internally. If you can learn to use rests and attacks with equal proficiency, you have really mastered that particular rhythmic feel.

III. Anticipation and Delayed Resolution

Anticipation means resolving early and delayed resolution of course means making the listener wait. These are used extensively in jazz and can easily be incorporated by rock guitarists to great effect. Listen to Example E for a demonstration of anticipation and notice the emotional effect it has. The rhythm gets propelled forward.

Example E - Anticipation

By contrast, delayed resolution can also be used to enhance improvised or written music because it creates tension by not resolving as expected and then relaxes the listener when it does. Example F demonstrates this.

Example F – Delayed Resolution.

There are a great many more rhythmic possibilities to explore, and we are just scratching the surface here. So have fun and start exploring those rhythms. Always remember in order to really 'understand' a certain rhythm, you have to feel it. There are only 12 notes so those we can think about with our brain. But there are millions of rhythms and your brain might not be able to compute them but your body will definitely be able to feel them.

Have fun! :)