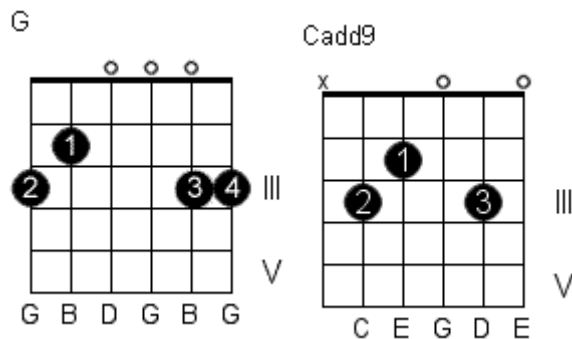


Beat-By-Beat Lesson Studies

This article is aimed at the beginner, but experienced guitarists may also not have thought about some of the things included here. There are a few different things to look for in making chord changes that will make your changes quicker.

First thing to point out is that most guitarists, especially beginning guitarists, use way too much pressure when they play. The idea is to play where you're so relaxed you could be asleep. Watch out for strain in the muscles in your shoulders or face. If these muscles are tense, then it will be impossible to be relaxed while playing. The way you sit and hold the guitar can greatly affect your playing. The reason I mention this first is because the tighter your muscles are, the slower they move. So if you've not thought about the pressure you use, you should give it a shot.

Second thing to look at is the fingers that you use in making the chord. Take the G and Cadd9 chord for example.

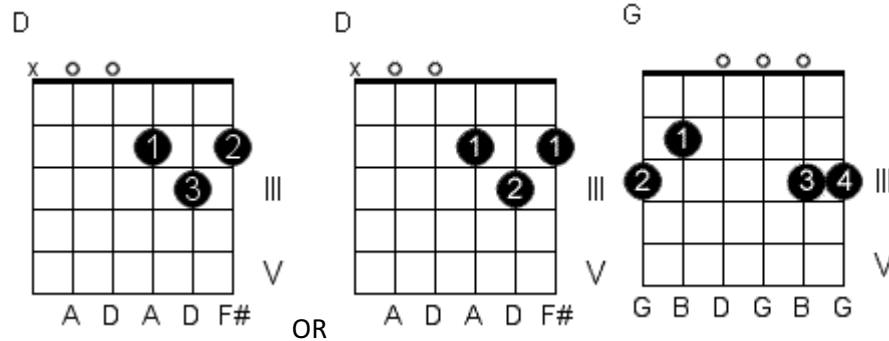


In both of these chords you play the B strings at the 3rd fret. So you should keep these fingers in place while you change the other two fingers.

Another thing to note is you can simply move your 1st and 2nd fingers back and forth between the two chords. You are focusing on muscle memory here, and not the sound. Once you feel your fingers are moving back and forth between the two strings comfortably you can start to actually play the chord so you can make sure your changes sound decent.

Any fingers that have to move when changing chords should be lifted up off the strings at the same time. Many people will lift one finger up at a time and, change one finger at a time. But this is a big no no, unless you are attempting a chord-based hammer on or pull off. When simply strumming, you want to try your best for all fingers to move at the same time when applicable.

Let's pretend we are going to practice the change from a D chord to a G chord.



Note: Take a look at BOTH of the D chord versions I show, which are noted by the 'or' text. I have found over the years that while the D chord is a basic chord, sometimes it is quite difficult to get your fingers to cooperate, so I'm offering a quick fix solution. Take a look at the fingering option and you'll see that the second chord version of the D chord is MUCH easier to play. However, you cannot ALWAYS use this version if you are tackling more difficult chord changes, but with our current studies you almost always can.

While a change from D to G isn't similar, you can still find a common ground to help you ease the change. If you look there are a few open strings. The cool thing here is that you can completely eliminate any need to focus on these open strings.

- The D chord only REQUIRES the notes A, D, and F#. Obviously the FRETTED notes are the only important notes.
- The G chord only REQUIRES the notes G, B, and D. Obviously the FRETTED notes are the only important notes, but we MUST have the D note in order for this chord to be considered a 'triad' (three notes), which is another name for a chord.

What does this have to do with changing chords? A lot actually. The key to learning how to CHANGE chords is first knowing what is required of you to do so. Stick to the NECESSARY notes and then add the secondary notes (which produce more flavor) once you've gotten the basics down.

Another important part of changing chords is how you take your fingers off the fretboard. Most players think of it like they are "lifting" their fingers up. But what you actually want to do is first "relax" your fingers. From here you very gently remove your fingers from the fretboard. Doing it this way does many different things for you. First, if you lift your fingers up from the fretboard, this makes your fingers move much further from the neck than you need. That wastes time. Also by relaxing your hand each time you move them, you can play longer without getting tired. You can also stretch your fingers further and move your fingers quicker when they're relaxed.

Also, when starting to play chords I would pluck each note in the chord individually as opposed to strumming them. That way you can hear if each note is sounding good or if you need to fix the chord in some way. You may not hear all the little mistakes if you play all the notes at once.

When you have a challenge with a certain move, try to find ways to break it down into the smallest little parts. By practicing those little parts instead of the entire move as a whole, you can get really super focused practice. I already mentioned this before, but don't feel like you have to actually play the chord every time. Give these ideas a try and see if it helps in your practice.

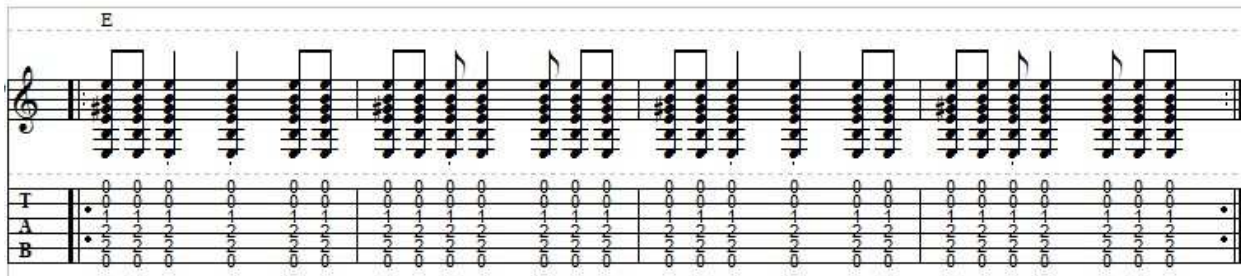
Counting The Beats

There are NUMEROUS ways to do this, and I touch base on it during the strumming exercises, but I want to give you a few options.

The traditional method:

Technical is not my thing, but I do believe I need to explain WHY I don't like it – so, here it goes.

When you count beats, you are counting the beats within each MEASURE. A measure is divided by a vertical line. A series of measures on ONE full line is considered a bar, like this:



There are four measures here to one entire bar.

Since you count the beats within each measure (even though these are all the same) you would have a total of 6 beats in each measure. Note values here are NOT important. Right now we are just looking at the total SUM of the beats in each measure.

- Let's say you have **one whole note**. The chord that is playing the whole note will only ring out ONE time during ONE measure, and will be on the '1.'
- Let's say you have **two half notes**. The chord that is playing the two half notes will only ring out TWO times during ONE measure, and will be on the '1' and the '3.'
- Let's say you have **four quarter notes**. The chord that is playing the four quarter notes will only ring out FOUR times during ONE measure, and will be on the '1, 2, 3, 4'.
- Let's say you have **eight eighth notes**. The chord that is playing the eight eighth notes will only ring out EIGHT times during ONE measure, and will be on the '1, 2, 3, 4'.

BUT WAIT! That can't be right can it? That would mean the eighth notes receive the same value as the quarter notes! Here's where the whole counting comes in.

Before you reach the eighth notes everything was pretty easy. Now that we're at the eighth notes we can't just count 1, 2, 3, 4 anymore. Just like with the 12 notes in music (as in: A, A#/Bb, B, C, C#/Db etc.) there are spaces between these numbers. This is when learning to count the beats helps.

When counting eighth notes, we assign an additional beat instead of just 1, 2, 3, 4. We will insert the "and" which can look like an "&" or a "+" or it could actually say "and". However, WHEN do you actually see this in anything other than strumming diagrams? Never. Really – never.

BUT, if you want to learn the traditional method, here it is for the eighth notes:

V V V V V V V V
1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

The "V" is just a strum, so it doesn't matter if it is up or down. It's for illustration purposes.

So, really all you've done is add the 'and' to the strumming.

What about the whole "1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a" thing going on?

This has to do with playing at higher numbered note values. I explain what that means in the exercises on the DVD, but really all these do is provide you a placeholder template for the overall counting so that you don't get lost. However, my method is MUCH easier (to me at least).

My method:

I WILL warn you – this is NOT technically correct, but it's never hurt me in the past with either playing guitar OR playing drums, and I don't foresee it hurting anything in the future.

I choose to make it super simple. I ONLY count 1, 2, 3, 4 over and over (and over) because once you understand the note values and how they add, subtract, multiply, and divide you really don't need to count them out using all the "e" or the "+" or the "a" tongue twisters. I find myself focusing too much on SAYING these letters and not where you change chords.

The easiest way to think of chord changes is this:

USUALLY a chord change comes in at the END of every pattern. You'll see with the strumming exercises that I changed chords after every 'template pattern' and this was always the case. It's almost a guarantee when playing songs. There is a firm structure within a song and you hear it immediately.

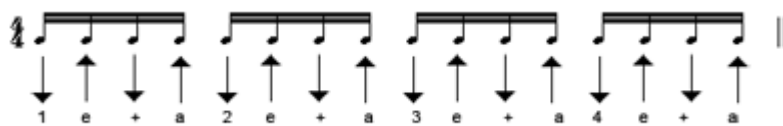
So, the REAL trick is learning how to change chords WITHIN the strumming pattern. You may recall with the exercises that each chord change came in at the end of each pattern. Unless you are working with some serious heavy metal that does NOT create any down-up or up-down pattern (such as all downstrokes – say, muted) then the easiest way to change chords is by LIFTING ALL fingers off the fretboard at the end of each pattern. This allows you a second or so to adjust your fingers before the next chord. The key here is to make sure you are only striking the strings in which the PREVIOUS chord

played. In a change from D to G it's super easy because you could strike virtually all of the higher strings as open notes when you change from the D to G at the end of a pattern.

For example:

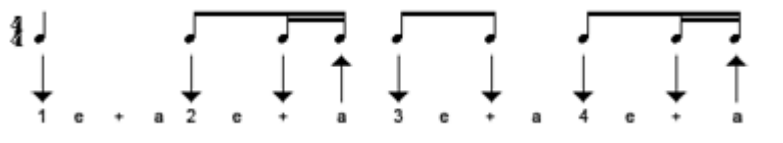
Example 1 (this is also strumming exercise 5):

This pattern is all 16th notes, so at the end of the LAST TWO strums (one down and one up) you can lift your fingers off and change to another chord. As long as you do NOT strike the upcoming chord until the value has been reached (two strums based on the tempo and note value shown here) then you will automatically be ready for the pattern repeat.



Example 2 (this is also strumming exercise 14):

What about this example? The same applies. The last two strums (one down and one up) are 16th notes as well, even though there are multiple values preceding them. Count the two strums as open strums WHILE you prepare for the next chord change.

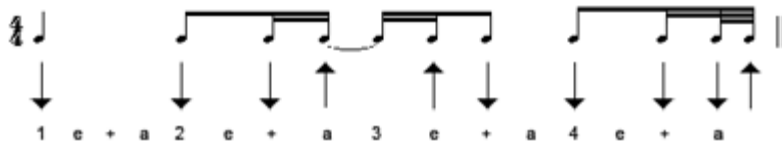


Example 3 (this is also strumming exercise 1):



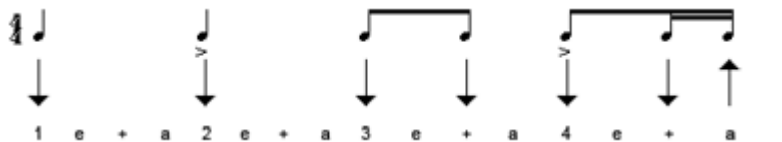
Just to touch base, this exercise is just a whole note that plays through a 1, 2, 3, 4 progression. You have PLENTY of time to get to the next chord. No matter what the tempo you can just strike the chord on the "1" and count "2, 3, 4" (or "2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a"....). Because you have ample time to change here this should be very easy, but I still wanted to touch base on it.

Example 4 (this is also strumming exercise 17):



This is a tricky one because the change at the very end of the progression must be thought of MUCH faster (32nd notes) – but it still applies. The only problem you will face here is that more than likely your brain (mine included) won't comprehend this quick change preparation. How do we fix it? Well, since the notes come SO fast, we can then look back and what comes before it. Hmm...a 16th note. Back to what I was discussing earlier! SINCE the 32nd note strums come so fast odds are you'll barely hear the actual chord. Instead you'll hear the 16th note much more obvious PRIOR to the 32nd note strums. So, even though you only have ONE chance (16th note) to get prepared for the change, you can still use the 16th note to prepare. While you DO NOT mute the 32nd notes in this example, the strumming will be so fast that odds are you won't even hear an actual chord ring out (32nd notes are pretty rare in strumming really) so just stick with using that last 16th note to prepare for the change. Again – since this is very rare you can practice this at your leisure to really enhance your overall playing. I still wanted to touch base on it.

Example 5 (this is also strumming exercise 7):



Do accents make a difference? Sometimes they do. In this case we have an accent on the "4" followed by two 16th notes. Here you MUST accent the "4" no matter what. The preparation for the change comes on the two 16th notes. BUT – what if these two 16th notes were 32nd notes? Remember I mentioned to revert to the notes preceding the 32nd notes, so if the 8th note you see above (which is accented) was instead a 16th note, you'd have to change on THAT note – but with open strings during the transition you would no longer have an accent because the chord wouldn't ring out. Hmm...what to do? Here is where you would have to alter the strumming pattern – and this is another reason I don't like using strumming patterns for leisure practice. They aren't always guaranteed because YOUR ability isn't reflected in the same way. If you can't play the accent and then switch chords – don't do it. The accent is never THAT noticeable, so why screw up an entire song just for one little accent. Remember I always preach that I'd rather you get THROUGH a song instead of stop it halfway through for something that isn't necessary. Just go with the flow! (And remember that there are ALWAYS exceptions to each and every rule you'll ever learn on progressive guitar studies.)

This might seem very basic, but it does take a bit of time to get down. However, I think you'll find that it will be MUCH easier simply counting the strums/beats when changing chords by simply lifting your fingers off and simultaneously physically/mentally preparing for the upcoming chord. It will work for any chord, any progression, and will save you HEAPS of time in trying to change chords using the traditional method.

One last note: Any rests or dotted notes are treated the same way in each of these exercises because they will either represent the same value as the note OR they will be halved/doubled.

If you have any questions about this feel free to let me know at nathan@ezstrummer.com.