

Lesson 5

Play with Precision

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LESSON 5:

PLAY WITH PRECISION

MUSIC THEORY

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

As I mentioned earlier, it is essential to be able to play beats that are evenly spaced. Your beats have to be crisp and precise in order for your playing to sound good.

This quality of precision timing is one of the marks of a professional musician. You got a taste of that in the exercises you just did, where you practised playing at the same time as the ticks of the metronome.

In this lesson, we're going to take your timing up to a whole new level of precision.

Why learn to play with precise timing?

You may not always want to play with a mechanically precise beat. There are types of music where variations in speed are part of what makes the music interesting and beautiful. So, you ask, why would I want to use a machine to learn to play with mechanically precise timing?

The answer is, when you play music, you want to have the *choice* of playing precisely in time or varying the time. You should have the *ability* to do both (playing in time or varying), so you can *choose* when to play in time and when to vary the time.

You may sometimes want to vary your speed intentionally. But that is very different from varying your speed because you never learned to play in time!

So what we need is to learn to play precisely on the beat for now. Later you can vary the timing artistically as you are playing, whenever you want to.

PRACTICAL

BUILD YOUR SKILL

Exercise 1:

Tap along with 3 ticks

You tapped along with the ticks in the last lesson, when you were getting to know your metronome. Now we're going to take your sense of timing up to a new level.

Here's what you do:

METRONOME  = 80

1. **Listen to a few ticks.** Listen to a few ticks of the metronome, to get a feel for the beat.
2. **Tap with 3 ticks.** Tap on a table (or something similar) 3 times, at the same time as 3 of the ticks.
3. **Listen to 1 tick.** Listen to 1 tick without tapping.
4. Tap with 3 ticks.
5. Listen to 1 tick.
6. **Repeat.** Keep repeating the pattern of tapping along with 3 ticks and listening to 1 tick. So the whole procedure is like this:

So you are learning a new skill, and that can take some work. I just want you to know that with these exercises you are working at developing a skill possessed by top musicians, that is not known to the rest of mankind.

If you feel you're spending too long on this, take it to a level you're satisfied with and move on to the next exercises. You can always come back to this one later if you feel it would be useful. ■

Exercise 2: **Play along with 3 ticks**

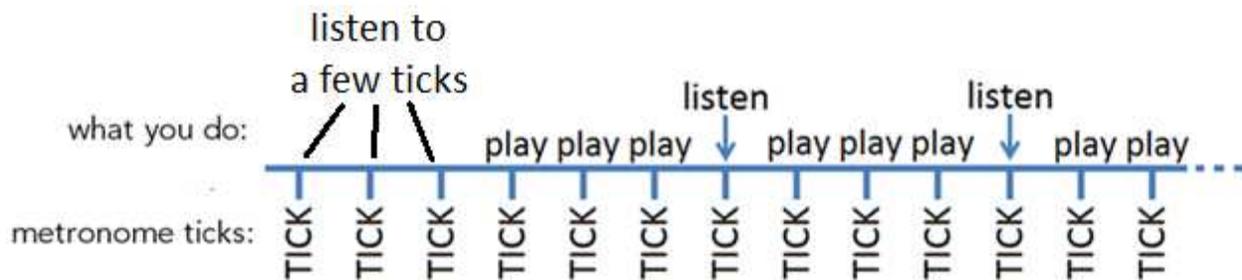
This is similar to the previous exercise, except you will play your keyboard instead of tapping on a table.

Here's what you do:

METRONOME  = 80

1. **Listen to a few ticks.** Listen to a few ticks, to get a feel for the beat.
2. **Play with 3 ticks.** Play middle C on your keyboard 3 times, at the same time as 3 ticks of the metronome. Play with a light jabbing motion, rapidly down and up, but not too forcefully. That way, the note will sound for a very short time. The reason for playing a short note is that it lets you hear how accurately you are matching the ticks.
3. **Listen to 1 tick.** Listen to 1 tick without playing.
4. Play with 3 ticks.
5. Listen to 1 tick.

6. **Repeat.** Keep repeating the pattern of playing along with 3 ticks and listening to 1 tick. So the whole procedure is like this:



7. **Listen and evaluate.** As you are playing, listen and evaluate how accurately you are playing with the ticks:
- If you play a bit too early, you'll hear 'note-tick'.
 - If you play a bit too late, you'll hear 'tick-note'.
 - If you play at precisely the right time, the tick will seem to disappear
8. **Go back to tapping if needed.** If you're finding this difficult, try tapping on the table for a while, and then come back to playing the note on the keyboard.
9. **Consistency.** Continue this exercise until you are consistently playing precisely with the ticks.

Tip: If you find you keep drifting apart from the ticks, try to spot the first note which goes adrift. For example, it may be the last of the 3 notes that goes off. Play the exercise again, correcting the timing of that one note.

Chat with David

Hearing your metronome clearly



Make sure you can hear your metronome clearly.

You'll be using your metronome a lot in **Book 3**, and sometimes you'll be playing or counting aloud along with the ticking. It's difficult to do that if your metronome is drowned out by your playing or counting.

If you're having trouble hearing the ticks, some possible solutions are:

- Turn up the volume of the metronome if it has a volume control.
- Move the metronome closer to your ear. You might need to find a stand or table to put it on.
- Some electronic metronomes have a socket so you can plug in an earphone or headset. That can also work if you're using a metronome app on your cell phone or computer.
- Turn down the volume of your keyboard while playing, or speak quietly under your breath while counting.
- Find a louder metronome. ■

Exercise 3:

Tap along with 5 ticks

Now we're going to increase the number of ticks from 3 to 5.

9. **Consistency.** Continue this exercise until you are consistently playing precisely with the ticks.

Well done! Don't underestimate the importance of the new skill you've just developed. Playing precisely in time is an essential part of being a real musician.

Exercise 5:

Tell the metronome who's boss

You're probably realizing by now that the metronome is a useful tool. But it isn't your master! You are in charge. You are using it because it helps you. But you can ignore it any time you want to.

Here's a funny exercise to make that clear.

METRONOME  = 80

1. **Play on each tick.** Pick any note on your keyboard, and start playing it in time with the metronome. Do that now.
2. **Play more slowly.** After you've done that a few times, decide you really want to play more slowly. Leave the metronome ticking at the original speed, but ignore it and play more slowly than the ticking. Do that now.
3. **Play on each tick.** Now decide you want to follow the metronome again, and play in time with it.
4. **Play faster.** Decide you now want to play faster. Still leave the metronome ticking at the same original speed, but ignore it and play faster than the ticking.