

# Rhythm Figures

by John Collins

*Rhythm figures* (or “rhythm slashes,” as they’re sometimes called) are written like ordinary musical notes, except that they have a slash ( / ) instead of a circle ( ◡ ) at the end of the stem. Also, instead of representing musical notes, they represent chords. Rhythm figures have the same time values as the musical notes that they resemble:

The rhythm figure , like an eighth note, , is equal to half a beat.

The rhythm figure , like a quarter note, , is equal to one beat.

The rhythm figure , like a half note, , is equal to two beats.

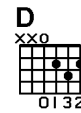
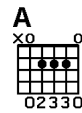
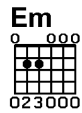
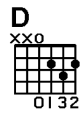
The rhythm figure , like a whole note, , is equal to four beats.

You don’t have to be able to read music in order to be able to read and understand rhythm figures. To get a feel for their use, try out the exercises that follow.

In the first exercise, each of the rhythm figures represents one full strum of the chord. The chord is repeated until it changes to a different chord above the figures. In this example, each slash is equal to one beat. Count off to yourself “1...2...3...4, 1...2...3...4,” and so on, with each rhythm slash (and the chord it represents) being given one beat (and one strum). The downstroke sign ( ▮ ) means that you should use a downstroke of the pick (or of your strumming hand) to play the chords. Now, playing at a slow and steady tempo, try the exercise:



In the second exercise, there are quarter slashes of one beat each (┘) mixed with eighth slashes of half a beat each (┘┘). Eighth slashes can either be written separately (┘┘), or can be beamed together (┘┘), it's the same thing. Each of these eighth slashes is equal to one half of a beat. So two of these fit within the length of a single beat (dividing the beat into two equal halves). In the example below, the first of the two beamed eighths is played with a downstroke of the pick (▣), and the second is played with an upstroke (∨). Remember to count off the time as you go (1...2...3...4, 1...2...3...4), and that two eighths fit within one beat. Try it:



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