

Tips for writing rhythms that work well

Rhythms generally work well by being mostly quite simple, but complex enough to be interesting.

Simplicity can be achieved by keeping a rhythm to a regular phrase-length (four bars, for example), being repetitive, only including regular subdivisions of the beat, and containing syncopation sparingly.

Complexity comes from making additions (extra notes and parts, variation of tone and dynamic) to a relatively basic foundation. The sky's the limit; it will work, as long as there's something simple going on either simultaneously or consecutively to be related back to. Use irregular subdivisions of the beat, syncopation, unpredictable accentuation, changes in metre and anything that's unusual or surprising (creatively define yourself as a unique individual).

Repetition is necessary to achieve music that is recognisable to an audience as sensical (meaningful, as opposed to pointless chaos), but contrast between order and apparent nonsense can be very effective.

- 1.** For the first bar of your rhythm:
From the patterns that are possible within one beat, choose one for each beat.
- 2.** For the second bar of your rhythm:
Repeat the first bar, but change whatever you had in the last one or two beats to something (almost anything) else.
- 3.** For the third and fourth bar of your rhythm:
Repeat the first and second bars, possibly with something different again in the last one or two beats of the second bar. Your first phrase is complete.
- 4.** For the next phrase:
Repeat steps 1, 2, and 3, making something that will either expand on or contrast with the previous phrase.
- 5.** For any subsequent phrases:
Either repeat step 4, repeat a previous phrase, or derive a variation of a previous phrase.
- 6.** For other parts intended to occur simultaneously:
Write these to "fit in" with already existing parts. Where existing parts have dense activity (a lot going on), compose a sparse rhythm, and vice versa; where existing parts have sparse activity (not much going on), compose a dense rhythm. Otherwise, make decisions about where you want parts to sound together (play the same thing), and where you want them to sound opposite.