

# Metronome and Timing Video Lessons

Text and Tablature  
Workbook  
by  
Ross Nickerson

## Timing Explanation

Timing when playing the banjo is very important. It can be difficult to learn and difficult to teach. When listening to the banjo most people hear many notes and might consider them all to be part of the melody. However, this is not necessarily the case. It would be better for you as a student to view your banjo playing in this way. As you pick the banjo you are creating a rhythm with your picking consisting of quarter and eighth notes. Within the constant and consistent rhythm that you are producing your job is to accent melody notes or notes that are to stand out and be heard more clearly. Accenting notes usually means hitting them harder than the others. Another way you can accent a melody note is by playing that note as a quarter note within your stream of eighth notes which will bring the note out to the listener also.

Learning and understanding timing can be difficult or intimidating as I mentioned in the above paragraph. However, if you take some time at the beginning to understand and realize its importance and value you will reap the rewards later. The reason most students have trouble with it is because they are anxious to let the fingers fly and just skip over the timing lessons. It is not hard to learn if you take the time.

When the timing is right not only will the listener enjoy it more but it will be much more satisfying to you. Most people will notice a rhythm mistake long before they will notice that you've played the second fret instead of the third. In other words, place a lot of value on your timing accuracy in the early stages. Everyone can miss a fret or string but if you don't develop a sense of timing everything played out of time will be wrong regardless if you are playing the right fret or string.

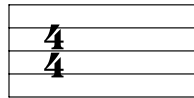
One thing to your advantage when learning and playing the banjo is you will only be playing quarter and eighth notes. This is unlike learning many other instruments that would require you to learn to count many varieties of notes. The reason for this is the banjo is limited on how long it can sustain (hold) a note, much like a drum.

On the next page I will provide some timing examples. Please take the time to tap out these rhythms. I recommend that you emphasize learning them by tapping them out before trying to play them on your banjo.

Listening to the CD carefully and using my suggestions on the next page will help you as well. Good Luck!

*Ross Nickerson*

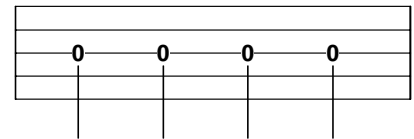
Here is an example of a measure. A measure is a unit of time. Each song you learn will be consisted of a number of measures.



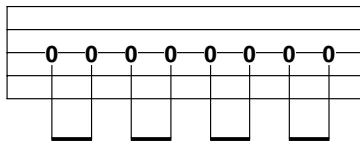
There are four beats in each measure in the songs and exercises we will be learning. That means that any combination of quarter and eighth notes will equal four quarter beats in each measure.

1 2 3 4

This example is a measure with four quarter notes. The stems on quarter notes aren't connected. Try tapping your foot, pencil, or banjo head once for each note and count to four out loud.



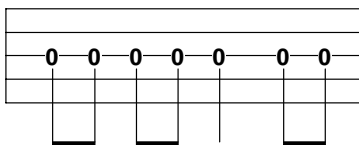
1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +



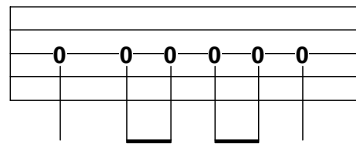
This example is a measure with eight eighth notes, which totals up to four quarter beats. Now, try tapping these notes by counting out loud 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and. When you tap your foot for example, the 1 or the numbered note is the foot going down and the + is the foot coming up. In other words you are fitting a note between each quarter note.

The next three examples are a combination of quarter and eighth notes. Count them out by adding the + beat for the eighth notes, and leaving it out, and resting after the quarter notes.

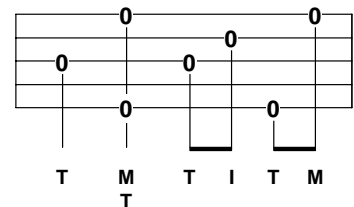
1 + 2 + 3 4 +



1 2 + 3 + 4



1 2 3 + 4 +



## Timing Review

Take some time to review timing before going any further in the book. After you have spent more time on timing and working with the metronome, I highly recommend reviewing to make sure your timing is correct with the rolls we have learned so far.

### Using a Metronome

A metronome may be the single most effective tool when practicing the banjo, but unfortunately, it seems to be one of the least used. One of the reasons is that it's not as easy as it looks, and students become easily discouraged and annoyed with it. The first thing you need to do is find one you like and that works for you. Don't buy the cheapest one unless it does the job. The metronome should be easy to see, hear, and operate. A headphone jack is a good option, too.

### Some Suggestions on Using a Metronome

- Count with the metronome before trying to play along; for example, count out loud the rhythm exercises in this section before trying to play them.
- While counting out loud, tap out the rhythms with a pencil or while tapping your foot.
- As a beginner with a metronome, you can set the speed so it clicks for each eighth note as a way of getting on the horse a little easier. Keep in mind though that the standard way metronome settings are spoken of and listed in books is normally one click or light blink for each quarter beat. Also, often when the tempo is faster, I set it for one click for two quarter beats, which is sometimes referred to as "cut time."
- Start at a slower metronome setting and work your way up in small increments.
- A good starting speed to set the metronome in the beginning would be 80 or 90 when using one click for each quarter note.
- Do the best you can and be patient! Getting even close to correct with the metronome is likely an improvement, and it really only takes a little time and practice.

- Keep in mind that if you feel the metronome is a nuisance or annoying to use, remind yourself that if you are playing out of time, it is like, not playing music at all. Playing without a sense of the beat can be hard to listen to and extremely difficult to follow along with. It's not only worth the time to gain some mastery of rhythm, it's imperative.
- Learn to play these next exercises well and with the metronome, and I flat out guarantee it will help every aspect of your playing, including your overall enjoyment.

## Timing Exercises Using a Metronome

1.      1   2   3 + 4 +

T   M   T   I   T   M

4.      1   2   3   4 +

T   M   T   T   M

7.      1 + 2 + 3   4 +

T   I   M   T   I   T   M

2.      1   2 + 3   4 +

T   T   M   T   T   M

5.      1 + 2 + 3 + 4

T   I   T   M   T   I   T

8.      1   2 + 3 + 4

T   T   I   M   T   M

3.      1 + 2 + 3   4

T   I   M   T   I   T

6.      1 + 2 + 3   4

T   I   M   T   I   M   T

9.      1 + 2 + 3   4

T   I   M   I   T   M   T

The pages in this booklet are excerpts from, *Beginning the Five String Banjo* by Ross Nickerson and *The Banjo Encyclopedia*, "Bluegrass Banjo from A to Z".