

STRUMMING TECHNIQUES & TIPS



What part of the strings do you strum on?

The sweet spot is around where the neck hits the body. (The sweet spot for the larger tenor ukuleles is a little closer to the bridge than this). If you strum too close to the bridge it sounds very tinny (which might be an effect you want sometimes) and the strings have very little give there. If you strum further away from the bridge, up the neck, the body won't resonate as much (again, an effect you may sometimes want).

Fingers and thumbs

There is more than one way to strum. There are different techniques different people use, and different ones that are appropriate for different situations.

- You can strum with one finger, using your nail on the downstroke and the pad of your finger on the upstroke.
- You can also use the nail of your finger on the downstroke and the nail of your thumb on the upstroke. This gives a stronger upstroke, and allows you to use more than one finger on the downstroke, which adds texture.
- You can just use your thumb. This is good when you are doing single downstrokes, say on the first beat of every bar. But if you use just your thumb for down and up strokes, it tends to make the upstroke louder than the downstroke, which is a bit strange.
- Some people prefer to use a pick. If you wish to do this, don't use a guitar pick – they sound too harsh. Ukulele picks are made of felt, not plastic, and work better over the nylon strings.

Strum from the wrist more than the elbow

Almost every beginner strums from the elbow. This results in quite a rigid wrist and usually means that your finger is strumming across the strings horizontally. It's OK, but the horizontal position of the fingers can mean they get caught in the strings. It's better to keep your wrist relaxed, sort of hanging down a little.

Keep Your Strumming Hand Moving

With strumming patterns that miss a strum here and there, don't stop the strumming hand moving completely until it's needed for the next strum. Keep your strumming arm moving, just make contact with the strings (a ghost strum). This keeps you in time better and helps your wrist stay relaxed.

Stay Relaxed

This can be hard especially when you are playing something new or difficult and you are concentrating hard. Watch out for this tensing up, and if it is happening, relax your hands, give them a shake, take a few breaths and try again. You'll notice an immediate difference.

Tap Your Foot

You can get away with a wrong note here and there, a misplaced chord. Break the rhythm and it's hard to recover and a very obvious mistake. Tapping your foot on the down beats, especially the first beat of each bar, will really help you to maintain steady timing.