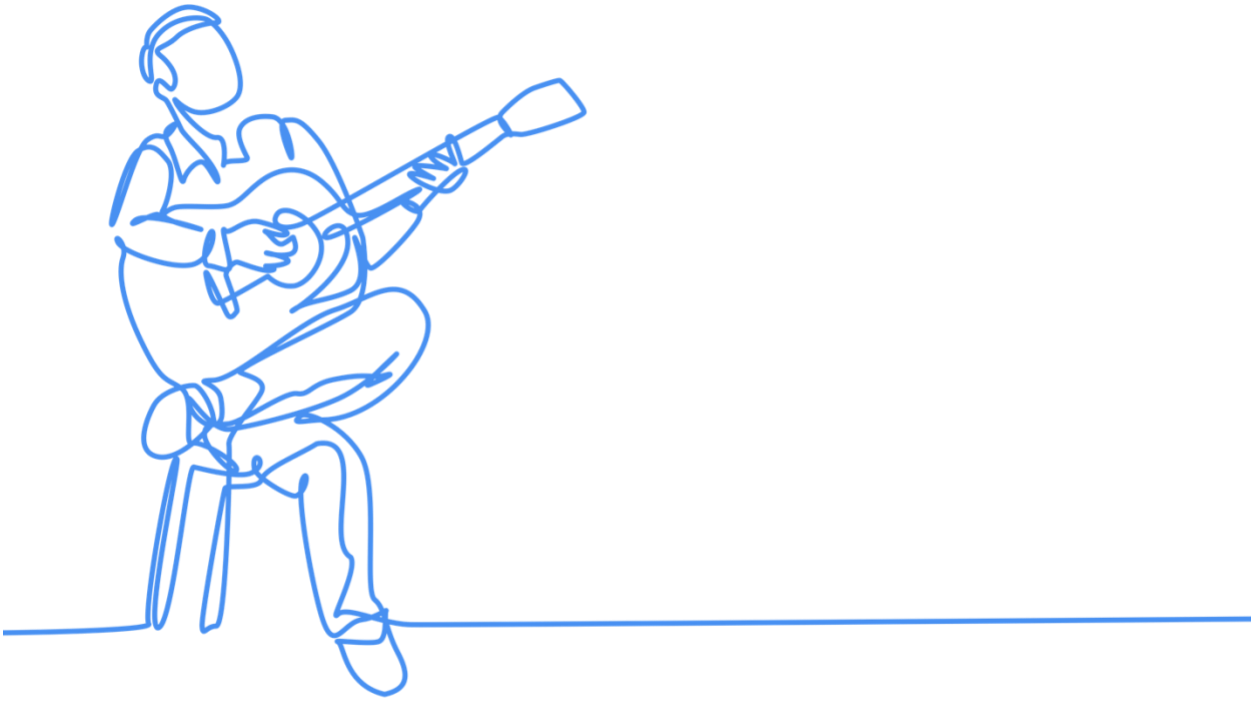
LEARN BLUES FINGERPICKING

INTERMEDIATE COURSE

4.1 Shuffle Blues



Patrick O'Malley

Intro

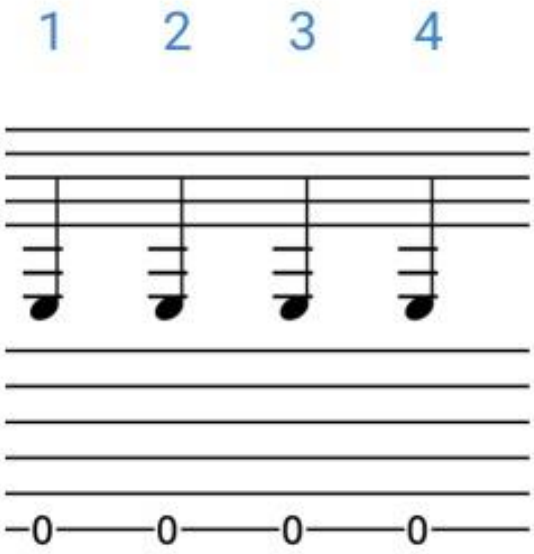
Some Basic Rhythm Theory

Now we're going to learn the shuffle. This is a classic blues sound – check out the backing guitar in this example to get an idea of what we're about to learn.

Let's explain the theory behind the rhythmic beat of the shuffle.

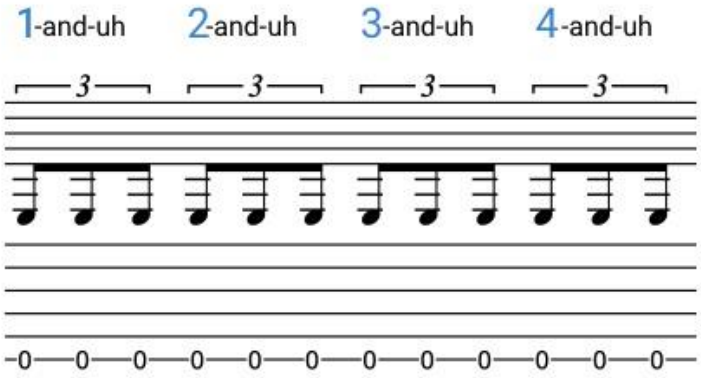
Triplets

Here below we have four notes in a bar – each note is a quarter note and as you can imagine 4 of these quarter notes makes us the entire duration of the bar. We would count this as "1, 2, 3, 4"



And now if we split each of these notes into 3 (i.e. subdivide each of these notes by three), we get triplets as you see below.

We would count this ONE-and-uh, TWO-and-uh, THREE-and-uh, FOUR-and-uh



And let's now only play the first and third notes of each triplet. Another way of explaining this is to not play the second note of each triplet which now show with that rest sign or squiggle.

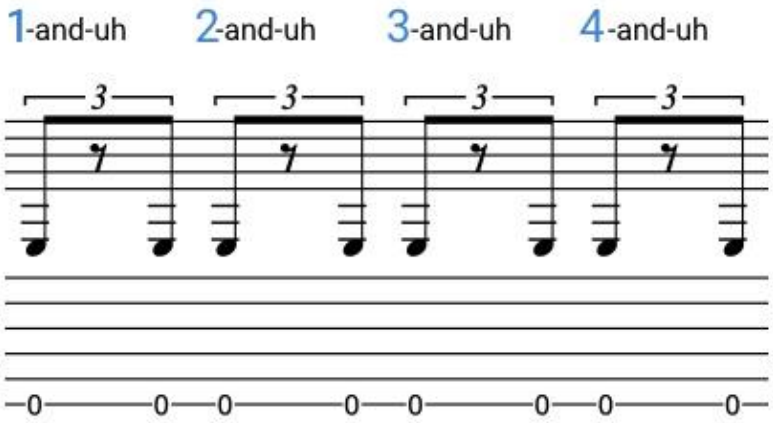
So we play the "1" and the "uh"

We play the "2" and the "uh"

We play the "3" and the "uh"

We play the "4" and the "uh"

(and we do not play any of the "and" beats)



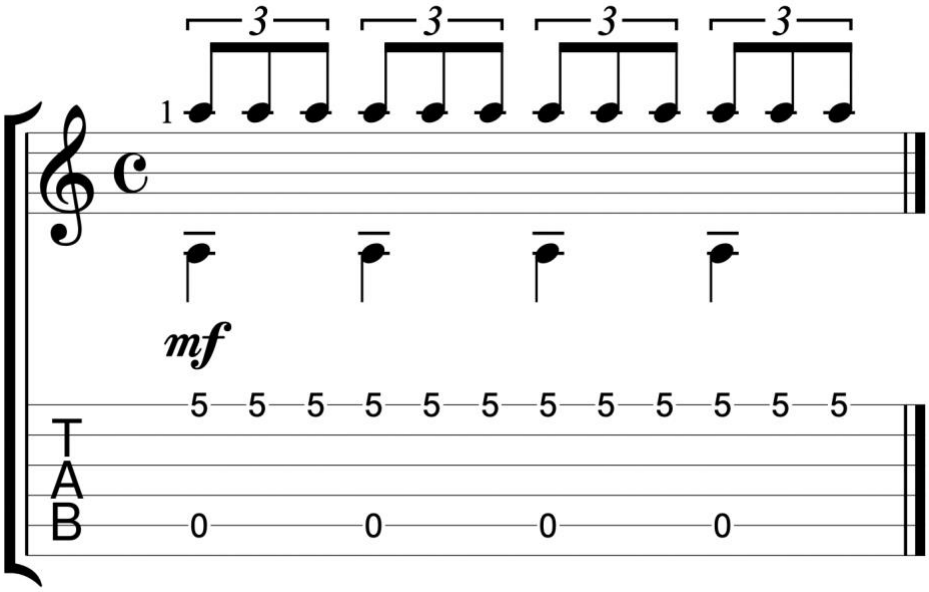
This gives us our shuffle sound!

Playing Shuffle on Guitar

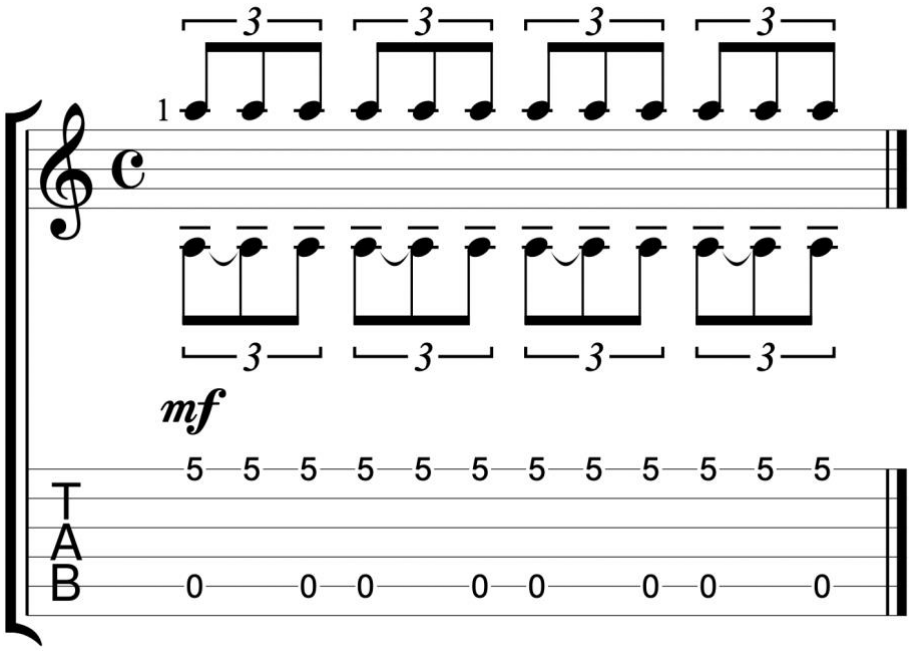
The best way to understand all this is to play it and actually feel what it sounds like.

Play triplets on the 1st string at the 5th fret (one-and-uh, two-and-uh…)

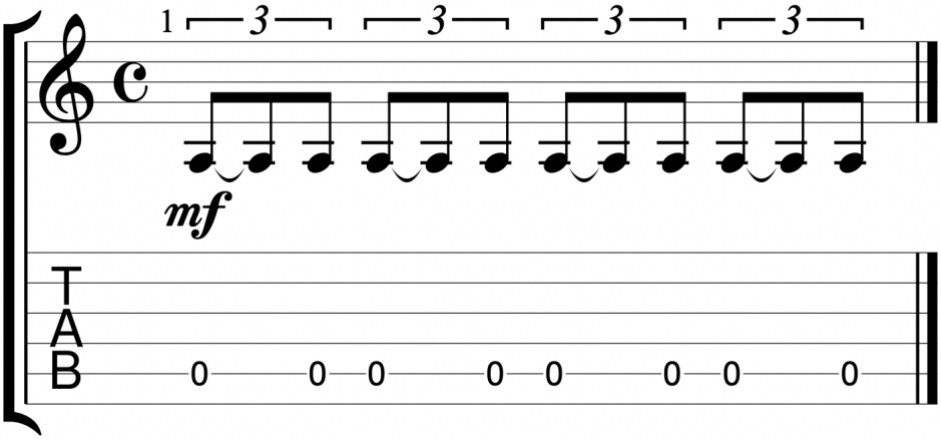
Play the open 5th string on the “one”, “two” etc.



Now play the open 5th string on the “one” and the “uh”, the “two” and the “uh” and so on



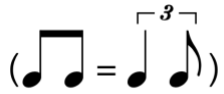
And then cease playing the notes on the 1st string!



Notation

For ease of notation, sometimes you will see the sheet music explaining that a shuffle feel is to be applied (even if not written exactly as the example above).

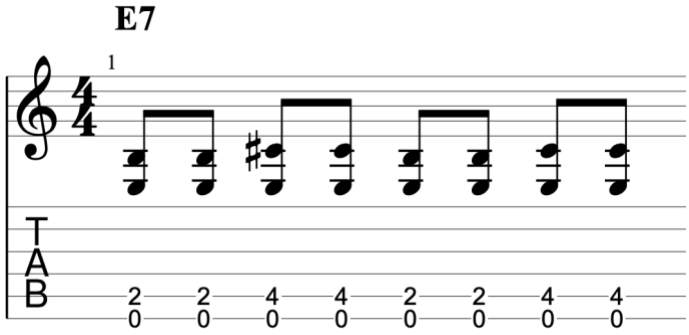
When you see this notation at the top of a musical piece, that's what it means. Use the audio files I have provided as your main guidance when playing along.



The 2-4 Shuffle

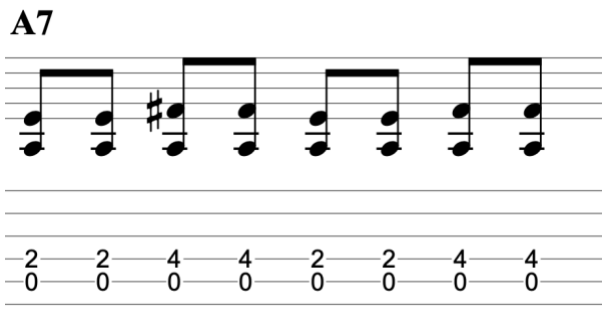
We see below a shuffle which has :

- a drone (or constantly played) 6th string (low E or thickest string)
- the 2nd fret twice followed by 4th fret twice on the 5th string

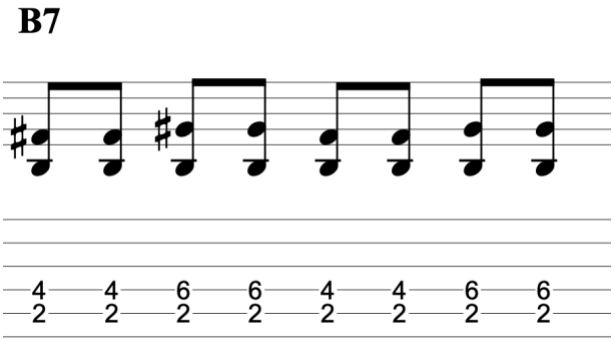


You have a choice between just strumming down with the right-hand thumb or using the right-hand thumb to play the 6th string while the index finger plays the 5th string (a kind of pinching movement). Try both to see which you like.

You will note that we play the same thing over the A section – everything is just down a string.



You will move this A part up 2 frets to get the shuffle over the B chord.

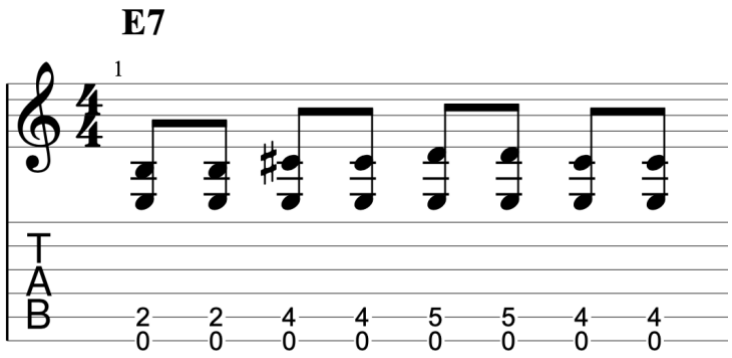


Here, the index finger of the left hand should play the 2nd fret of the 5th string.

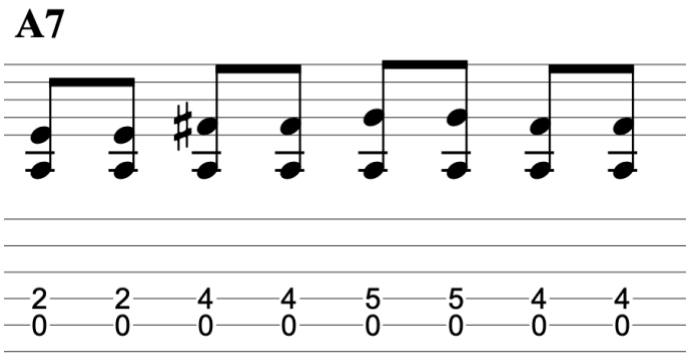
Then you need the ring finger and pinky to play the 4th and 6th fret of the 4th string. This can be hard for some people to play at first so be patient. It's quite a stretch so don't injure yourself – and if you feel any pain, stop playing for a few minutes. It's fine to just play a B7 chord here if you can't play this part of the shuffle.

The 2-4-5 Shuffle

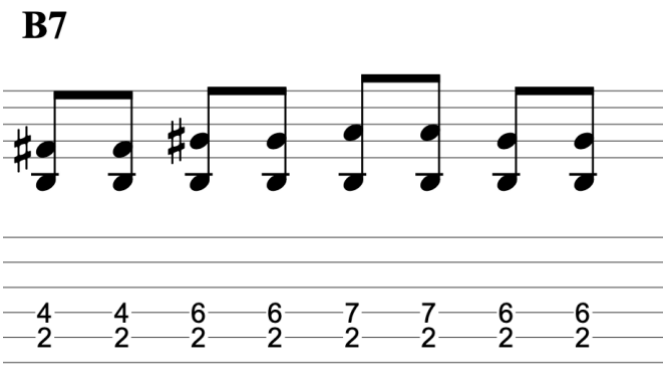
This is another shuffle variation where instead of playing 2nd fret and 4th fret of the string 'below', we play 2nd fret, 4th fret, 5th fret, 4th fret. See below for the 2-4-5 over E



See below for the 2-4-5 over A (take it down a string from the exercise above)



See below for the 2-4-5 over B (move up 2 frets from the exercise above)



The 2-4-5 over B is really tricky for the fingers. Some people don't feel like they have this much reach in their fingers. If you can't play it, that's fine. Either play a 2-4 shuffle over this chord or play a B7 chord. Those will sound great based on the feel of your playing – you don't have to shuffle for 12 bars continuously. In fact, if you did that it would sound quite boring after a while so mixing it up is a good thing!

Example Shuffles

- Bo Diddley's Before You Accuse Me
- Stevie Ray Vaughan's Pride & Joy
- Elmore James I Believe I'll Dust My Broom