

# The Eight Commandments of Strum Patterns (blech) by Gary Jugert (double blech)

## 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment:

- **Picks** are for guitar players. Throw yours away.
- **Capos** are for singers who don't know how to play ukulele. You know how to play. Throw yours away.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: There are only two "correct" strum patterns.

- If you want to copy Israel K's version of Over the Rainbow exactly, you have to own a Low G ukulele and there are 500 videos on YouTube teaching you to do it step by step. You still can't sing like Israel, so your version won't be as good, so why are you doing this at all? Make YOUR version of that song.
- If you want to copy George Formby's strum patterns there are indeed correct and less correct ways to do it. If that's your goal, you'll need to move to England and buy a banjolele. By the way, go YouTube George Formby, he's great. His devotees are also the reason ukulele hasn't taken off in Britain the way it has in other parts of the world. Brits hate those guys.
- All other songs do NOT have a "correct" strum pattern. Search your heart and find one that works. Or, if you have group leaders who like strum patterns, do whatever they tell you to do. And, despite what the media is telling you, there is no "Hawaiian" strum. (The "D-DU-UDU" advocates are being paid by dark money from BitCoin.) In ukulele books, they'll have fancy names on all sorts of strum patterns. Note that those names change from book to book and player to player, so if you must name your strums please pick something creative and fun.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment:** If you have a small ensemble of singers and you intend to perform in public, you should decide if everybody strumming together is advisable (it's not), and if it is (it's really not), then you should agree on a pattern. Fair word of warning ... there will always be somebody who is screwing it up and everybody will be thinking about getting the pattern right instead of singing and entertaining the crowd.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: There are two strums:

1. Down
2. Up

I wish I could make this more interesting. You might note that just because your hand is going up or down does not require you to hit the strings while you're doing it. To get your rhythm correct, you'll be moving continuously up and down whether you are making noise or not.

**5<sup>th</sup> Commandment:** You need to know what the meter of the song is you're playing. A chord player strumming is also serving as a percussionist. Ignore what is going on in the melody and keep your beat steady.

- **4/4 Time** is the most common. You'll strum 4 or 8 times in each measure.
- **3/4 Time** is the second most common: You'll strum 3 or 6 times in each measure.
- **6/8 Time** comes up frustratingly often: You'll strum 2 or 6 times in each measure.
- **2/4 Time** is used in old fashioned songs. You'll strum 2 or 4 times in each measure.
- All other time signatures come up rarely. By the time you get to them, you'll have given up on strumming altogether and realized plucking is your future.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You have three tools:

- **Thumb:** Mostly it's used for soft beautiful down-strums. You can also flick it up using the nail for a lovely up-strum. Most players overuse their thumbs when strumming.
- **Fingers:**
  - a. Your index finger will go down (using the nail) and up (using the pad). Make sure your nail is facing the ground and not the nut on your ukulele fretboard.
  - b. All the other fingers will only do down-strums and are usually combined to create a percussive element.
- **Palm:** In certain percussive strokes, you will finish the downstroke with a flat palm to create a drum-like "chunk" sound. If you're from Hawaii, you are addicted to this element and need therapy.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: The triplet strum:

- Index Down – Thumb Down – Index Up

**8<sup>th</sup> Commandment:** Practice all of the tools above. You might find them useful when you sing (or pretend to sing because of peer pressure). And as with all tunes, bring all of your tools to the song and find out which ones will present it and you in the best light. You making music your way will be far more valuable than copying the way somebody else did it. And remember, the strumming police aren't real even though they're annoyingly everywhere. Be bold and pluck often.