



Introducing
**RHYTHM SECTION
DEVELOPMENT**

WITH *IAN + STEVE
ALLISON GOOLD*



SBL COURSE WORKBOOK



RHYTHM SECTION DEVELOPMENT WITH

*IAN
ALLISON
AND
STEVE
GOOLD*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course Ian Allison and drummer Steve Goold walk you through some unique concepts and ideas to help level up your sense of rhythm.

Playing "in the pocket" takes more than just counting and tapping your foot. What we're talking about here is a more sophisticated and subtle approach to bass playing, but it's not impossible to learn. The trick is to think like a drummer!

In this course you're going to learn:

- The nuts and bolts of syncopation.
- What it means to play "in the pocket".
- How to use rhythm to make a musical statement.
- Why every audience loves a back beat.
- How to play with a click track.
- And much, much more!

LESSON 1: THINKING LIKE A DRUMMER

*"Time is **everybody's** job."*

*"All musicians must use time to make their musical statements."
[Unlike pitch, key, low end, etc.]*

- Vocalists in particular can be in the "pocket" when they sing. Check out Björk, D'Angelo, and even Billy Eilish for examples of how the vocals add to the song's rhythm.
- The rhythmic component of solos is another great example. Be sure to check out Branford Marsalis, Bill Frisell, Keith Jarrett (among others) for great "pocket" soloing.

*"The really, really finely-tuned **placement** of timing—that's what separates the pros from the amateurs."*

*"**Listening** to the other musicians, and prioritizing your timing, makes what you're playing sound tight."*

*"Time is everyone's job—it's a **give and take**."*

*"Time is a really big deal in an ensemble. You have to consider it, you have to talk about it, you really have to **value** it... And then when that happens, it's so much fun, because it feels very effortless."*

- As bass players, try to play with a drummer! Don't practice prioritizing your time by yourself. Learn to keep time with another person. Find a drummer and jam!
» And remember... it's not a contest: sit in the pocket together.



LESSON 2: PENDULUM

THE PENDULUM (1:04)

- The “pendulum” is how Steve understands the role of his instrument—it’s the drummer’s job, and it’s the “lens” he looks through for everything he does... it’s his fundamental definition of the word “groove”.
- What separates a rhythm from a groove? A groove is a rhythm that makes you wanna dance!
- What creates “danceability” in a groove? **Motion**.
 - » The kick drum and the snare do that job the best.
 - » In 4/4 time, all we need is the kick on the “front” beats 1 and 3, and the snare on the “back” beats 2 and 4 to create the simple pendulum effect.

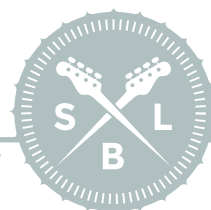
“The clearest and most compelling way to give a pendulum to the listeners is with ‘BOOM’ and ‘CRACK’... and everybody feels it right away. That’s why the kick and the snare are the ‘sun’ of the drum set solar system—everything revolves around them.”

“No matter what [the drummer] does on the high-hat, the kick and snare are dictating how the ‘pendulum’ feels, and the high-hat is just adding some extra little ‘sauce’.”

- By using **subdivisions** to create **syncopation** on the high-hat, the groove (the pendulum) that’s driven by the kick drum and snare doesn’t change.

THREE OPTIONS TO SYNCOPATE THE KICK & SNARE DRUMS (5:12)

- By syncopating the kick drum or snare, we change the “*momentum*” of the pendulum.
- The first option is **addition**:
 - » For example, adding an “unnecessary” kick beat on the “&” of beat 3 creates a perception of more “force” of beat 3 into beat 4.
 - » Similarly, adding the “unnecessary” kick beat on the “&” of beat 2 creates more momentum into beat 3.
 - » But note how adding a *snare* to the “&” of beat 3 causes the pendulum to linger into beat 4—*decreasing* the momentum!



LESSON 2 (CON'T)

- A second option for syncopating the kick and the snare is **subtraction**. (9:25)
 - » Simply subtracting the kick drum from beat 3 creates a feeling of “floating” until we arrive on beat 4.
- The third option option is to **shift** notes (10:26)—take a note on the pendulum that the listener is expecting, but play it in a different spot. Same number of notes, but the *timing* is not what the listener is accustomed to.
 - » For example, shifting the kick drum to the “&” of beat 3 seems to emphasize beat 4 much more.
 - » Conversely, shifting the kick drum to the “&” of beat 2 changes the groove completely differently!
- Any groove can be thought of as additions, subtractions, and/or shifting of notes from the basic pendulum beat!

“Whether or not the pendulum is there really affects how all the listeners perceive the music.”

*As bass players, “just **look** for the pendulum. Whenever you hear a drummer playing, try to find that back-and-forth. Try to locate ‘2’ and ‘4’—those back beats—and in your head picture a pendulum moving back and forth.*

*Use that as the **backdrop** for how you would understand what the [other musicians] are playing.”*



LESSON 3: PARKING THE CAR

SYNCOPIATION and SUBDIVISIONS

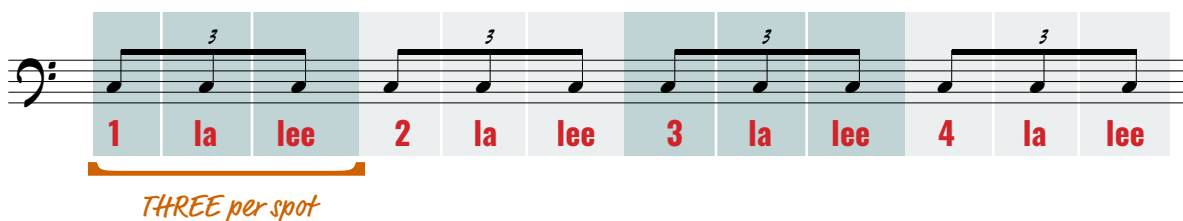
- A simplified way to think of **syncopation** is to envision each beat in a measure as a “parking space” in a parking lot (the entire measure).
 - » In 4/4 time, we’d have four total parking spaces (the “top” 4 in the time signature), with the **quarter note** (the “bottom” 4 in the time signature) getting one parking spot:



- Each parking space has its own unique name: a “3” refers to the third spot in our parking lot of four spaces—musically, the third note in the measure of four. If all we’re doing is parking quarter notes, we only need the numbers themselves to identify where a note is in the measure.
- Of course, there are other types of notes than quarter notes. We can split quarter notes into two **eighth notes**:

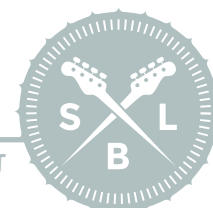


- Here, if we park a note in spot “3”, we need to know which half—the “3” or the “& of 3”.
- We can create an even smaller sub-division by splitting the quarter note into thirds, creating **triplet eighth notes**:



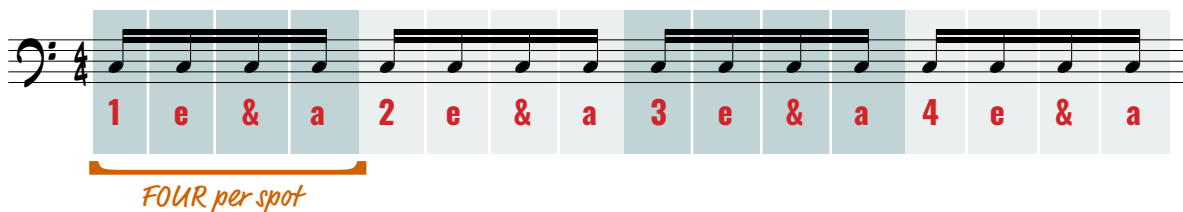
- » Note that you can count triplet eighth notes in any number of ways, for example:

“1 trip-let, 2 trip-let, 3 trip-let, 4 trip-let”
“tri-puh-let, tri-puh-let, tri-puh-let, tri-puh-let”



LESSON 3 (CON'T)

- Finally, we can split the regular eighth notes in half to create **sixteenth notes**:



- If we look at each of our "parking lots", we see that each parking spot has its own unique name, and we can use it to identify exactly where in the "lot" we're referring to...

"Emphasize the note that's in the 'a' of spot '2' "

"Park a snare drum on the 'e' of 3' "

*"This idea of the parking lot is just a way to **visualize** how each of these notes is distinguished from the other... The size of the parking lot doesn't change."*

*"**Tempo**... is just stretching or squeezing the size of the entire parking lot."*

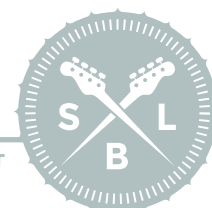
SYNCOPTION EXERCISES

Straight Eighth Notes (7:15)

- In the first exercise, we'll park our note on the "1" of the first measure, then leave the rest of the spots empty. The second time, we'll move that note to the "& of 1". The third time, move it to the "2", etc... (You can use any note.)



- Try this exercise at different tempos. Count out the "parking spaces" at first, but strive to keep everything in your head. It's harder than you think, especially at the faster tempos!



LESSON 3 (CON'T)

Triplet Eighth Notes (9:45)

- In the next exercise, we'll park our note on the "1" of the first measure, then leave the rest of the spots empty. The second time, we'll move that note to the "la of 1". The third time, move it to the "lee", etc... (Again, pick any note, and count the triplets however you're comfortable, and repeat at different tempos.)



Sixteenth Notes (11:42)

- In the next exercise, we'll park our note on the "1" of the first measure, then leave the rest of the spots empty. The second time, we'll move that note to the "e of 1". The third time, move it to the "&", etc.:



*"That's what it means to be 'in the pocket'—you're pulling into the **dead center** of the parking space."*



LESSON 3 (CON'T)

- To add a degree of complexity—and really cause you to really focus—play the previous exercise, then continue on in the *reverse* order. For example:

NEW Exercise

← Last 4 bars of previous exercise

etc.

- As you play these exercises, you'll begin to learn the **feel** of where each note is "parked". For example, you'll start to recognize where the "e of 3" feels, and start **hearing** it in actual music.

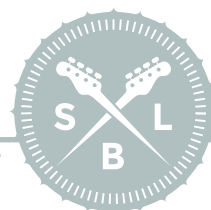
"Ideally, musicians will understand the way the "a of 2" just feels...
This exercise is designed to increase that familiarity."

"You don't even need a a bass [to perform this exercise]...
You could be walking down the street with the 'pendulum' in your
foot fall and practice this!

- Unlike drummers, playing this exercise on the bass requires us to play the note(s) for a *specific duration*—don't let your parked note in these exercises take up two spots!
 - » But, we do have control about how *long* we let each note ring out.
 - » Try repeating these exercises, but this time let each note ring out for, say, twice its written length. Or for the remainder of the measure regardless of where it starts. Get creative! As an example:

etc.

"Thinking about where that note cuts off
is just as important as your attack."



LESSON 4: PLAYING BEHIND THE BEAT

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “PLAY BEHIND”?

- Returning to our parking lot analogy, the lines of the parking spots are the *beat*.
 - » How does the listener know where the parking lines are? They can't hear the “click” of the song, but they *can* hear the drummer.
 - » Once the drummer establishes where the beat is with enough clarity, we can then “park” our notes on the “left” or “right” sides of those parking spaces—essentially behind or ahead of the beat.
- It's important to be selective on what to play “behind the beat”.

“If [the drummer] were to play everything behind the beat, it wouldn't sound “behind the beat”—it would just sound like the new beat.”

- Playing everything behind the beat also results in the feeling of *losing tempo*.
- Playing behind the beat can be very **subtle**! We're not moving to a different parking spot—we're moving around the *same* parking spot.
 - » In effect, the bass sound *grows* from the drum sound—you want to hear the drum just before you hear the bass!
- Note that playing behind the beat should not be confused with *ritardando* or *accelerando*, which are **full-band** effects:

» *ritardando (rit.)—slowing down, decelerating—adds a sense of weight and feels heavy.*

accelerando (accel.) does the opposite—it adds energy.

- If you're thinking as a bass player about how to manipulate the beat, consider using a **DAW**—a digital audio workstation, such as ProTools or GarageBand.
 - » For example, play 8 bars of an eighth-note “bounce”—you'll immediately see your natural tendencies against the “click”.

*“Control over playing behind the beat, or in front of the beat—with intention—comes from the presence of **precision**: if you don't know how to hit the dead center of the beat, you're not going to be able to control your ability to play behind or in front of the beat.*



LESSON 5: LOCKING WITH THE KICK DRUM

DOES THE BASS PLAYER ALWAYS HAVE TO MATCH WHAT THE DRUMMER IS DOING WITH THE KICK DRUM IN ORDER TO BE "COOL" ...?

» *OSTINATO: A repeating pattern that provides a backdrop for someone else.*

- In many ways, the high-hat provides an ostinato for the kick and snare drums.
- Similarly, the drums often provide an ostinato for the other instruments.
 - » A basic groove by the drummer allows the bassist (or other musician) to play whatever they may want, regardless of what the kick drum is doing. It can help free up the bassist, not feeling like they need to lock in with the drummer and when the kick drum hits.
 - » The drummer acts as an accompanist, allowing the bassist to become the focus.
 - » Alternatively, the bass can play an ostinato to give the *drummer* some freedom.
- Don't feel the need to *always* "lock in" with the drummer; allow each other some space and share the focus!

"You should, as a bass player, be able to not watch the drummer's foot!"

THE "REVOLVING DOOR" IDEA (7:12)

- **"Trading 4s"** is a perfect example of the revolving door concept—highlighting each member of the band (or specific instruments) four measures at a time. "This is the feature... now *this* is the feature."
- This idea can also be found in smaller ostinatos, for example dropping the kick drum from the "pendulum" on beat 3. This creates *space*:

"As a bass player, with space you have the option to leave that space [empty], or you have the option to fill it up and leave space somewhere else that maybe you weren't expecting... It creates an opportunity to make a 'part'... and invites other people in the band to step in."



LESSON 5 (CON'T)

- Don't be afraid to play on the back beats—the "2s" and "4s".
 - » You don't have to play "only" on the kick drums... sometimes playing on "snares" is fantastic.

"Feeling where that space is being left, and in that particular ensemble that you're in... [know when you] should you cover that space, or support so that something else can step into that 'revolving door' limelight."

"The point here isn't that playing 'locked' with the kick drum is a problem—it's just one of many options. It's not something that you have to do, but neither is it bad. It's just one of a handful of choices you can make."



LESSON 6: FEEL AND GHOST NOTES

FEEL

- Feel is, of course, very **subjective**.
- For the bass, **dynamic articulation** plays a big part in the feel of what you're playing:
 - » The articulation that happen with your hands.
 - » The technique that you use.
 - » Muting—right and left hand.
 - » A "sound" that you use that affects your attack.
 - » A slide into or a slide out of a note.
 - » Hammer-ons.
 - » Actual dynamics: playing louder or playing softer.

*ALL of these things
influence how a
groove "feels"*

"Dynamic articulation is not about the pitches... it's about all of the other things that make up the line that you're playing."

"There are so many ways you can make a line feel emotional, and that's what dynamic articulation does—it helps bring dynamics into your ostinato."

*"The **pendulum** is still the groove definer... [the bass player] can be muting, and playing a line with all the emotion and dynamic they want, but really, what sets up the groove is the pendulum, and the feeling of **pulse**."*



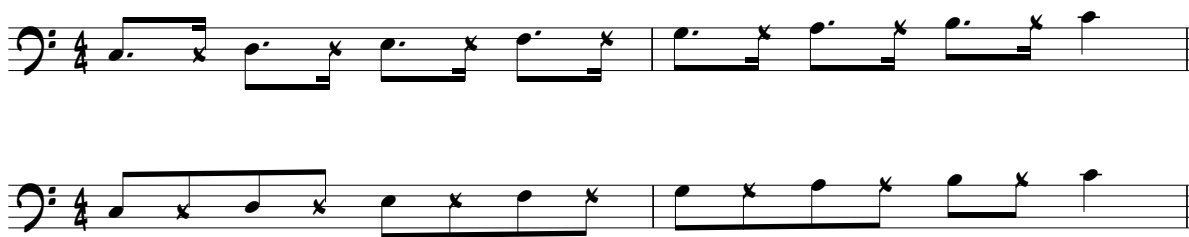
LESSON 6 (CON'T)

GHOST NOTES (ON THE BASS) (12:26)

- Ghost notes are produced by playing a deadened string... there's no "pitch".
- Ghost notes provide **context** around a groove.
 - » There a lot of power in playing—or omitting—ghost notes.

GHOST NOTE EXERCISES (14:36)

- To get ghost notes into your playing, choose a scale and pick a rhythm to use.
Two examples:



- Again, be sure to deaden the strings with all the fingers on the fretting hand! The ghost note should *not* have a discernable pitch.



LESSON 7: THE MENTAL DOLLAR

THE MENTAL DOLLAR

- The “mental dollar” is a way to **manage** your focusing “bandwidth”.
 - » We have a limited amount of attention to give to things—we have a finite amount of “mental bandwidth.”
- Think of your “mental bandwidth” as one dollar. How are you going to spend it? Will you spend it wisely...?

*“The concept of the mental dollar basically has to do with **preparation**.”*

*Preparation has a lot to do with perceived **respect**:*

Playing with a musician who seems to not respect the moment enough to have prepped—showing up with just their natural ability or not learning the song, for example—can easily be interpreted as being disrespectful.

“If other musicians in the room are perceiving that you don’t have it ‘together’, that will affect the entire quality of the whole experience.”

- When first learning a new song, or a new technique or style, etc., you can easily find yourself spending \$0.90 out of the mental \$1.00—leaving only 10 cents to deal with everything else that might cross your mind during the gig.
 - » **Practicing** helps us cheapen the “cost” of something.
 - » It can turn something that used to cost 90 cents into something that now only costs 30 cents... leaving us a 70-cent “buffer” to spend on other things, such as:
 - › Listening to the other players;
 - › Enjoying the groove or fills being played of the other players;
 - › Reading the room; or
 - › Make mental adjustments in real time.
 - » Your available “buffer” in your mental dollar will greatly affect your *playing*!
 - › Less is NOT more!
 - › Keep your buffer high... it will only add to your enjoyment.



LESSON 7 (CON'T)

- Is there someone out there with \$5!? Is there someone that has so much money that nothing phases them, or that they don't need to prep since they're so naturally talented?
No.

"That's an idea that we perceive when we see greats operating—they must have something that I don't have... No. They have the same thing that you have, they're just using it differently."

"Something that you can do, as a community of bass players, is—the next thing that you have to play? Prep it really hard. No matter what it is, see if you can simulate it. Work it so that you know that music front-to-back."

Can you navigate a song just on your own...?

*"If you do the **work**—that's evident to everyone...
Everyone in the band notices."*



*"You're not going to build up a **reputation** if you show up to gigs knowing that you're going to have to spend \$0.90 just to succeed. You've got to prep with "mental dollar buffer". Prep everything that you think you're going to encounter so that it's gonna be \$0.30 tops that you're paying."*



*"How did you get this gig?" You have a reputation that the artists **trust**.*



LESSON 8: THE CLICK TRACK

THE CLICK TRACK

*"Yes, absolutely, you have to play and listen to the other musicians. But you also have to, at some point, have a **constant** that you are adhering to that... gives you a focal point for analysis."*

- The **click track**—a machine-generated, constant tempo—is there to help us learn ways that we can grow in time-keeping.
- There are often two extremes as players when it comes to a click track:
 - » "I don't want the click 'cause it's gonna make my groove feel weird."
 - » "I have to have the click! Otherwise I'll panic!"
- From a drummer's perspective, the click track is a "pocket" issue.

"The pocket is basically an expectation on the part of the listeners (and other musicians) of where the next note is going to fall, based on everything that's been 'told' up to that point."

"The click is just a suggestion as to what 'perfect' feels like. But the audience can't hear the click!"

THE "DISAPPEARING CLICK" EXERCISE (5:56)

1. Set up a 2-bar loop.
 2. Program a click to be present in the first bar, but not in the second bar.
 3. Press play. The cursor keeps moving—the tempo keeps going—and you keep playing.
 4. You'll be "flying blind" in the second bar.
 5. Did you maintain tempo when the loop returns to the first bar?
 - Repeat this until you find yourself "in the pocket" with your notes falling on the click every time.
 6. Then... change the loop to two measures of click and two measures without.
 7. Play through it again!
 8. Then... try four measure of click and four without, etc.
- This is a great **confidence-building exercise**—it builds trust in yourself.



LESSON 9: IMPROVISATION

IMPROVISATION

- When a bass player is asked to play a “solo”, we often think about something “flashy”—a sweet slap line or something similar.
 - » Instead, when playing by yourself, develop a *theme*, or develop a *vibe*...
Make a **statement**!
 - › It doesn't have to be a “statement” of chops, or a prepared piece.
 - › Instead... how about a snapshot of an **emotion**?
- Improvisation can be a really helpful indicator about your relationship to your instrument.

*“Improvisation is **creating**. It's starting with nothing and seeing what happens.”*

“It's not easy. It's not easy to make up a story and have it actually move through an Introduction and a plot development and a plot twist and a conclusion on the fly.”

- If you think you want to quit or start over in the middle of the “story” because of a “wrong turn” in your story—force yourself to make something of the turn that just appeared!
- Push your concept of what you can do by yourself.
- Telling that story by yourself may also cause you to discover aspects of your instrument that you hadn't discovered before—you may start playing it differently.

*“Any songwriter will tell you the way to write good songs is just to write a bunch of songs, because you're gonna write a lot of bad ones. And every time you write a bad one, you **learn** something about songwriting. The same thing is true with this improvisation thing.”*



IMPROVISATION = SPONTANEOUS COMPOSITION

