



SLAP BASS FUNDAMENTALS

WITH PHILIP MANN

03

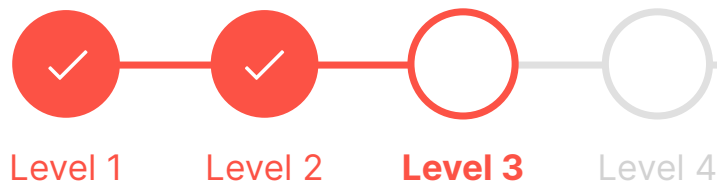
COURSE BOOK

SCOTTSBASSLESSONS.COM

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The journey so far...



Previously Covered:

- The open strings: E–A–D–G
- Proper string-striking technique
- Popping/plucking
- Creating “drum” grooves
- Melodic elements
- Rudiments & paradiddles
- Developing lines and grooves
- Combining techniques

In Level 3 we’ll cover:

- The Dorian mode/scale
- Triplets
- Double-thumb technique
- Rhythmic patterns

IMPORTANT!

Be honest with yourself. If you find yourself struggling with any topics from the previous parts, you are not ready.

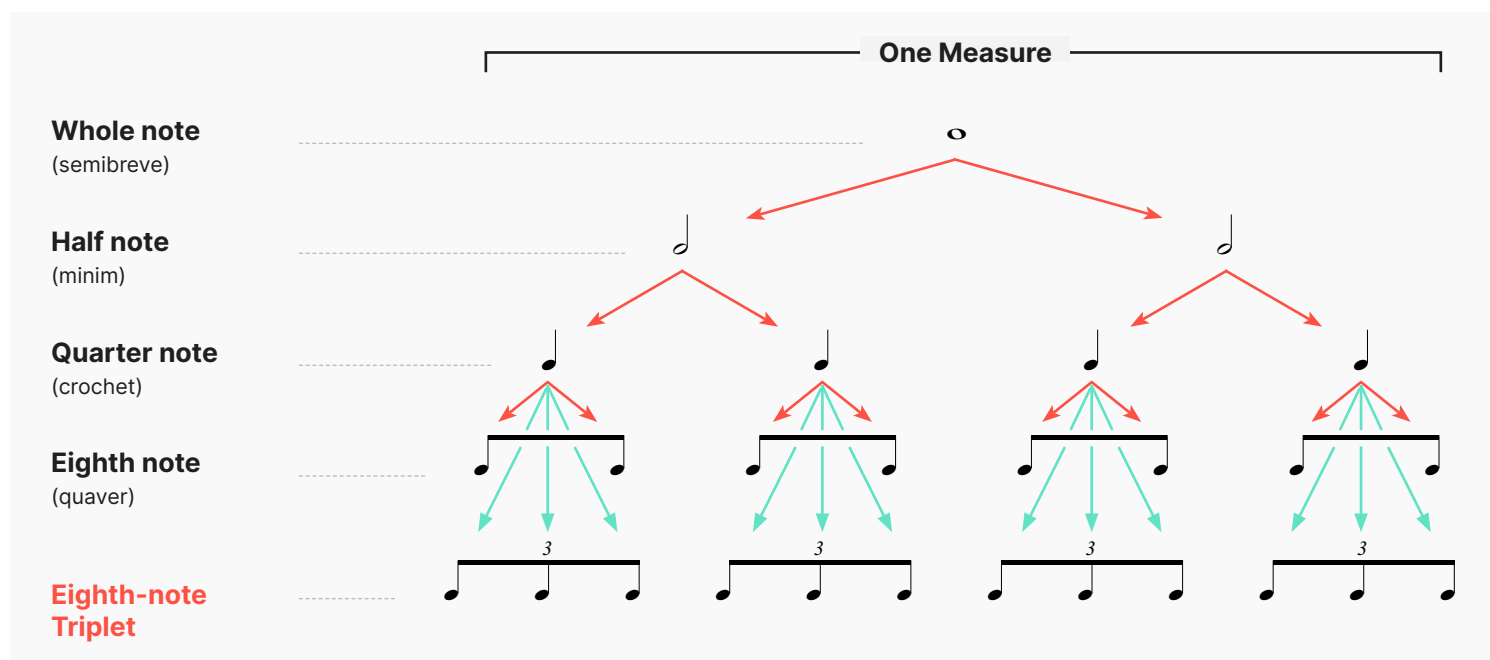
DO NOT progress past this point! You must be able to absolutely nail all those aspects. Resist the urge to jump ahead!

Lesson 1

Triplets

A **triplet** is a group of *three* notes played evenly over the span of *two* notes, and is indicated with a number “3” over the notes, sometimes with a bracket (and always with a bracket when a rest is involved).

Understanding the rhythm of triplets is fundamental to your continued learning—they often define the “feel” in genres like the blues and jazz, where swing notation is common. Let’s see how **eighth-note triplets** might fit in a typical measure in 4/4 time:



In your playing, you’ll encounter many types of triplets, but in slap bass, the eighth-note and sixteenth-note triplets are the most heavily used.



“With triplets, it’s very much about partnership of the right [plucking] hand working in conjunction with the left [fretting] hand.”

LESSON 1 (continued)

Counting Eighth-Note Triplets

It's important that you can *feel* the triplet beat. As you might expect, there are a couple ways you can count out eighth-note triplets. Here are a few for you to consider:

1	2	3	4
3	3	3	3
tri - puh - let	tri - puh - let	tri - puh - let	tri - puh - let
1 - trip - let	2 - trip - let	3 - trip - let	4 - trip - let
1 - and - uh	2 - and - uh	3 - and - uh	4 - and - uh

Once you're comfortable with the triplet feel, you can split the triplet beats between your left and right hands to create percussive rhythms, just as you did in Lesson 2 using sixteenth notes with a paradiddle (R-L-R-R).

Practice Tip:

For each exercise, use a metronome and start at a slow tempo. Gradually build up speed until you reach a point where you no longer are playing nice and clean (your “breaking point”). Dial it back a few bpm and start again from there.

LESSON 1 (continued)

To play a “slap triplet,” begin by striking the string with the thumb, then slap (“thump”) the strings against the fretboard with your fretting hand to mute the sound. Leaving your fretting hand in place to deaden the strings, strike the muted string again with your thumb to create a percussive sound. For a right-handed player, this corresponds to a R-L-R sequence for each “tri—puh—let.” Don’t worry too much about slapping the G string since it’s generally “popped” rather than slapped:

Exercise 01

N.C.

T * T --- | T --- | T --- | T --- | *sim.*

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

Notes:

- Point your slapping thumb *parallel* to the strings, and strike *through* the string using the bone on the side of your thumb. Don’t “bounce” your thumb off the string. End the stroke on the small piece of the fretboard just after the last fret. Your goal should be a clear, consistent sound across all the strings as you slap each string.
- Your fretting hand should create a nice, even surface to deaden the strings; don’t curve your hand or you may create unwanted notes or harmonics. The strings should slap against the fretboard, but don’t *hold* them against the fretboard—allow your hand to rebound slightly.
- Slapping the fretboard by muting across the 6th–8th frets helps avoid unwanted harmonics.



LESSON 1 (continued)

In this next exercise, we'll replace the muted "let" in the "tri-puh-let" pattern with a pop. As before, begin by striking the string with the thumb, then slap ("thump") the strings against the fretboard with your fretting hand. Leaving your fret hand in place to deaden the strings, pop the muted G string with your plucking-hand index finger to create a percussive sound. For a right-handed player, this again corresponds to a R-L-R sequence for each "tri—puh—let":

Exercise 02

N.C.

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

Notes:

- Place the *side* of your index fingertip just under the side of the string, then rotate up to create the "pop" of the string. Do not use the pad of your finger and pull up!
- Over time, you'll likely develop a callus on the side of your fingertip near the nail—this is normal.
- Use an emery board or something similar to lessen the length of your nail to avoid developing a blister on your fingertip!
- Although you can slap *and* pop the G string, it's very rarely slapped—it's instead popped.

Lesson 2

The Dorian Mode/Scale

Because of the nature of the strings on the bass, many slap-bass songs take advantage of the open E and A strings and are coincidentally written in the keys of E and A, respectively. But, it's important to apply slap bass concepts and shapes in *any* key. The go-to vocabulary for this is the **Dorian Mode/Scale**.*

Let's look at the E Dorian Scale:

E Dorian Scale

Em

Major 6th

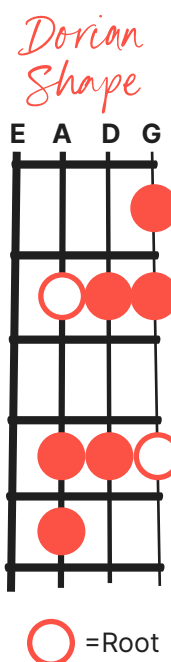
R 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 6 $\flat 7$ R

7 9 10 7 9 6 7 9

A key feature of the Dorian Scale is the **major 6th**—it's a *minor* scale with a major 6th that compliments the minor tonality of the flattened third. The major 6th is also a semitone away from the flattened 7th ($\flat 7$), which creates tension and allows it to act as a *leading tone* into that $\flat 7$ th, for example in a m7 chord.



"[Slap bass] really is about 'bedding in' the basics so they are super strong. Your foundations have to be absolutely solid...Spend a lot of time on the basics—really, really clean them up. Don't take them for granted."



continued →



To learn more about modes and scales, check out:
 "FUNCTIONAL THEORY FOR BASSISTS VOL. 1"
 in the SBL Course Library.

LESSON 2 (continued)

In the following exercises, we'll first *fret* a note with our index finger, then slap ("thump") the strings against the fretboard with the remaining fingers of the fretting hand to create a percussive sound. With the fretting hand in place to deaden the strings, next strike the muted string again with your thumb. For a right-handed player, this again corresponds to a R-L-R sequence for each "tri—puh—let."

Note that this technique removes us from the constraint of the open E string and allows us to move around the fretboard. Let's start with a short line using E Dorian:

Exercise 01

Em

T * T---| T---| T---| T---| T---| T---| T---| T

7 5 4 5 7 5 4 5

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

We can also do the *opposite* of the last exercise: start by fretting the G string with your index finger and *pop* ("pluck") the note, then slap ("thump") the strings against the fretboard using the rest of your fretting-hand fingers. Finally, with your fretting hand still deadening the strings, slap with the thumb to create a percussive sound:

Exercise 02

Em

P * T P T P T P T P T P T P T P T

9 7 6 7 9 7 6 7

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

LESSON 2 (continued)

Experiment with playing different notes of the Dorian scale with each of the two techniques illustrated in the examples. And don't be afraid to combine the two techniques, either:

Combined Exercises

Em

T * T --- T --- T --- T P T P T P T P T

7 5 4 5 9 7 6 7

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

Notes:

- In Exercise 01, having to have the index finger already in place before striking the string may feel a bit cumbersome at first—you have to move quickly! Try not to let that movement upset the balance of the triplet. Work slowly, concentrating on your accuracy, before building up speed.
- In Exercise 02, we have the option to strike the deadened “let” on either the E or A strings. (The D string is an unlikely candidate.) Experiment with each string to hear the difference in the percussive sound produced; the E string will be deeper in pitch.
- Be sure to think about the direction the string is vibrating when playing slap bass, in particular when “popping” a string. Unlike a “regular” plucked string which vibrates parallel to the fretboard, a popped string's vibration is *perpendicular* to the fretboard. The placement of your index finger is crucial to ensure a crisp, clean sound; you do *not* want the string to sound like it's buzzing.

Lesson 3

Sixteenth-Note Triplets

Just as an eighth-note triplet spans the same time in the measure as one quarter note, a **sixteenth-note triplet** spans the same time as one *eighth* note:

Quarter note
(crochet)

Eighth note
(quaver)

Sixteenth note
(semiquaver)

Sixteenth-note triplet

To count sixteenth-note triplets, we can use the same “tri-puh-let” verbalization, but since there are two sixteenth-note triplets across one beat, we’ll count twice as fast when compared to eighth-note triplets; it’s a smaller subdivision of the *same* time:

1 2 3 4

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

tri-puh-let tri-puh-let tri-puh-let tri-puh-let tri-puh-let tri-puh-let tri-puh-let tri-puh-let



*“The mechanics [of playing sixteenth-note triplets]—the methodology— is absolutely, 100% identical [to playing eighth-note triplets].
It’s just done twice as fast.”*

LESSON 3 (continued)

In a musical context, we have:

Exercise 01

N.C. //

Count: 1 2 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 &

T P T P T P T P

9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9

0 X 0 0 0 0 9 X 9 X 9 X 9 X

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

4 //

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 (&)

P T P T P T P T

9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9

0 X 0 0 0 0 9 X 9 X 9 X 9 X

5

Groove Stationary triplets

T P T T P T P T P T P T P T P T P

0 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9

0 X 0 5 7 9 X 9 X 9 X 9 X 9 X 9 X

Notes:

- As the pulse (beat) goes by, work to be able to subdivide it in your head into the sixteenth-note triplets *before* you play them.
- In the example above, we stop the triplets on beat 4 to allow us to “reset” ourselves and have a bit of a chance to think before we play the next measure.
- When playing sixteenth-note triplets in this manner, particularly up to speed, experiment with the angle your fret-hand fingers make in relation to the fretboard and find the position that will allow you to best get that percussive “thump” in the middle of each triplet. Try to keep your fingertip on the fretted note (the “pop”), and pivot your hand.

LESSON 3 (continued)

Moving Sixteenth-Note Triplets Around the Fretboard

The next step with playing sixteenth-note triplets is to be able to *move* those sixteenth notes, playing different pitches for each note in the triplet. Let's start by using the rhythm of Bar 4 of the example on page 13, and again play in E Dorian:

Exercise 02

per-beat triplets

N.C.(Em)

Groove *Continuous triplets*

Notes:

- As you get more comfortable with this exercise, add more/different notes as you play the triplets to spice things up a bit.
- Again, take advantage of the last beat of the sixteenth-note-triplet measures to “reset” yourself—proper timing is essential. Make sure you know how many groupings there are until you hit the last beat!
- Be sure to practice stationary, per-beat, and moving continuously triplets.
- Rather than coming up with your own “groove,” you may just want to play something simple (such as quarter notes) instead; what’s important is to recognize *when* to play the triplets in the exercise, not necessarily to develop the groove around them.

Before we start Lesson 4, be honest. Have you actually sat down and played *just eighth notes* using your thumb to make sure your notes are crisp and clear? Don't fool yourself—it may seem boring and mundane, but it's the key to success!



"Make sure you give the time that's needed to the open E's and things like that—all the pedantic rudiments... Don't rush them, it's really important."

Lesson 4

Double Stops

A **double stop** (also called a *dyad*) refers to two notes played at the same time. They're found in music all the time, producing all kinds of interesting harmonies, and are a wonderful addition to your bass vocabulary.

To start, let's look at some double stops by combining an open D string with a D Major triad (R-3-5) played on the G string:

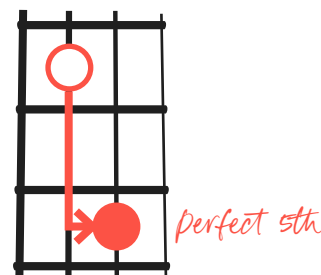
Exercise 01

Exercise 01 shows four measures of double stops on the D and G strings in 4/4 time. The notation includes fingerings (R for right hand) and fret numbers for the G string.

Measure	Notes	Fingering	G String Fret
1	D (open), D	5 R	2
2	D (open), D	R R	7
3	D (open), D	3 R	11
4	D (open), D	5 R	14

Perfect 5ths

A perfect fifth is easy to find on the fretboard: from any note, go up two frets and up one string (e.g., from the 4th string to the 3rd, the 3rd string to the 2nd, or the 2nd string to the first). The resulting note is a **perfect fifth** above the starting note. This relationship is true *anywhere* on the fretboard.



LESSON 4 (continued)

Perfect 5ths and the Dorian Scale

In Lesson 2 we highlighted the Dorian Scale, which is commonly used in slap-bass lines. Because of the major 6th in the Dorian Scale, every note of the scale has a perfect fifth as part of the scale itself—except for the major 6th! (Rather ironic since *that's* the note that makes the Dorian Scale ... *Dorian*.)

Exercise 02

E5 A5 E5 A5 G5 E5 A5 E5 A5 G5

T * T-- P T T-- P T T-- P T T-- P

9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

Exercise 03

E5 D5 E5 D5

T * T-- P T T-- P T T-- P T T-- P

9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

E5 A5 E5 A5 G5 E5 A5 E5 A5 G5

T T-- P T T-- P T T-- P T T-- P

9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5

E5 D5 E5 D5

T T-- P T T-- P T T-- P T T-- P

9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5 9 7 5

LESSON 4 (continued)

We can continue by adding perfect-fifth double stops, here in descending lines:

Exercise 03 (continued)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Exercise 03 (continued), written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Each system consists of a staff with notes, a line of plucking patterns, and a fretboard diagram below.

System 1 (Measures 7-8):

- Measure 7:** Labeled E5. The staff shows a quarter note on G4, followed by two eighth notes on F#4 and E4. The plucking pattern is T (down) followed by two eighth notes marked with an 'x'. The fretboard diagram shows the 9th fret on the 4th string (G) and the 7th fret on the 3rd string (F#).
- Measure 8:** Labeled D5 E5. The staff shows a quarter note on A4, followed by two eighth notes on G#4 and F#4. The plucking pattern is P (up) followed by two eighth notes marked with an 'x'. The fretboard diagram shows the 7th fret on the 4th string (A) and the 5th fret on the 3rd string (G#).

System 2 (Measures 9-10):

- Measure 9:** Labeled C#5 B5. The staff shows a quarter note on B4, followed by two eighth notes on A#4 and G#4. The plucking pattern is P (up) followed by two eighth notes marked with an 'x'. The fretboard diagram shows the 6th fret on the 4th string (B) and the 4th fret on the 3rd string (A#).
- Measure 10:** Labeled F#5 E5. The staff shows a quarter note on C#5, followed by two eighth notes on B#4 and A#4. The plucking pattern is T (down) followed by two eighth notes marked with an 'x'. The fretboard diagram shows the 9th fret on the 4th string (C#) and the 7th fret on the 3rd string (B#).

As always, start at a slow tempo and gradually increase as you go. Crisp, clean notes are the goal. Be sure to add additional double stops from the scale as you get more and more comfortable with the technique.

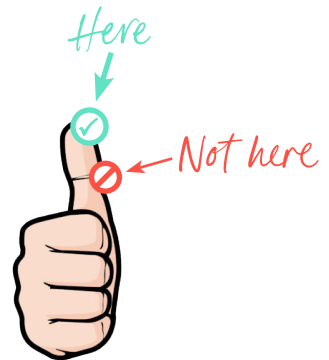
Notes:

- In Level 02, recall that we used the index and middle fingers to produce the “&” and “uh” of the sixteenth notes. In this exercise, use the same two fingers simultaneously to pluck the double stops of the root and perfect fifth.
- Be sure you know *where* these double stops are located on the fretboard so that we can reference them not only for this technique, but for future techniques as well.

Lesson 5

Double Thumbing

Not to be confused with double stops, **double thumbing** is a slap technique where you use the top corner of the thumb rather than the bony side as you would with a regular slap stroke. Strike through a string with the corner of the thumb on the downstroke and let your thumb come to rest on the fretboard just near the last fret. Then, re-strike the same string with the corner of the thumb on the upstroke to sound the next note. It's a bit similar to how you would pluck the strings with a pick.



Start by muting the open strings with your fretting hand, and double thumbing each string across the fretboard. Your goal is a consistent “down, up, down, up” motion:

Exercise 01

N.C.

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.

T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Notes:

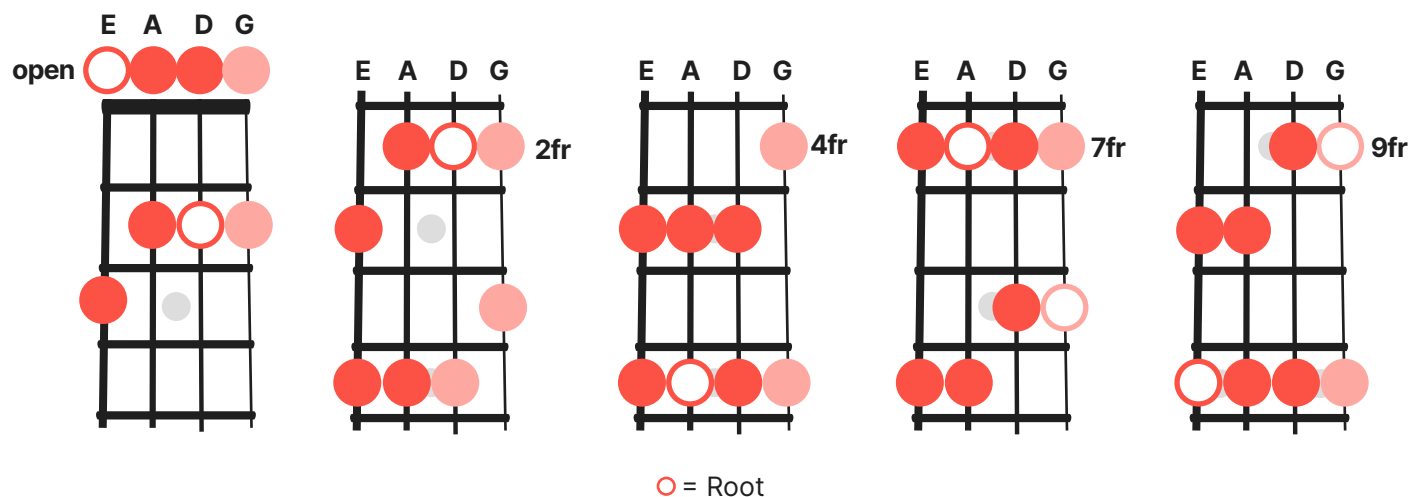
- Since we're using a different part of the thumb, the top corner of your thumb may get sore and perhaps even a bit raw. If this occurs, **STOP! Do not let a big white “bubble” develop!** This “bubble” will result in a blister. You'll be sidelined from playing for a few days. Instead, give it a rest and come back the next day. You'll eventually develop a callus.
- When initially striking the string, do not let your finger recoil but rather let it hit the fretboard.
- Keep your thumb rigid throughout, with your thumb parallel to the string.
- Notice that you'll need to move your plucking hand to continue landing on the fretboard as you move from the low E to high G string. Don't let your strikethrough end up near the pickup—your goal is *consistent tonality*.

LESSON 5 (continued)

E Minor Pentatonic

Let's next add some melodic phrases to our double-thumbing playing, this time using notes from the E Minor Pentatonic Scale. As a refresher, let's take a quick look at a few E Minor Pentatonic patterns:

E Minor Pentatonic patterns: 1 - b3 - 4 - 5 - b7



Start the next exercise by first producing a nice steady stream of eighth notes using the double-thumb technique, then add in part of the E Minor Pentatonic Scale:

Exercise 02

N.C.

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.

T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Homework!

Using Example 02 as a guide, continue playing using the remaining minor pentatonic shapes across the first three strings. (Light red circles on the fretboard diagrams represent additional notes of the pattern in the same position of the fretboard.)



"It's tedious. It's annoying. You will make mistakes. Your accuracy will fluster. You will get really annoyed and hate this lesson."

Lesson 6

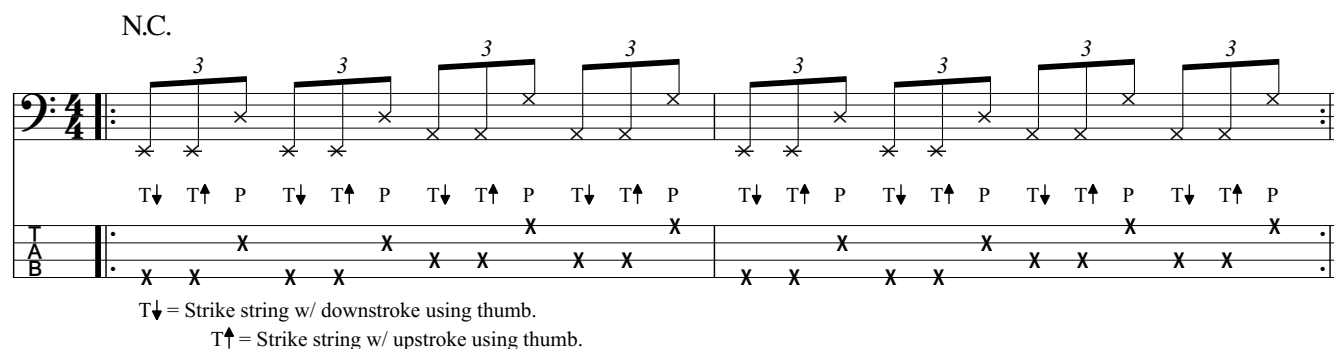
Adding a Pop

In earlier lessons we explored triplets and how we could apply various slap techniques to them. We can continue this idea using double thumbing—its down and up motion can readily be used for the first two notes of a triplet (the “tri” and “puh”). But what about the third note (the “let”)? Try adding a **pop** to liven up your slap-bass playing.

To get this idea under your fingers, first alternate strings with the double thumb and the pop. Your goal is a consistent “down, up, pop” throughout. And of course, start slowly and gradually increase your tempo:

Exercise 01

N.C.



T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.
T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Notes:

- Exercise 01 will help you to train your hand to be able to repeat the needed motion as you cross the strings. You'll need a certain rigidity in your plucking hand, but the mechanics are the same throughout.
- You can also use adjacent strings for this exercise (the A and D strings, for example), but it's slightly more difficult—you'll need to manipulate your hand to be able to grab the string to generate the pop.

LESSON 6 (continued)

Let's take the previous exercise one step further, still popping the G string (*insert your own joke as necessary*), but alternate the double-thumbed string:

Alternating Strings

N.C.

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.
T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Referring back to Lesson 02 and again using the E Dorian Scale, we can modify the exercises to create new ones that incorporate this *double-thumb-and-pop* technique:

Exercise 02

N.C.(Em)

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.
T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Notes:

- Be sure you can play each exercise smoothly and cleanly before moving on to the next! These are not easy exercises, and will take some patience to play them correctly, especially at tempo.

Lesson 7

In this lesson we'll get away from triplets and return to sixteenth notes. We'll combine elements from the previous lessons, and create another type of slap-bass technique, this time featuring a “down, up, pluck, pluck” pattern:

Exercise 01

N.C. *(Rudiment from Lesson 01)* *NEW Idea*

*Slap fretting hand against fretboard, as indicated, throughout.

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.
T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Let's use the E Dorian Scale and use this new idea in a descending line. We'll start by playing eighth-note octaves of the scale notes first, then apply our new technique:

Exercise 02

N.C. (Em)

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.
T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Notes:

- Notice there are barely any actual *notes* in Exercise 01; nearly all “notes” are percussive in nature.
- There are *no* notes that sound in Exercise 02.

LESSON 7 (continued)

This “down, up, pluck, pluck” pattern can be applied to any combination of notes, but it’s ready-made for perfect fifths:

Exercise 03

N.C.(A5)

T↓ T↑ P -----| T↓ T↑ P -----| T↓ T↑ P -----| T↓ T↑ P -----|

7 X X 9 7 X X 9 7 X X 9 7 X X 9

T↓ = Strike string w/ downstroke using thumb.

T↑ = Strike string w/ upstroke using thumb.

Lesson 8

Changing Up the Rhythm

In our last lesson of Level 3, we'll look at changing up the rhythm. We've looked at eighth- and sixteenth-note triplets, but only in the context of playing each beat the same way. Let's mix things up a bit. There are quite a few permutations we can come up with in a single 4-beat measure:

Single Measure Eighth-Note Triplet Permutations

Four musical staves illustrating eighth-note triplet permutations in 4/4 time. Each staff shows a different arrangement of eighth-note triplets across the four beats of a measure. The first staff shows four groups of eighth-note triplets. The second staff shows a permutation with triplets in beats 1, 3, and 4, and a quarter rest in beat 2. The third staff shows a permutation with triplets in beats 1, 2, 4, and 3. The fourth staff shows a permutation with triplets in beats 1, 2, 3, and 4.

And we can extend these permutations to sixteenth-note triplets. The rudiment is exactly the same, just in double-time:

Single Measure Eighth-Note Triplet Permutations

Three musical staves illustrating sixteenth-note triplet permutations in 4/4 time. Each staff shows a different arrangement of sixteenth-note triplets across the four beats of a measure. The first staff shows four groups of sixteenth-note triplets. The second staff shows a permutation with triplets in beats 1, 3, and 4, and a quarter rest in beat 2. The third staff shows a permutation with triplets in beats 1, 2, 4, and 3.

LESSON 8 (continued)

You've hopefully noticed that we can use **any** of the techniques discussed in Lessons 01–07 for the triplet-rhythm permutations just mentioned. And, by moving the placement of the eighth- or sixteenth-note triplet(s) within the bar (or the beat itself), your rhythmic variations are endless:

- Down, up, pluck
- Down, up, dead note (see Richard Bona)
- Octaves (see Larry Graham)
- Fifths

And of course there are many, many more options available to you. Let yourself get creative!

The idea is to incorporate these triplet ideas as short fills to enhance your bass grooves. Here's a quick example:

Example 01

N.C.(Em)

T P T T T P T T P T P T T P T T --- 1/4

0 5 5 7 X 7 7 5 5 0 X 3 0



"The main thing is that you understand how [the use of these triplets is] put together, where it's coming from, where you can execute it, and you know what you've got to do to try and clean up—most importantly— your playing."

