

USING RHYTHM PATTERNS

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Rhythm patterns are the most effective way to learn to play difficult fast passages well. Using this method improves velocity, coordination, and intonation simultaneously. I was introduced to rhythm patterns by Frank Cohen, now Principal Clarinetist of the Cleveland Orchestra, when we were together in the Baltimore Symphony. Frank had gotten the concept from a small book devoted to hundreds of rhythm pattern examples by Ivan Galamian, who taught many famous violinists at the Julliard School. So the idea came from a violinist to a clarinetist, to a violist, to the present article--in simplified form.

When you have a difficult fast passage, regardless of how the rhythm of the passage is printed, practice it in some of the rhythm patterns printed here (lines A-D). For example, if the difficult passage is in duplets, practice it in the two-note and four-note rhythm patterns; if the passage is in triplets, practice it in the three-note patterns, as in the excerpts below.

Two-Note Patterns:



Three-Note Patterns:



Four-Note Patterns:



More Four-Note Patterns:



Line E is a brief excerpt of a fast passage in cut time from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Try playing it as fast as you can. Then

after you've worked on it as suggested below, try playing it again. You will immediately find that you can play it faster, more precisely coordinated between left-hand fingers and bow, and with better pitch! This is an extremely effective way to practice.

Practice the excerpt an equal amount of time in each of the three-note patterns; as a convenience the passage has been written out as you would practice it in each pattern. Line F is the excerpt written in the three-note pattern, B1. Line G is the second of the three-note patterns, B2. Line H is the last three-note pattern, B3. When playing the patterns at high speed, be sure to accent as printed in the syncopated pattern (line H); it helps keep the pattern coordinated with the beat. Now try playing it again in the original way (line E). You will find that you now can play it easily faster and with greater accuracy.

Beethoven Symphony Excerpt



Same excerpt in three-note pattern B1



Same excerpt in three-note pattern B2



Same excerpt in three-note pattern B3



If you want to improve scales, play them too in rhythm patterns to get more accurate intonation and greater velocity at the same practice time. If you want to use the rhythm patterns with three-octave scales, use a pitch pattern that gives you a 48-note scale to play, divisible by duplets or triplets. Adding three notes to both the beginning and the end of the scale and not repeating the top note is one way of getting a 48-note scale. That way you can utilize whichever patterns you prefer. Four-octave scales are most easily done in duplets and fours.

Harmonic Arpeggios + SEVCIK + BALANCED LH - 2um6