



# Rhythmic Precision in Swing Music

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## Abstract

This document contains a number of exercises to train rhythmic precision when playing swing music containing rhythmic accents.

## Rhythmic precision exercises

Figure 1 contains fifteen exercises for the training of rhythmic precision in *swing music*. These exercises are used in workshops for jazz big bands by Mr. Erik van Lier.

Timing problems between members from a section, e.g., the four or five trumpet players in the big band, may arise when each individual player uses a different interpretation of the swing pattern. Swing music implies that written notes in groups of 2 equal *eight notes* are played with a *triplet feeling*; however, the rhythmic ratio between the pair is not exactly 2:1 (as in classical music). The actual swing ratio depends on the tempo and the interpretation of the music.

The set of exercises in this document are appropriate when a jazz score contains rhythmic accents (short notes, interspersed with rests). That is a particularly vulnerable case, where precision is hard to achieve. The exercises use a clever trick (using vocalisation of the rests), that can be practiced by all the section members during rehearsal time.

## Guidelines for performing these exercises

Each exercise is written with 2 sets of notes: notes with **stems up** represent the *written notes* as they would appear in the score or parts of the musical piece in swing style. Notes with **stem down** fill the gaps between the accents and specify a *vocalisation* of the entire fragment. Suggestions for pronunciation are given at the bottom of the figure.

First, sing or speak the lower line aloud, while clapping the upper line. Try to synchronise each section or even the entire band. After a while the timing of the orchestra should improve. Then, think the lower line (that is, silently, mentally; just a reminder, since there is a class of people who always think aloud), while playing the upper accents on your instrument. Use the same technique for synchronisation between the rhythm section and the horns (these patterns would typically be supported by drum accents).



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# Eriks Exercise

Erik van Lier

1 Bap dee - be - doom-bap. 2 Gee - doom-bap, bap.

3 Gee-doom-bap, gee - doom-bap. 4 Bap, dee - be - doom-bap, bap.

5 Gee - doom-bap, bap, bap-bee-doom-bap. 6 Dee-be-doom-bap, bee-doom-bap, ba-dap.

7 Bap boom boom bap-gee - doom-bap, gee-doom-bap, gee - doom-bap, bap, bap-bee-doom-bap.

8 Bap-bee-doom-bap, gee - doom-bap, bap. 9 Dee-be-doom-bap, bap, bap-bee-doom-bap.

10 Bap-bee-doom-bap, bap, gee - doom-bap, bap bap bap, gee-doom-bap, gee - doom-bap, daa-ba-dap.

11 Bap boom bap-bee-doom-bap, gee-doom-bap. 12 Bap-bee-doom-bap, bap-gee - doom-bap, bap, ba-dap.

13 Gee - doom-bap, ba-dap-gee-doom-bap, ba-dap. Gee - doom-bap, ba-dap-gee-doom-bap, bap ba-dap.

14 Gee - doom-bap, bap bap bap ba-dap. 15 Bap-bee-doom-bap, gee - doom-bap, ba-dap-gee-doom-bap.

A: as in Bath  
Bap: no sound on the P  
E: as in Bird

EE: as in Bee  
G: as in Girl  
OO: as in Too

Top line: the figure  
Bottom line: fills  
(in fast tempos the M disappears)

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Figure 1: Exercises for improving rhythmic precision in swing music