

## LESSON 1

# THE ALTERNATING BASS

In Book 1, we played country backup parts by hitting a bass note on the first beat and following up with three downstroke strums (or two downstroke strums for a waltz). Now we're going to add in another bass note, on the third beat, replacing one of the strums and giving us the classic country and bluegrass sound of an *alternating bass*.

Let's start with a familiar chord, D. For now, our general rule is: for the second bass note of the pattern, go up to the next highest string (meaning the string with the next highest *pitch*, not the one higher off the floor). So for a D chord, we'll play the second fret, third string, on beat 3, as in Example 1. Everything is still done with all downstrokes (toward the floor).

On an A chord, if we follow the general rule of going up to the next highest string for the bass note, we'll play an E note, or the second fret on the fourth string, on beat 3. It will sound like Example 2. You're now playing a bass note on every other beat, and following every bass note with a downward strum on the top strings.

TRACE 5 Ex. 1

TRACE 4 Ex. 2

D

A

0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2

0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2

As you might have guessed, the interesting part is keeping this going as you switch chords. To get used to maintaining an alternating-bass strum for each chord, practice switching between D and A every two bars, as in Example 3.

If you're having trouble hitting the right strings for the bass notes, take out the strums for a moment. Just try socking away at the first and third beats of the D chord, as in Example 4, paying attention to hitting each string as accurately as possible. You should still finger the whole chord while you do this exercise. In Example 5, do the same thing with the A chord: just play the bass notes.

When you go back to playing the whole strum, continue to focus on hitting the bass notes on beats 1 and 3, and let the strums fall almost as an afterthought.



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