

DRUM LESSONS IN LA.COM

MASTERING THE METRONOME

All musicians are responsible for playing in time. As drummers though, we state the pulse and feel for the other musicians and for the listening audience. So its important that we have an excellent sense of time. Working with a metronome (also called a click) will improve your time. Here are some suggestions that will help.

FOR STARTERS

The two fundamental parts to playing in time are **tempo** (beats per minute) and **subdivisions** (eighth notes, sixteenth notes, etc). The tempo is the main pulse of how fast you are playing, but it's just as important to be aware of the subdivisions even if you're not playing them. For example, if you are playing an eighth note beat, be aware of and count the sixteenth note subdivisions; the space between the notes. (This is especially helpful when playing slow tempos.)

If you are not comfortable playing with a click, start by having your metronome play sixteenth notes and clap or play quarter notes along to it. (Counting the sixteenth notes along with the click will help.) Then try clapping eighth notes. Make sure that your clapping lines up with the appropriate metronome clicks (record yourself and listen back to make sure.) When you feel comfortable with that, reverse it so the metronome plays quarter notes and you clap eighth and sixteenth notes.

This is a good exercise to internalize the subdivisions. Now lets take it to the drum set. Do the same thing playing drum beats. You play a quarter note beat while the metronome plays sixteenths and conversely, you play a sixteenth note beat while the metronome plays quarters. Find the appropriate volume for it. Not so low that you have trouble following it and not so loud that its distracting.

It may help to think of the metronome as another musician that you're playing with, like a percussionist playing a cowbell. Only this musician has perfect time. The more you play with a metronome, the more you will internalize the time that it generates. If you can choose the sound of the metronome, pick one that is musical and easy to hear.

TAKE IT EASY

It's important to start slowly and gradually make your way through a variety of speeds. Make sure you feel comfortable playing the current tempo before you speed up. You want to be able to play with the metronome well fast, slow, and anywhere in between.

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I recommend you move the tempo in increments of five. This helps you to feel the differences in slight variations in speed when playing in general. For example, if you are used to playing a song at a certain tempo and the singer asks you to play it a little slower, you want to be sure you can keep the tempo steady at the slower pace for the whole song and not speed up to where you're used to playing it.

SHUT UP THE CLICK

Now that you have a good grasp of playing with the metronome, let's refine your sense of time. Most modern metronomes have both an auditory and visual cue where you can hear and see the time. Mute it and try to play along to the visual cue while periodically looking away to see if you are still in time when you look back. If you have a drum machine, you can program it to mute itself for a certain amount of measures. The point of doing this is to start to rely less on the metronome and more on your inner sense to generate the time. But do this only after you feel comfortable playing with the metronome as explained in the paragraphs above.

You can do something similar when you are just listening to music in general. Count along and turn down the sound to where you can't hear it, but keep counting. Then turn the volume back up to see if you stay in time. I don't recommend doing this when others are with you as they will not appreciate you messing with the music.

MOVE THE CLICK

The metronome usually marks the beginning of the measure and starts on beat 1. When you feel that your sense of time is solid, have the metronome play on different parts of the beat. For example count the metronome marking on the 2 and 4 instead of on the 1. Also, try the sixteenth note off beats. Have the metronome play the "e" or the "a" of the beat. This will no doubt be difficult at first because we are so used to the metronome on the 1, but this will help strengthen your time at various parts of the measure. ([Here](#) is an exercise that will help you feel the metronome on different parts of the beat.)

CONCENTRATE

It's usually a good idea to avoid distractions when practicing but it's also good to train yourself to follow the click with other things going on. Put on some music and try to play to the metronome with the music playing. Chances are the music is in a different tempo than the metronome and you may find that your mind will try to follow the music instead of the metronome. (CAUTION: Try this only after you feel very comfortable playing to a metronome in general. If not, the extra distraction will only frustrate you.) This exercise really focuses your concentration and helps you stick to the click when you use it while playing with a band.

IN CLOSING

If you are serious about playing music, a good sense of time is essential and something to continually work on to improve. Once you are comfortable with it, experiment with playing ahead and behind the click. Don't get frustrated if it doesn't happen right away. Mastering time takes time to master. (Clever, huh? I just thought of that.) The more you work on it, the easier it will become.



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