MUSIC ELEMENTS & BASIC THEORY

Unless you read formal music notation, it can be difficult to define how to perform music and strum various rhythms. You may find all kinds of weird and wonderful methods online that might help but UCL has developed a simple, effective visual way to get you started by using just arrows and numbers to help you get started.

Before long you will be able to listen to the rhythm of a song and get a feel for it as your ability to strum in various ways will become more relaxed and effective after getting to grips with the initial training.
There are a few things you need to acknowledge before you begin your training. Music is made up of eight key elements which include; tonality, timbre, texture, rhythm, pitch, harmony, dynamics, melody and form. The speed of music is defined by the tempo working together with all elements to create the overall sound structure and a time signature helps to define how many beats there are per bar and the key signature defines what key the song is to be played in. Each key has its own chord family but more on that at level 2.

TONALITY: The overall sound of the music as pleasant or unpleasant, upbeat, relaxed, heavy, soft etc.

TIMBRE: The unique sound quality of an instrument or sound. Different sized ukuleles have different tonalities, as can the same instrument but with different strings or woods.

TEXTURE: The layers of sound, eg: Ukulele, bass, drums, harmonica or soprano, concert, baritone, vocals.

RHYTHM: How long or short a sound is. To define rhythm, we use a simplified visual method for practising rhythmic strumming. According to the tempo we set each note of the bar to numbers with add (+) signs in between for up strokes:

4/4 : 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +
↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑

3/4 : 1 + 2 + 3 +
↓ ↓ ↓ ↑

Most of the down strokes tend to fall on the numbers and most of the up strokes on the **+'s**.

EG: 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +
↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↑ ***(This rhythm is also known as the Calypso stroke)***

But we don't just strum up and down, sometimes we mute the strings or create a 'chuck' sound (as often used in reggae music) which would be represented by the letter X. More on that in Level 2.

DYNAMICS: How loud or soft the music is. There are few ways to define the dynamics. See the diagram for an idea of what each of the formal music dynamics represent.

In formal music, the dynamics would be illustrated by the letters to the left and possibly a decrescendo or crescendo diagram. The velocity number is for keyboard players to define how hard to hit the notes.

An accent means to make a certain note louder in a phrase.

Dynamics' Note Velocity

Dynamic	Velocity*	Voice
ppp	16	Whispering
pp	33	Almost at a whisper
p	49	Softer than speaking voice
mp	64	] Speaking voice
mf	80	
f	96	Louder than speaking
ff	112	Speaking loud
fff	127	Yelling

Decrescendo (diminuendo) Crescendo Accent

*Note velocity adopted from Logi

FORM: The order and arrangement of parts of the music. Pop songs may start with a 4 or 8 bar intro section followed by a few verses, a bridge and chorus. There is often a middle 8 section or solo part after the halfway mark and often an outro at the end. But songs come in all shapes and forms so this course will help you define each of the sections and their functions.

HARMONY: The instruments that support the melody with the chords. Chords are made up of 3 or more notes that work in harmony to define their sound. There are various chord types such as major, minor, dominant, augmented, diminished and many more that you will explore at UCL.

MELODY: A series of pitches that make up a tune. Melody is usually the line that is sang by a vocalist. It is the main part of a tune that makes it recognisable and stand apart from others. A song can feature the same chord progressions and rhythm but various melodies over the top can totally change the sound of the song.

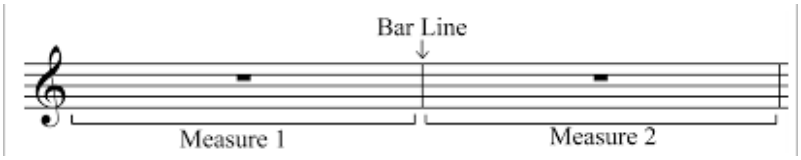
SOME BASIC THEORY

TEMPO: The speed or pace of the song. The tempo is defined in **BPM** aka **Beats Per Minute**. 60 beats per minute is the same as real time seconds, so 120 beats per minute is the same as counting 2 beats per second. **90BPM - 140BPM** is the average tempo for popular music from Blues, Soul, R&B to Rock and Pop. If you ever tap your foot to music – you are probably tapping out the tempo.

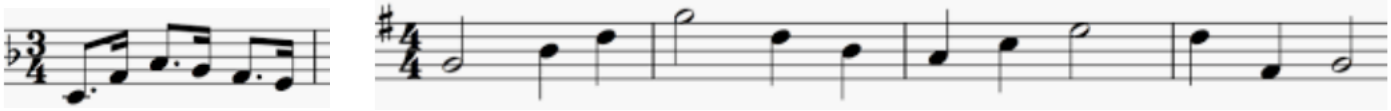
TIME SIGNATURE: Determines how many **beats** there are in each **bar**. We will be looking at both **3/4** and **4/4** time throughout this course. 3/4 is also know **waltz time**. 4/4 is also known as **common time** and can be represented with a C on sheet music. Have you ever seen a drummer count in using their sticks? They are determining both the time signature and tempo of the song so that the rest of the group can start on time & in pace.

KEY SIGNATURE: Tells you what key the song is in. In formal music this is represented by the number of sharps or flats at the beginning of a music piece. For informal training purposes we simply select the 1st letter of the chord of which the key is in. EG: C would mean that the song is played in the key of C major.

BARS: A bar is one measure of a song and contains notes relative to the time signature.



Here are two examples of how notes can be arranged within a bar of 3/4 time and 4/4 time:



PRACTICE TIP: *Start off slowly at speeds of either 60BPM or 80BPM and gradually take the speed up by 5-10BPM each time you feel like you are progressing. Remember… no pain, no gain& practice makes perfect! ;)*