# Some basic rhythms in jazz

**General Rhythmic Profile**
While so called traditional music (form the common practice era and beyond) accentuates the fist and third beats in 4/4 meter, jazz, blues, pop, rock, etc. has an accentuation on beats two and four, known as a backbeat. This is especially noticeable in the drums, where the hi hat is "stepped-on" on those beats.
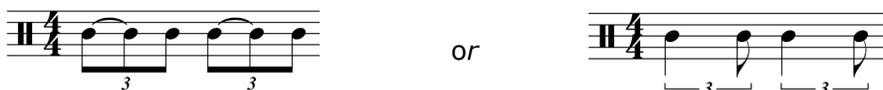
A great way to get an applied sense of a backbeat (in the absence of a drummer) is to set a metronome at half the intended tempo of whatever is being practiced. Then align the "slower" pulses with beats 2 & 4 while practicing/playing.

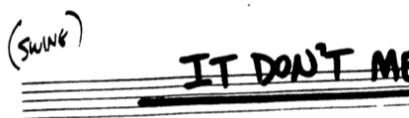| Beat/count: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Metronome: | | click | | click | | click | | click |

This will actually be hard at first, because one usually associates the click of a metronome with the downbeat (beat 1). But over time it will become a seemingly natural way to play and will prepare you for playing with a real drummer.

**Swing**

While "swing Music" is characterized as a style of jazz associated with the Big Band era of the 1930's, the term "swing" can generally refer to a way of handling rhythm. Whether in 4/4 (most common) or 3/4, "swinging" refers to taking what would usually be evenly dispersed eight notes and instead grouping them in pairs so that the first of the two is longer and the second is proportionally shorter. Typically (and moreover approximately), the first eighth note (longer) is treated as two tied eighths within an eighth-note triplet figure; the second eighth (shorter) is treated like the third eighth of the triplet figure.



*or*

While this description can be captured with the above notation, it is not notated as such and should be "felt" rather than "read". In notation, the pair of eighth notes are noted as just that, but sometimes with the additional performance instruction of "swing" written at the top of the score, as exemplified in the chart of Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean A Thing":



But in most cases, it is just assumed that the interpreter of the chart will handle the rhythm as "swing" and no specific instruction is given beyond a general tempo and/or something vague like "jazz":

## Latin

A "Latin" rhythm is generally characterize a rhythm section and bass line that articulates the "and" of 2 & 4 in a 4/4 meter at a medium tempo. |: 1..(2) **&** 3..(4) **&** :|



Like "swing", the notated melody in a chart might not indicate such a rhythm, but it may be instructed at the top of the chart with the expectation that the players will know how to affect such a rhythm.



## Bebop (Bop)

Bebop refers to a very fast (or very slow), complex style developed in the 1940's that incorporated improvised lines of eighth notes often ending with a two-note figure (sounding like "be-bop").



## Ballad

The ballad is a slow tempo song, often with the drums utilizing brushes instead of sticks in order to imply a gentle atmosphere. Because of its slow tempo, the ballad often allowed players to insert lavish improvised lines and runs, displace rhythms and incorporate reharmonized and altered chords. Such choices were, of course, up to the player and the chart itself would not indicate where such insertions should be made (i.e. the chart appeared to be rather "ordinary").



## Harmonic implications

Interestingly, regardless of these different rhythmic styles (and there are many more!), the use of harmony and chord progressions is remarkably similar. This will be discussed separately...