READING RHYTHMS

Text and examples by Norman Weinberg.

LOOK OUT, HERE come those notes with lots of beams. Okay, okay, I know, for some players, looking at a page full of beams can be a scary experience. But relax; additional beams don't necessarily mean you're going to have to play so fast that your sticks turn into kindling. More often than not, music that makes use of thirty-second notes moves at a slower pace than music using longer note values.

It's tedious, but let's start with the basics. First, let's talk about what thirty-second notes look like and what they do. Thirty-second notes have three flags whenever they aren't connected to any other notes. Most often though, you'll see thirty-seconds that have three beams instead of three flags – free-standing thirty-seconds are rare. Similar to the way that sixteenths are grouped, thirty-seconds are beamed together into groupings that visually indicate the counts.

What do thirty-second notes do? Just as eighth notes divide quarters into two equal parts and sixteenth notes divide eighths into two equal parts, thirty-seconds divide each sixteenth into two equal parts. To look at this in another way, remember that in common time there are four sixteenth notes in each count. And since there are two thirty-seconds to each sixteenth, there will be eight thirty-seconds in a single count.

Performing a full count's worth of thirty-second notes is truly easy. Just count a group of four sixteenth notes (1 e + a) and play those syllables with your right hand. Now, place a left hand stroke in between each one of those syllables. If you did this correctly, you've just played eight notes between counts one and two, and you've just performed a set of thirty-second notes. Congratulations! See, that wasn't so hard.

If you played last month's exercise in cut time, you've actually got a jump on understanding thirty-seconds. In cut time, eighth notes get the syllables of "1 e + a" as they divide each of the two main counts into four equal parts. The sixteenth notes that were in the exercise forced you to play two strokes for each of those syllables. In effect, you were playing the rhythm of thirty-seconds (eight equal divisions to each count) even though the notes themselves were written as sixteenths.

Take a look at Example 1 and you'll see how thirty-second notes (the stems-up notes with three beams) relate to the other types of values that you already know. Notice that there are eight thirty-seconds to each quarter, four thirty-seconds to each eighth note, and two thirty-seconds to each sixteenth note.

Now that you know how thirty-seconds operate, let's discuss a counting system for them. Example 2 shows two different ways to approach the counting of thirty-seconds. In the first measure, you'll see that the thirty-second notes aren't really counted at all. Instead, you simply use your common sense to tell you how to place two notes on each of the same syllables that are used for sixteenths. The second measure in the example shows a counting system that places a syllable on every thirty-second. While this method may look confusing, in reality it's not. In order to apply this system, say the "1 e + a" syllables for the first half of the count (the number) and another set of syllables for the second half of the count (the "and" syllable). In essence, this method lets you think of thirty-seconds as a set of four notes on the first eighth of the count and another set of four notes on the second eighth. Whichever method you choose (and both methods will work just fine), try to stay consistent. Counting thirty-seconds one way the first time you play a passage and another way the next time can lead to confusion.

Most often, you're not going to see a grouping of eight thirty-seconds. Many intriguing rhythms can be created by combining eighths, sixteenths, and thirty-seconds together. Example 3 shows several rhythms that are created when all three of these note values are connected. Below the rhythms, you'll see the counts that show you where each eighth or sixteenth syllable will fall.

Don't forget that any note, including thirty-seconds, can be replaced with the same value of rest. In Example 4 you'll find some additional figures that include sixteenth and thirty-second rests. For this example, there are no counts written below the notes. Think about the value and the length of each note, and "solve" the measures. Rhythms of this complexity usually move very slowly, so don't try playing this too fast.

One last type of figure is presented in Example 5. Here, four thirty-seconds are connected to a set of three sixteenth note triplets. In the first figure, the thirty-seconds will begin on the first half of the count and the triplet begins on the "and" syllable. The second figure is just the reverse, with the triplet starting on the "number" syllable and the thirty-seconds starting on the "and."

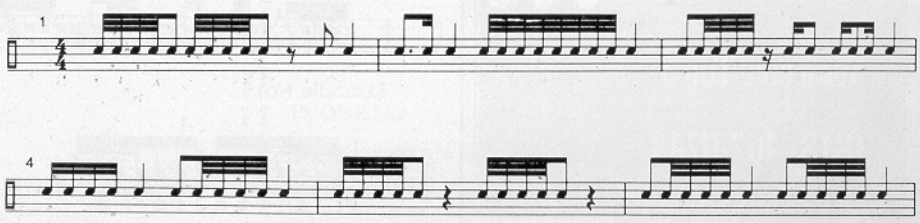
Just as an aside – since things are starting to get a bit more complicated, it might be a good time to review some of the practice suggestions presented in earlier articles.

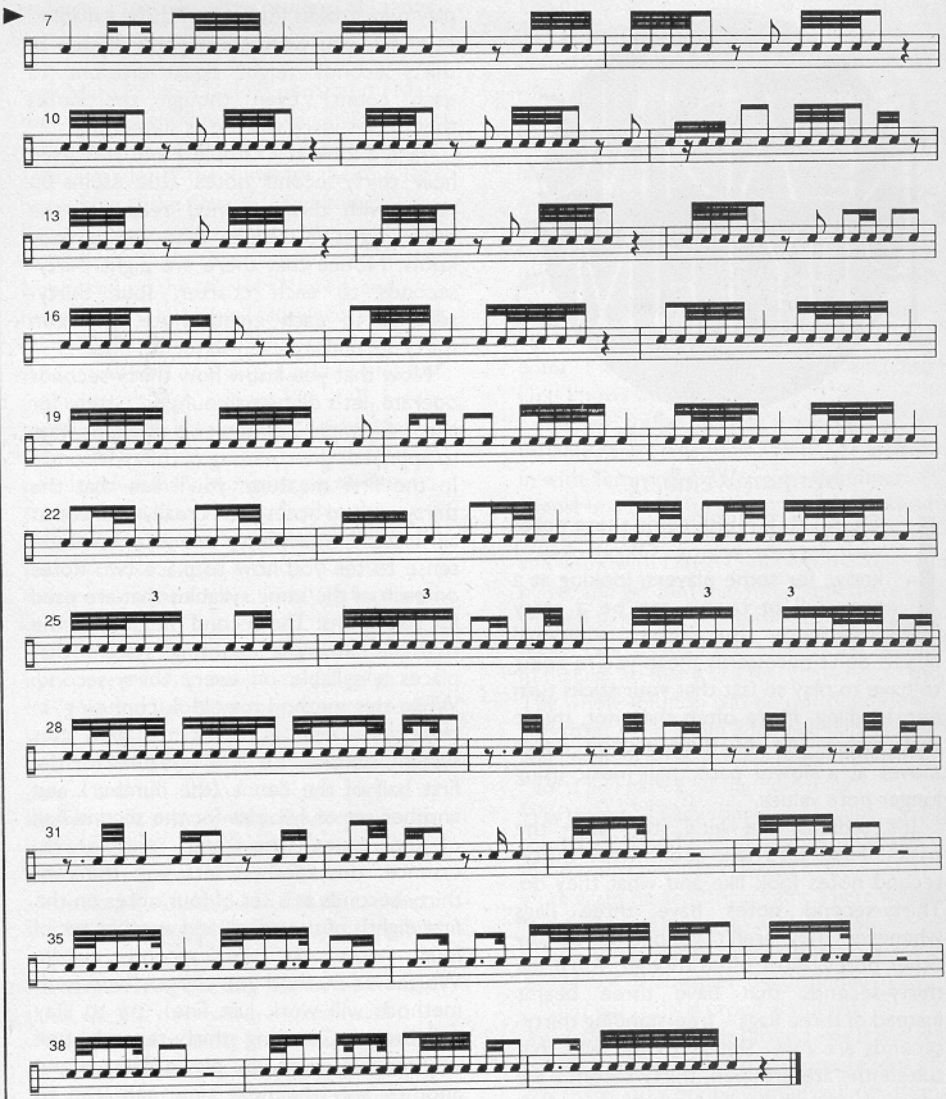
Be certain that the speed of your counts is steady and consistent. There should be no pause between figures, measures, or between lines. Take the exercise very slowly at first and have a successful experience. If you're having trouble, SLOW DOWN! Set yourself some realistic goals. Then, pat yourself on the back and do it again. Do it again, and again, and again. If you play this exercise fifty times in a row without errors, then you can be pretty confident that the fifty-first time will also be perfect.

Counting out loud will serve as additional feedback to your ears and your eyes that everything is going along okay. As you count, keep your verbal syllables short and crisp so you can hear where the sound is supposed to occur. If you draw out the verbal count, it becomes harder to synchronize the sound of the drum to the sound of the count.

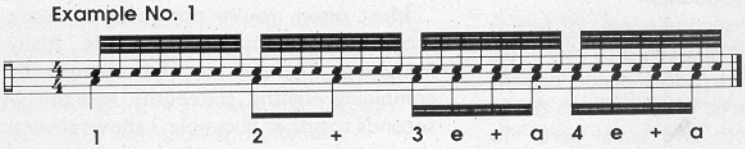
Always try to keep your eyes in front of your hands. This means that while your hands are playing count one, your eyes need to be looking at count two (at least). Every count gets placed into a short-term memory location in your brain. As you play the count, your eyes are already looking ahead to see what you have to do for the next count. This occurs when you read English. Your eyes are scanning the words coming up while your mouth is saying the words that your memory recalls.

Next month we're going to do something a little different. We'll have a series of exercises taken from the Reading Rhythms booklets (available each month from *Rhythm*). So review any rhythms that may still need some work and get ready to apply some of these reading skills to the drumkit. Until then, practice and have fun! ®

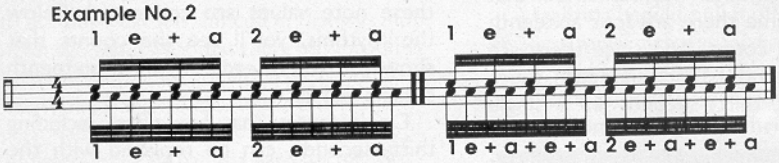




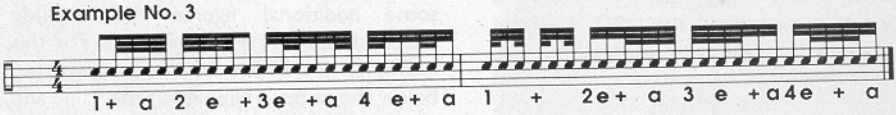
Example No. 1



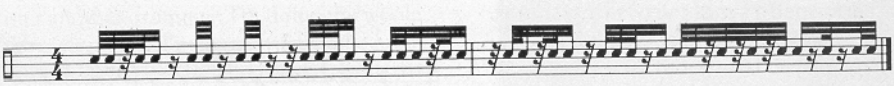
Example No. 2



Example No. 3



Example No. 4



Example No. 5