

1 Getting Started

Since most funk parts are based on a sixteenth-note subdivision, we'll begin by just scratching muted sixteenths.

With your left hand resting lightly on the fretboard (just enough to mute the strings), begin strumming with your right hand. The example below shows that you begin with a downstroke, alternating four strokes per beat.

1

count: 1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

v = downstroke
V = upstroke

As you play, keep your eye on your strumming hand, and apply these basic rules:

- Your wrist and arm should be loose! Also, try not to "fix" your fingers or wrist onto the guitar.
- Don't drag your pick across the strings. Instead, try to make it sound like you're hitting all of the strings at the same time. This will keep your sound tight and focused.
- At this point, you'll want to always keep your strumming hand moving in time with the music, and keep the volume of all the attacks even like a machine. It's also a good idea to tap your foot as you're playing. And finally...
- Play strong! This is no time to be shy. If you make a mistake, make a big, loud, ugly mistake.

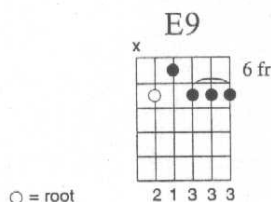
A word about counting: To keep better time while you play, try tapping your foot once for each beat (1, 2, 3, and 4) and using "e-&a" to fill out the count, like this:

"**one**-ee-and-uh, **two**-ee-and-uh, **three**-ee-and-uh, **four**-ee-and-uh."

2 Divide and Conquer

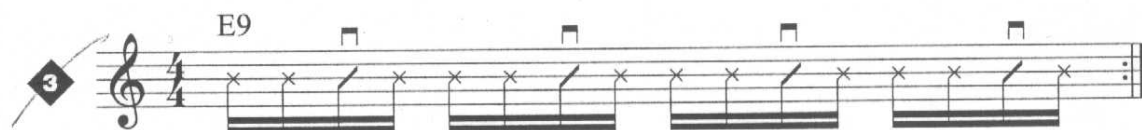
(Isolating Sixteenths)

Now that you're wailing on the sixteenths, we'll use the ultimate funk chord—E9—to begin playing the attacks. To get the right sound on this voicing, try muting the sixth string with your left-hand thumb so that it doesn't sound. (Note: Throughout this book, the root of the chord will be highlighted.)



The concept of isolating each of the sixteenths is, without a doubt, the most important element in developing your funk technique. As you play through the following examples, keep the volume of the scratches even with volume of the chord. Also, continue to tap your foot on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Downstrokes: The first and third sixteenth of each beat. The first sixteenth is called the *downbeat*—it's also your tempo or meter. The third sixteenth is called the *upbeat*.



Upstrokes: The second and fourth sixteenth of each beat. Getting the upstrokes "just right" can be tricky. Try to get them as strong as the downstrokes without throwing off the time-feel.

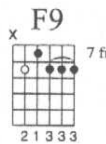
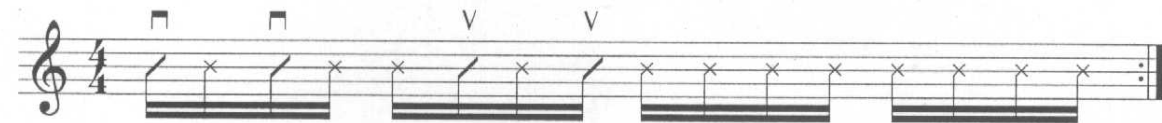


3 Forging the Funk

Now let's combine these sixteenth attacks to create some basic one-bar rhythm patterns. We'll also move around the ninth chord shape to some other keys.

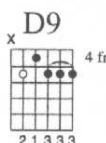
6

F9

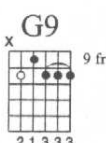
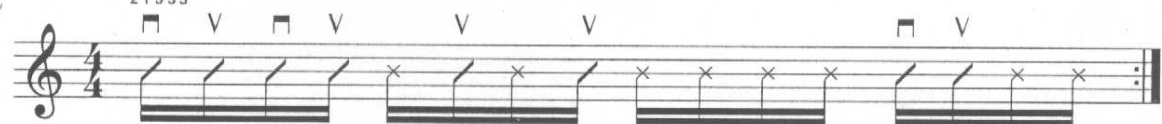
7

D9



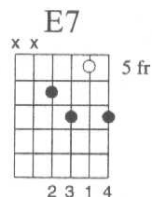

8

G9

Here's a chord you can use instead of the ninth. Notice that it uses only the top four strings—this type of voicing is typical in funk because it makes the guitar easier to hear among the other instruments.

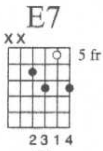
E7



Apply this new E7 shape to the following examples. Focus on the higher strings, and try to avoid hitting the lower strings with your strumming hand!

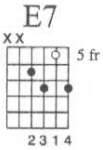
9

E7




10

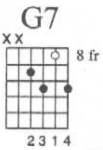
E7




Let's move the same chord shape up three frets to G7.

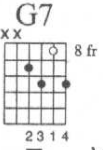
11

G7




12

G7




4 Scratch Or Float?

At times, you may want to sustain a chord while you're playing a rhythm pattern, instead of scratching. Although you may be tempted to stop your strumming hand in these instances, it's better to keep that hand moving in the usual sixteenth-note motion, "floating" over the strings as the chord sustains.

13

Here's another four-note chord shape, this time in the key of C, with the root on top. Use this shape to play the following example. Be sure to float your hand during the sustained notes.

C7

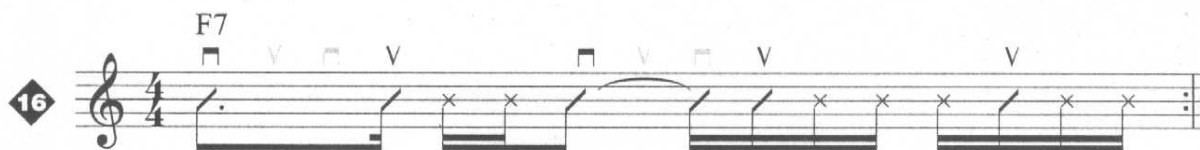
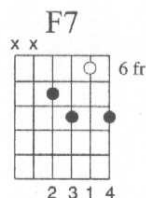
14

For this pattern, move the same chord shape down three frets to the key of A.

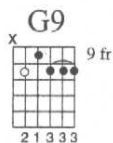
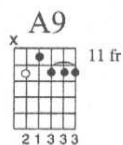
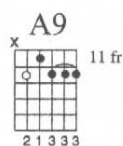
A7

15

Now try another pattern with this F7 shape.



Up to this point, we've been scratching every sixteenth note; this helps keep our time even and our technique more consistent. However, this constant scratching sound isn't always desirable. With the next three rhythm patterns, keep your right hand moving in a normal down/up motion, but strike the strings only on the indicated rhythm—leaving silence between the attacks.



Now that you can play in time *without* the muted scratch, you should be aware that an occasional scratch sound between attacks can add a cool percussive effect to your funk playing. You may want to go back and play the examples on this page again. From this point onward, experiment and let your ears tell you how much of the scratch sound is appropriate.

5 The Swing Thing

Until now, all of our examples have had a “straight” feel. Let’s begin playing some of the rhythms with a swing feel.

The swing groove happens by slightly delaying the second and fourth sixteenth of each beat. The best way to understand this is to hear it first. Listen to the CD, and then try it yourself: Simply scratch muted sixteenths with a straight feel, then stop and try the swing groove.

20

straight

swing

Play these familiar rhythm patterns with a swing feel. (Use our old reliable E9 chord.)

E9

21

E9

22

E9

23

In funk, the swing feel can be used to varying degrees. You'll often see it notated like this: (♩♩♩ = ♩♩♩). Check out the following three swing jams. Each is a two-bar rhythm pattern.

24 (♩♩♩ = ♩♩♩)

G9
9 fr
2 1 3 3 3

F9 7 fr
F#9 8 fr
2 1 3 3 3

25 (♩♩♩ = ♩♩♩)

E9 6 fr
2 1 3 3 3

F9 7 fr
E9 6 fr
2 1 3 3 3

26 (♩♩♩ = ♩♩♩)

C7 8 fr
1 2 1 1

F9 7 fr
2 1 3 3 3

From this point on, some of the examples will have a swing feel and some will be straight.

6 Chords 'R' Us

Before moving into other funk techniques, let's take a moment to embellish the chords we've already played. By moving one note of a chord shape, we can enhance our rhythm parts, making them more melodic. (Remember that any of these shapes can be moved around the neck into different keys.)

The basic E9 shape is easily changed into an E13 chord. Use the following rhythm to practice alternating between these two shapes.

E9

6 fr

2 1 3 3 3

E13

6 fr

2 1 3 3 4

27

4/4

The other seventh chords we've used can also be modified by changing one note. These next embellishments are known as "sus4" (suspended fourth) or just "sus" chords. Play the following rhythms, alternating between these chord shapes.

E7

E7sus4

28

A7

A7sus4