

Mental Floss

Variations on standard exercises to test your brain

Gene Fambrough - University of Alabama at Birmingham

Introduction

How would you categorize your mistakes?

This hands-on workshop aims to give students a new approach to “train their brain” to think about music in a more cohesive way.

History / concepts: 4-2-1 vs. “gridding”

Do not rely on notation unless absolutely necessary, the challenge is to “think” through the pattern.

Explanation

16th-note accent pattern (4-2-1) for reference and point of departure:

The image shows musical notation for a 16th-note accent pattern (4-2-1) on three staves (4, 2, 1) and a single staff below. The notation consists of three staves labeled 4, 2, and 1, each containing four measures of music. Each measure contains a group of 16th notes with an accent (>) above the first note. The pattern is 4-2-1, meaning the first measure has 4 groups of 4 notes, the second has 2 groups of 8 notes, and the third has 1 group of 16 notes. Below these three staves is a single staff with a single note followed by a rest, indicating the end of the pattern.

Reinforcing the 4-2-1 concept!!!

Variations to apply:

- Element
- Order
- Structure
- Sticking
- Metronome

Element variation

Change from single accents to double accents:



“Chunk” learning by rote

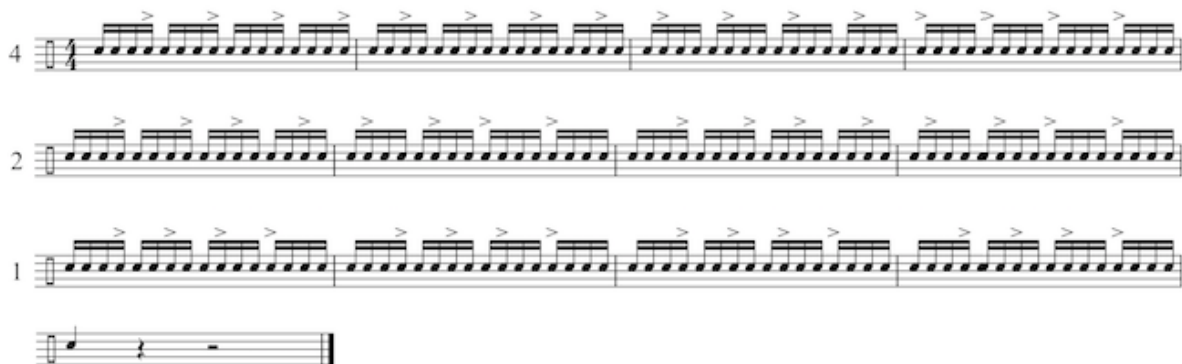
Other examples of element variation include:

- Substitute diddles for accents
- Add flams on accents
- Substitute 5-stroke rolls for double accents
- Add drags after (or before) accents

Order variation

Using the initial exercise for reference, change the order.

The first logical order variation is to play the exercise “backwards”, i.e. starting with the accent on the “a”, then the “&”, then “e”, and finally downbeats.



In “chunks” as needed...

Other examples of order variation:

- Change the order of accents: [1, &, e, a], [e, 1, a, &], etc.

Structure variation

Change the overall pattern structure to what is referred to as “forwards/backwards”. This is simply an alternation of the smaller sets (4’s, 2’s, 1’s) between “forwards” and “backwards”:

Four’s – forwards

First set of two’s – backwards

Second set of two’s – forwards

One’s – backwards/forwards/backwards/forwards

Other examples of structure variation:

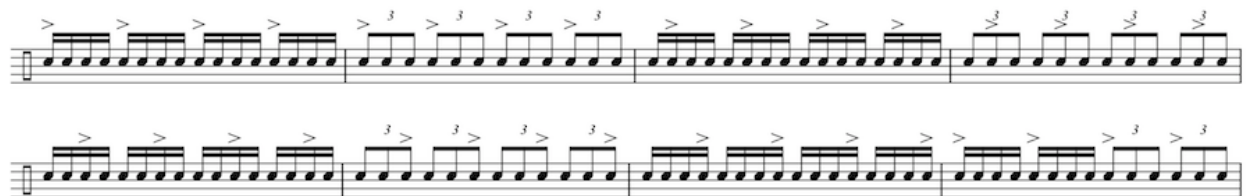
- Alternate “forwards/backwards” by single counts [1-4, 2-3, 3-2, 4-1]
- Alternate “backwards/forwards” by single counts [4-1, 3-2, 2-3, 1-4]

Advanced structure variation #1:

Place the 3 sets of triplet accents inside the 4 sets of 16th accents:



Using this format, construct the 4-2-1 exercise:



[etc...]

Advanced structure variation #2:

Create the accent pattern using the above principle, but keep the hand motion consistent (i.e. 16th notes remain constant throughout).



Initial list of exercises / variations:

EXERCISES	VARIATIONS
16 th Accent Pattern	Backwards Double Accent Double Accent – Backwards Forwards/Backwards Double Accent – Forwards/Backwards Paradiddle-tap Sticking Paradiddle-tap Sticking – Backwards Paradiddle-tap Sticking – Forwards/Backwards
Triplet Accent Pattern	Backwards Double Accent Double Accent – Backwards Forwards/Backwards Double Accent – Forwards/Backwards Diddle Sticking Diddle Sticking – Backwards Diddle Sticking – Forwards/Backwards
16 th Timing	Backwards Forwards/Backwards Alternating Sticking Diddle Sticking
Triplet Timing	Backwards Forwards/Backwards Alternating Sticking Diddle Sticking (by group) Diddle Sticking (alternating)
“Stone” Diddle	Backwards Forwards/Backwards Double Accent Double Accent – Backwards Double Accent – Forwards/Backwards
Diddle Control	Backwards Forwards/Backwards