

Five-Note Phrasing

Part 1: Creating Rhythmic Tension

by Marc Dicciani



Marc Dicciani is the dean of the College of Performing Arts at Philadelphia's University of the City. He's played with Randy Brecker, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Jon Faddis, Pat Martino, Stanley Clarke, and Christian McBride, among others. Marc endorses Yamaha, Vic Firth, Remo, Zildjian, LP, and Mono. For more information, visit dicciani.com.

The concept of tension and release is fundamental to any style of music. Creating moments of musical conflict followed by resolution, either through compositional or performance devices, can be satisfying and interesting both for the listener and the performer. Incorporating syncopated rhythms, dynamic changes, busier subdivisions, or dissonant harmonies are some of the many ways to create musical tension. In this lesson, we'll explore methods to create tension and release by using five-note phrases.

Highlighting beat 1 of every measure can make the music sound predictable. To create interesting variations, you can play phrases that take more than one measure to complete or that don't begin or end on the first beat.

To become fluent with these groupings, you need to internalize where the five-note phrase begins and ends. Exercise 1 demonstrates a four-measure pattern of continuous 16th notes played using a sticking that allows us to easily hear the accents and five-note groupings. To begin, alternate between the first two measures of paradiddles with accents on each quarter-note pulse and the two measures of the accented five-note sticking. Play a foot pattern that helps you keep track of the pulse and barline.



Now play the five-note phrase over four measures of 16th notes. You can alternate between this four-bar exercise and four measures of paradiddles with quarter-note accents.



Try the following pattern while aligning the bass drum with the start of each five-note phrase and playing quarter notes with the hi-hat. You may want to isolate the first two bars before practicing the full pattern.



Now we'll break up the continuous five-note groupings by only playing parts of each phrase. In the next three examples, the beginning of each five-note figure is indicated with an accent.

Here are the first three notes of each five-note grouping repeated for four measures. Play quarter notes with your hi-hat foot.



Here's a rhythm composed of the first, third, and fourth 16th notes of the five-note phrase.



Exercise 6 isolates the first four notes of the phrase.



Let's play two measures of a simple groove, and then play two measures of each of the previous rhythms as a fill. You can develop flexibility with these exercises by starting the fill at different places within the phrase. As you get comfortable with the rhythms, try varying the sticking, orchestration, and accents, and incorporate the bass drum.



Let's try another fill that includes the bass drum. Once you're comfortable with playing two measures of this phrase, repeat it for four measures to create more musical tension and variety.



Now we'll explore some four-measure over-the-barline grooves. Start by alternating between an easy quarter-note groove and the first two measures of the five-note phrase.



Now we'll alternate between a straight quarter-note pattern and the entire four-measure phrase.



Repeat each of the previous rhythms until you've internalized how the five-note groupings feel over a quarter-note pulse and within a four-bar phrase. Next time we'll explore more challenging patterns based on these ideas.



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Part 2: Adding More Tension and Release

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In this lesson we'll continue exploring five-note phrases within a 16th-note subdivision. To become fluent with these groupings, you need to internalize where the five-note phrase begins and ends.

To review, let's reinforce the ability to hear the starting point of each five-note grouping. Alternate between a simple quarter-note groove and the first two measures of a repeated five-note phrase. In the third and fourth measures of Exercise 1, only play the first partial of each five-note grouping while playing quarter notes with the hi-hat foot.

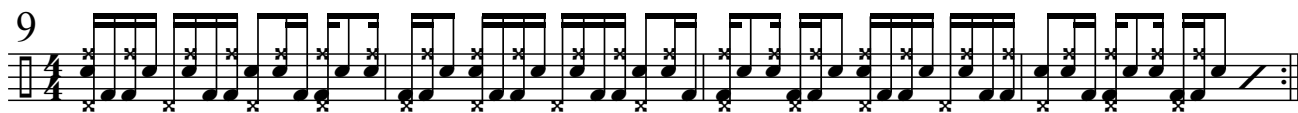


Now alternate between four measures of a quarter-note groove and four measures of the repeated five-note phrase.

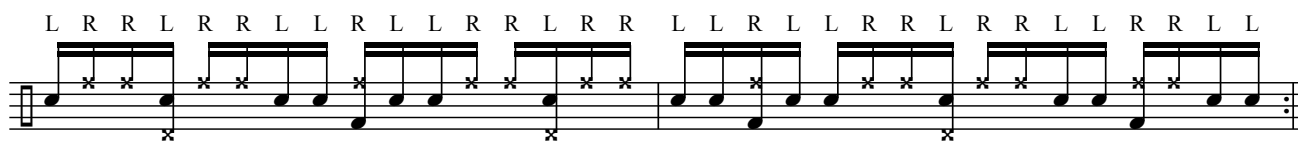


Now we'll play some challenging patterns based on these ideas. In some of these examples, the bass drum and snare pattern repeats on every fifth 8th note, while in others the phrase repeats on every fifth 16th note. However, the hi-hat or ride phrases always comprise five 16th notes. Remember to alternate each four-measure pattern with a simple four-bar groove. It often helps to play quarter notes with the hi-hat foot to reinforce the pulse and center the placement of the syncopated patterns. The goal is to develop the ability to hear the quarter-note pulse without always playing it.





Instead of playing steady quarter notes to help place the syncopated rhythms accurately, we'll incorporate the hi-hat into the five-note phrase. This enhances the metric illusion and is much more challenging. To play these accurately, you'll need to feel the quarter-note pulse internally.



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You can create hundreds of variations of patterns or fills using 8ths, 16ths, or 8th-note triplets in any time signature, tempo, and style. Here's an example using a jazz ride pattern while playing a five-note, 8th-note-triplet rhythm between the snare and bass drum.



These patterns can create some very interesting and complex rhythmic possibilities that will expand your ability to hear and play phrases that extend over the barline. Just be sure to use discretion when playing these types of ideas in a performance situation with other musicians. Have fun!

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