

Patterns are culled from Irish, Scots, French-Canadian, Appalachian Old-Time styles. Establish good bowing rhythms first in any style, then add left-hand ornaments, which must fit over the bowings. Your right hand is your groove!

Rhythm bowing sampler

edited from Donna Hébert's
"Fiddling Demystified for Strings"

reels

Appalachian Old-Time

The fundamental bowing lick: simple shuffle

double shuffle

Musical notation for Appalachian Old-Time simple shuffle and double shuffle bowing patterns. The simple shuffle pattern consists of eighth notes with accents on the offbeats. The double shuffle pattern consists of sixteenth notes with accents on the offbeats.

Note the strong offbeat accent. This will hold true for all reels in all styles. It creates a danceable groove.

The next level of complexity: 2+2 split bowing (even)

2+2 split bowing (staggered)

Musical notation for 2+2 split bowing (even) and 2+2 split bowing (staggered). The even pattern shows two eighth notes grouped together, and the staggered pattern shows two eighth notes with a half-beat offset between groups.

3+1 syncopated bowing: variously named the Georgia, Tennessee and Shetland shuffle, this is found everywhere. Note how it pops the offbeat out for a natural accent.

Scots snap - driven upbow accents - played down-up

Note spiccato bowing at the end

Musical notation for 3+1 syncopated bowing, Scots snap, and spiccato bowing. The 3+1 pattern has three eighth notes followed by a quarter note. Scots snap features upbow accents on the first two eighth notes of a pair. Spiccato bowing is shown at the end of the pattern.

French-Canadian syncopation driven-upbow accents

syncopated accents divide bar in uneven thirds:

3+1 bowing also divides the bar unevenly, but in a more subtle way:

Musical notation for French-Canadian syncopation and uneven bar divisions. The notation includes fingerings (1, 2, 3) and accents on the first notes of groups. The bar is divided into uneven parts: 2, 4, 5, 7, 1, 3, 6, 8, 123, 123, 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2.

accents can start on 1 or 2 depending on melodic movement

Triplets

Musical notation for triplets in Irish and Scottish styles. Irish styles play a true triplet, while Scottish styles play a staccato duplet.

Irish styles generally play a true triplet and often slur the last triplet note into the next note or phrase.

Scottish styles generally play a staccato duplet (sometimes called a 'birl'), rather than a triplet, and tend to lean on the downbeat more than Irish styles.

Musical notation for French-Canadian triplets, showing slurred and split triplet patterns.

French-Canadian styles slur the triplets or split them for a characteristically Québécois percussive sound. Accent first note of slur.

jigs

6/8, 9/8 and 12/8s often use the same bowing patterns. Jigs have Irish, Scots, English and French-Canadian roots. Unlike reels, the accent is on the downbeat, so be wary of a heavy arm. Use bow speed rather than weight for your accents.

Musical notation for single jigs and double-down or double-up bows. The single jig pattern has a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The double-down or double-up pattern has two eighth notes.

single jigs go 'humpty-dumpty,' while doubles go 'rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat'

shorter note often slurs into longer one

double-down or double-up bows can help keep a jig light

Musical notation for jig sinuosity, showing beat-crossing slurs.

The sinuosity of jigs often comes from these beat-crossing slurs, giving them their "S" curves. Starting phrases on an upbow also lightens up a jig.