

Find a tempo you can keep constant (no matter how slow) and a strum you find easy. It makes sense to practice the basic down-up strum because this strum is the essential aspect of dulcimer playing. Vary it when you want to and practice other strum patterns—like playing all downstrokes and then all upstrokes: down/down/down/down—up/up/up/up—down/down/down/down—up/up/up/up... You might want to try something like down/down/down/up/down—down/down/down/up/down: strum down three times, up once, and down once again, with the third downstroke and the one upstroke each taking half as long as each of the other three strokes: 1, 2, 3- $\&$ , 4. Count it out loud.

Get used to the pick hitting the strings. How tightly you hold the pick makes a difference in how much “pick drag” you receive from the strings. Carry a pick with you wherever you go and practice your strumming on the side of a book, table, your leg—anything at all. The purpose now is to strengthen your wrist, get used to the pick, and strike the strings (or any other surface) uniformly and at an even rate.

Do this strumming awhile, keeping the strings muted. Concentrate on your speed and beats. Don't go too fast, keep it steady and even, and look at your right hand because, right now, that's where it's happening.

Now we're going to hear what those strings really sound like. Using the down/down/down—up/down strum sequence, strum the strings, and on the one upstroke, quickly lift the index finger of your left hand which has been muting the strings. Lift this finger only on the upstroke, and get your finger back down to mute the strings in time for the next beat. (It may be like rubbing your stomach and patting your head for the first time.) Timing and the development of ear-hand coordination are important elements of playing music.

Experiment with this. The more you strum and practice the up- and downstrokes, the more you will develop your rhythmic sense. You can make up your