

The Basics

A lot of people really struggle with playing a Shuffle feel. They kinda sorta get it, but it's a lurching, jerky, inconsistent mess. The main problem is that they don't actually understand how a Shuffle is constructed – and so how it is supposed to **feel** from a playing perspective. They hear it in the recordings of Blues and Rock tunes, but when it comes to playing a proper Shuffle feel, they are at a loss to understand how to execute this stylistic approach.

♪ = 84

The musical notation shows a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The melody consists of eighth notes. Below it is a tablature staff labeled TAB with fret numbers 7-5 repeated across the measures.

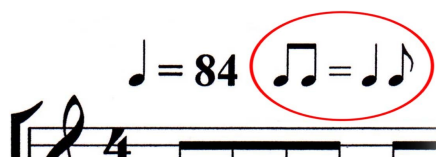
Now, continuing with the twelve-eight time signature, what you will now do is play the **first and third** note of each triplet, but “rake” the middle note of each triplet. You do that by relaxing pressure for the second note of each triplet and striking the strings, producing a ‘thrack’ sound (represented by the X in place of an eighth note). Continue with the metronome so you won’t screw this up. If you have to slow it down to play this correctly, do so. **Timing is everything for a proper Shuffle.**

Do this correctly and you will begin to hear the shuffle emerge from what you're playing.

Next, you want to now omit that middle rake and play only the first and third notes of each triplet. You need to 'rest' on the middle note, which means silence the strings. Just as you raked the middle note by relaxing pressure, so you again relax pressure, but just don't rake the strings during that middle 'rest'. The metronome will click that now silent note off to help keep you centered in your timing.

This is where you begin to honestly embrace the shuffle and truly get the feel right on the money. That's the physical aspect of learning to play a proper shuffle feel.

How do you know when a song should be played with a shuffle feel? Look above the Staff at the beginning of the chart, next to the metronome mark. It's called a **metric modulation** (circled below). You'll see a pair of eighth notes tied together followed by an 'equals' sign, and then a quarter note and an eighth note. This little graphic tells you to play it with a Shuffle feel, also called a Swing feel.



It may also simply be written “Med. Swing”, or something to that effect, telling you mid tempo and with a shuffle/swing feel.

On the next page is a full 12 bar progression employing a typical Blue/Rock shuffle. Notice that it is now written in “4/4” time; also note there are only **two eighth notes per beat**. Remember: It is the **metric modulation** which tells you to play it as a shuffle.

BUT - you still count it with a triplet feel by counting it out like this:

One an ah; **Two** an ah; **Three** an ah; **Four** an ah

You strum on the beat note (One, Two, Three, Four), and then on the third part of the beat (the “ah” of each beat), just as you did with the 12/8 feel before. Keep the metronome going at 84 bpm, but now call out audibly: **One** and ah, **Two** and ah, etc. to keep the “12” feel present in your thinking. You will eventually be able to simply count a kind of lurching “One & Two & Three & Four &...” once you understand this better.

♩ = 84 ♪ = ♩ ♩

A

Musical notation for section A, measures 1-3. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes. The bass line is indicated by a tablature below the staff.

Measure	Tablature (B)
1	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
2	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
3	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
4	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5

D

Musical notation for section D, measures 4-6. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes. The bass line is indicated by a tablature below the staff.

Measure	Tablature (B)
4	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
5	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
6	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
7	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5

A

E

Musical notation for section A and E, measures 7-9. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes. The bass line is indicated by a tablature below the staff.

Measure	Tablature (B)
7	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
8	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
9	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
10	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5

D

A

E

Musical notation for section D, A, and E, measures 10-12. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes. The bass line is indicated by a tablature below the staff.

Measure	Tablature (B)
10	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
11	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
12	7-7-9-9-7-7-9-9
13	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5

There are many examples of the Shuffle feel out there. Just listen to “That’ll Be The Day” by Buddy Holly, “Pride And Joy” by Stevie Ray Vaughn, “Further On Down The Road” – a classic Blues tune played by a whole host of people, and “Albatross” by Fleetwood Mac.

A properly executed up-tempo Shuffle will get people tapping their feet, and in a night club, they'll get out on the dance floor. You just can't sit still when you hear a band rip into a great shuffle or popular song that swings like there's no tomorrow.

And remember the lyric to the old song, “It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that Swing!”

You better believe it, brothers and sisters!