

Open Rhythm Guitar Chord Riffs

A simple definition a riff is a catchy repeated musical phrase. A chord riff is based on a root note or chord like E7, Am, G etc. Chord riffs are often one to four bars in length, and then repeated. Let's look at a repeated one bar riff based on A7.

A7

<i>T</i>		
<i>A</i>	2 2 4 4 2 2 4 4	2 2 4 4 2 2 4 4
<i>B</i>	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
count:	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

In the above example, you see 0 on the 5th string and 2 on the fourth string. The two numbers are shown together vertically. This means that they are played simultaneously. Take your index (first) finger and place it at the 2nd fret on the fourth string. Pluck the open A string at the same time you play this fingered note. Make sure not to strike any of the other strings. Play this string pair again.

Next, put your ring finger (third) on the 4th fret on the 4th string. Strike the pair twice. Go back to the 0 and 2 pair and play it twice. Repeat with the 0 and 4 pair. Count aloud while you play: "One and two and" while on the 0 and 2 pair, then "three and four and" while on the 0 and 4 pair. Continue the pattern while counting "one and two and three and four and."

This commonly used pattern is sometimes called the "Jimmy Reed pattern" because of its prevalence in his music. This riff was also used often by early rock-n-rollers like Chuck Berry.

A similar riff could be played on the chord D7. It would be fingered like this:

D7

<i>T</i>		
<i>A</i>	2 2 4 4 2 2 4 4	2 2 4 4 2 2 4 4
<i>B</i>	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
count:	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Now lets move the riff to an E7 chord:

E7

<i>T</i>		
<i>A</i>		
<i>B</i>	2 2 4 4 2 2 4 4	2 2 4 4 2 2 4 4
	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
count:	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &