

Chapter Three: Drum Fills, Semiquavers & Improvisation

Up until now you have only utilised a small portion of your drumset. It's time to start using the rest!

Drum fills are patterns usually played around the snare and toms that can be used to emphasise certain sections of a song, such as going into or out of a chorus. Fills can be subtle or overt, it is up to you as musician to feel what is best for different situations.

Let's start basic. You are going to hit each drum four times, starting on the snare drum and finishing on the floor tom.



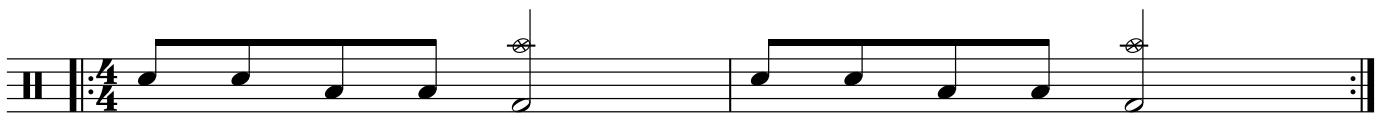
This can be altered by hitting each drum twice.



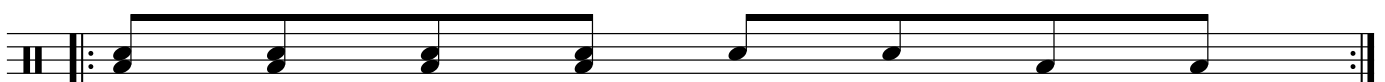
There are literally endless combinations of fills to be created and played. Part of the excitement of being a musician is having the ability to create something that nobody else has ever thought of or played before.



Fills can start or end with a crash cymbal for added emphasis or aggression.



Hitting the floor tom at the same time as the snare is a popular way to "fatten up" the sound.



You know a crotchet is worth one beat. You know a quaver is worth half of a beat. Now it is time to introduce the next member of the rhythmic family – semiquavers. The name semiquaver may sound daunting, but it literally means half of a quaver. The word semi means half, just like a semicircle is half of a circle.

That means semiquavers are twice as fast as quavers. You can fit two semiquavers in one quaver, four semiquavers in one beat, or 16 in one bar of 4/4 time. Take a look at the following ladder.

The ladder consists of four staves, each representing a step in the progression:

- Staff 1:** A single crotchet note on the first line of the staff, labeled '1' above it.
- Staff 2:** Two quaver notes beamed together, labeled '2' above the first note. A '+' sign is placed between the two notes.
- Staff 3:** Four semiquaver notes beamed together, labeled '4' above the first note. '+' signs are placed between the first and second, second and third, and third and fourth notes.
- Staff 4:** Eight semiquaver notes beamed together, labeled '8' above the first note. '+' signs are placed between the first and second, second and third, third and fourth, fourth and fifth, fifth and sixth, sixth and seventh, and seventh and eighth notes.

Semiquavers allow us to play faster, meaning we can fit more notes in one bar. Many fills are played as semiquavers to sound noticeably faster than the beat that comes before or after it.

This is the same fill from before where we hit each drum four times, but this time the fill is played as semiquavers. Notice how we can now fit the entire phrase within one bar instead of two like before.

The examples show a drum fill consisting of four hits, each represented by a semiquaver note on a staff:

- Example 1:** Labeled '1' at the start. It shows four semiquaver notes beamed together, labeled '1 e + a', '2 e + a', '3 e + a', and '4 e + a' above them. The notes are grouped by a thick bracket above the staff.
- Example 2:** Labeled '2' at the start. It shows the same four semiquaver notes beamed together, but without the labels and '+' signs.

Combinations of semiquavers, quavers and crotchets can be used to create a diverse range of fills.

1 1 e + a 2 + 3 e a + 4 +

2 1 + 2 e + a 3 + 4

3 1 e + a 2 + 3 e + a 3 +

4 1 + 2 + 3 e + a 4 e + a

Fills can be two bar long, just make sure you start at the right time and finish at the right time – nothing is worse than a big fill that doesn't come back in on the first beat with the rest of the band!

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As a drummer, it is important to have multiple learned fills that you can recite at any given time. However, the art of improvisation is a far more useful skill. Improvising involves playing something 'in the moment.' It is not a rehearsed phrase – it's made up on the spot. Your ideas should flow freely.

The slanted dash symbol below represents one beat of improvisation. The idea is to play a rehearsed groove, then proceed to play an improvised fill. Give this a try and remember to use a metronome!

1

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 2 3 4

2

3

4

5