

The Jazz Commandments

Jazz Style & Articulation Clinic

How To Get Your Band To Swing

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JAZZ BILL OF RIGHTS

All Eighth Notes Are Not Created Equal!

To Swing It You Gotta Hear It!

PREAMBLE TO THE COMMANDMENTS

You have to Verbalize,
In Order to Stylize Authentically

I. Syllables

“Doo” is used for long sounds that occur on downbeats. The articulation symbol used is (-).*

“Day” or “Dah” is used for accented long sounds on either downbeats or upbeats. (>)

“Va”, “da”, or “ba” is typically used on unaccented upbeats. (No symbol is used)

“Daht” is used for accented short sounds whether on downbeats or upbeats. (^)

“Dit” is used for unaccented short notes. (.)

“Dn” is used for notes that are ghost or swallowed. These notes are often designated by an “x” on the staff in place of the note head or a note head in parentheses.

“Dow” is used for notes that are followed by a fall (descending glissando to an undefined ending pitch).

(\)

“Dwee” is used for notes that are preceded by a scoop, which is a slide into a note. (/)

“Deop” is used for a glissando-like drop into a short note from an undefined starting note. (∩)

“Doit” is used for a glissando-like lift at the end of a note. (√)

“Doo-dle-da” is used to articulate eighth note triplets.

“Dool-ya” is used for turns and flips. They are usually represented by this symbol. (˘)

*Keep in mind that the articulation symbols are not always used in the sheet music. Also note that accented short notes use a different syllable than unaccented short notes and are, as a result, played slightly longer, or as one would say in the jazz vernacular “fat” or “phat.” The notes are still short, but they have more weight and length.

II. Articulation

Example 1

SWING

DOO DA DOO DA DOO DA DOO DA DOO DA DOO DA DOO DA DOO DA DOO

Example 2

SWING M.M. = 160+

DOO DA HOO DA HOO DA HOO DA HOO DA HOO DA HOO DA HOO DA HOO DA DOO

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Example 3

SWING M.M. = 180+

DOO HOO HOO DAY HOO HOO HOO DA HOO HOO HOO DA DAY HOO HOO DA DOO

III. Commandments

1. Unless specifically marked otherwise, any quarter note or eighth note followed by a rest is played (sung) short.

2. Quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of beats 1 or 3 are usually played long.

3. Quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of 2 or 4 are usually played short.

Exception: More than four quarter notes in a row.

Exception: Johnny Carson Theme/Li'l Darlin' Rule

Example 7

DAH DAHT DAHT DAH DIT DIT

Exception: Quarter note on beat one or three followed by a long note.

Example 8

DAHT DAY DIT DAHT DAY DOO DIT DAHT DOO DAY

4. When the rhythmic pattern of two eighth notes followed by a rest starts on a downbeat, it is almost always articulated with the syllables doo-dit.

5. A quarter note (or the equivalent thereof) that occurs on an upbeat between two eighth notes (or rests) is played short.

Exception: When the upbeat quarter note equivalent occurs as a part of a sequence of eighth notes and is tied across the bar line or the imaginary mid point of the measure, it is played long.

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6. Upbeat entrances after a rest, especially those that are a dotted quarter note length or longer, should be "anticipated with an accent" (AWA).
7. A succession (3 or more) of quarter notes (or equivalent) on consecutive upbeats is usually played long and accented.
8. In a line of eighth notes, accent the highest note and any wide leap changes of direction. Ghost (swallow) the lowest note and notes that occur on the weakest upbeats (2 and 4).
9. The eighth note triplet rhythm is usually articulated by slurring the first two and tonguing the last one.
10. All notes of a quarter note triplet should be played long unless otherwise indicated.
11. Two sixteenth notes followed by a rest are articulated with the syllables "Spit-It" or Did-It."
- 12A. The syllable "Dwee" is used for notes that are preceded by a scoop.
- 12B. The syllable "Dow" is used for falls.
- 13A. The syllable "deop" is used to indicate a glissando-like fall from an undefined starting pitch to a short defined pitch.
- 13B. The syllable "doit" is used to indicate an ascending glissando at the end of the note.
14. The syllable "dool-ya" is used for turns or flips, which are comparable to an embellishment much like the mordent in classical music.
A combination of upper and lower neighbor tones is used to execute this articulation.
15. When a single occurrence of the rhythmic figure dotted eighth-sixteenth is used to indicate swing eighth notes, the dotted eighth note is usually played short with an accent.

The inversion of this figure is articulated in the following manner with the dotted eighth note played long:

16. A slur is not always a slur.

In jazz, the slur mark is often used to indicate phrasing rather than articulation. Legato articulations should be used under slurs. Written articulations should also be observed especially at the end of phrases.

Example 23

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes. A slur covers the first two measures, and another slur covers the last two measures. There are various articulation marks above the notes, including accents and slurs. Below the staff, a series of rhythmic syllables are written: DAY Doo DA Doo DA Doo DA Doo DA Doo DA Doo DA Doo DAY Doo DN DAHT Doo DA Doo DA Doo DA Doo DA Doo DIT.

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16. **In general, dynamics follow the shape of the melodic line. If the line ascends, crescendo. If the line descends, get softer.**

Notes that are longer than 2 beats in duration must have dynamic change.

Long notes that enter on an upbeat are usually executed with a sforzando followed by a crescendo.

Example 24

SWING

000 DA 000 DA 000 DA 000 DA 000 DA 000 DA 000 DAHT sfz DAH

And the Jazz Gods Said,
Follow these commandments,
And you shall swing your buns off!

DISCOGRAPHY

- *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, Vol 1-3* (Sony)
- *Dizzy Gillespie/Charlie Parker - Town Hall, New York City, June 22, 1945* (Uptown UPCD 27.51)
- *The Genius Of Charlie Parker* (Savoy MG 12014)
- *Charlie Parker - Yardbird In Lotus Land* (Spotlite (E) SPJ 123)
- *Charlie Parker - The Complete Savoy Studio Sessions* (Savoy SJL 5500)
- *Art Blakey – Night at Birdland, Vol. 1* (1954) (Blue Note 32146)
- *Ken Burns Jazz - Definitive Count Basie* (2000) (Verve 549090)
- *Count Basie - Basie Straight Ahead*, (1967) (Verve 822)
- *Ken Burns Jazz - Definitive Art Blakey* (2000) (Verve 549089)
- *Ken Burns Jazz - Definitive Duke Ellington* (2000) (Legacy 61444)
- *Woody Herman - Woody's Gold Star* (1987) (Concord 4330)
- *Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra – Central Park North* (1969) (Blue note 76852)

RESOURCES

The Jazz Commandments: Guidelines for Jazz Articulation and Style

Jerry Tolson

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“...[T]he landmark jazz publication, *The Jazz Commandments*, ...is a masterfully produced course of study for developing confident, swinging jazz bands and combos.”

John Kuzmich, JAZZed Magazine
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