

How to Use Subdivision and Your Metronome to Help Keep Your Tremolo Rhythmically Even

As with arpeggios, using the metronome with subdivision can be very effective to help even out a tremolo rhythmically.

In Francisco Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* the notes are written in even thirty-second notes:

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

Original version with standard "pami" tremolo pattern.

The image shows the first measure of the original 'pami' tremolo pattern from Francisco Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*. The notation is in 3/4 time, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of eighth-note tremolos. Above the staff, the letters 'p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i' are written, corresponding to the notes. Below the staff, the guitar tablature is shown for the Treble (T), Alto (A), and Bass (B) staves. The tablature indicates fingerings and fret numbers for each note.

If the metronome (or you are feeling) clicks only on the eighth-note (quaver) thumb strokes and the tempo is increased, the tremolo may become uneven or "lopsided" in a number of ways:

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

Gap between "p" and "a".

The image shows the first measure of the tremolo pattern from Francisco Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, illustrating a common issue when the tempo is increased. The notation is in 3/4 time, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of eighth-note tremolos. Above the staff, the letters 'p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i' are written. A blue box highlights the first 'p' and 'a' notes, with a gap between them. Below the staff, the guitar tablature is shown for the Treble (T), Alto (A), and Bass (B) staves. Red 'x' marks are placed on the tablature lines, indicating the metronome clicks on the eighth notes. The text 'Metronome clicks eighth notes.' is written in red below the tablature.

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

Lack of finger independence between "a" and "m". "m" follows "a" too quickly.

1

p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i

Metronome clicks eighth notes.

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

"i" follows "m" too quickly. This also produces a rhythmic gap between each tremolo group.

1

p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i

Metronome clicks eighth notes.

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

"pami" gallops as a single unit. This produces a rhythmic gap between each tremolo group.

1

p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i

Metronome clicks eighth notes.

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

"a" follows "p" too quickly. This also produces a rhythmic gap between each tremolo group.

Metronome clicks eighth notes.

Sometimes, these maladies can be fixed simply by *subdividing the measures into sixteenth notes* instead of eighth notes. Subdivision into sixteenth notes provides reference clicks for "p" and "m":

Recuerdos de la Alhambra (Francisco Tárrega)

Subdivision into sixteenth notes. "p" and "m" pluck on metronome clicks.

Metronome clicks sixteenth notes.

Providing the additional reference point to tell "m" when to pluck helps all the fingers to maintain their correct rhythmic spacing, so they stay more precisely in rhythm.

[Watch me demonstrate how to subdivide the tremolo into sixteenth notes in Video #14:](#)



Video #14: Recuerdos de la Alhambra by Francisco Tárrega, subdivision into sixteenth notes

Once again, this is the crux of using subdivision. It provides additional reference points to tell the fingers precisely when to play their notes.

Several other factors can cause an uneven tremolo and other cures must be applied, but subdivision into sixteenth notes is certainly one of the first fixes to apply to a lopsided tremolo. See my Technique Tip, [*How to Master the Tremolo*](#) for a comprehensive discussion of how to achieve an even-sounding tremolo.

How to Subdivide the Beat and Use the Metronome to Play Complex Rhythms

When you come across a rhythm that is complex, subdivide to smaller note values that you can count accurately.

For example, this section from Fernando Sor's *Allegretto from Twenty-Four Very Easy Exercises, Op. 35 No. 8* can be difficult to play accurately because of both the sixteenth-note triplet figures in measures 33-36, and the dotted sixteenth followed by a thirty-second note figures in measures 37-40:

Allegretto from Twenty-Four Very Easy Exercises, Op. 35 No. 8 (Fernando Sor)

The musical score is for Fernando Sor's *Allegretto from Twenty-Four Very Easy Exercises, Op. 35 No. 8*. It is written for guitar in the key of F# major (three sharps) and 3/8 time. The score shows measures 33 through 40. Measures 33-36 contain sixteenth-note triplet figures, while measures 37-40 contain dotted sixteenth-note followed by thirty-second-note figures. Below the staff are three lines of tablature labeled T, A, and B, providing fret numbers for each measure.

Measure	T	A	B
33	2	2	0
34	3	4	0
35	1	2	0
36	3	4	0
37	2	0	0
38	5	0	0
39	2	2	0
40	1	2	0

[Watch me play the two phrases in Video #15:](#)



Video #15: Sor Allegretto, the two phrases complete

It is best to break the section down into its two separate phrases. First, let's look at the triplet figures and how to subdivide them:

Allegretto from Twenty-Four Very Easy Exercises, Op. 35 No. 8 (Fernando Sor)

Subdivide into sixteenth-note triplets

33

Set metronome to click sixteenth-note triplets.

T 2 3 7 4 0 3 1 0 1
A 2 4 4 2 2
B 0

35

T 3 7 4 0 3 1 0 0
A 4 4 4 2 2
B 0

We subdivide each eighth note into three sixteenth-note triplets (the smallest note value in the phrase). Depending on your ability to play the passage, you would set the metronome somewhere between 120 and 200 bpm. Before playing, count with the metronome out loud: "123 123 123". Continue counting and begin playing the passage. Of course, rather than attempting to play the entire passage, you will probably need to practice one measure or even one or two beats at a time.

[Watch me demonstrate how to subdivide the phrase into sixteenth-note triplets in Video #16:](#)



Video #16: Sor Allegretto, subdivision of the first phrase into sixteenth-note triplets

Similarly, in the next four measures we subdivide each eighth note into thirty-second notes (the smallest note value in the phrase):

Allegretto from Twenty-Four Very Easy Exercises, Op. 35 No. 8 (Fernando Sor)

Subdivide into thirty-second notes.

37

Metronome clicks thirty-second notes.

T 2 0 5 5 5 2 3 0
A 0
B 0

39

T 2 2 2 1 2 0
A 2 1 0
B 0 0

Depending on your ability to play the passage, you would set the metronome somewhere between 144 and 208+. Before playing, get in the groove by counting out loud with the metronome: "1234 1234 1234". Continue counting and begin playing the passage. Of course, rather than attempting to play the entire passage, you will probably need to practice one measure or even one or two beats at a time.

[Watch me demonstrate how to subdivide the phrase into thirty-second notes in Video #17:](#)



Video #17: Sor Allegretto, subdivide into 32nd Notes

Let's look at a passage (measures 11-12) from a more difficult piece, the *Prelude* from J.S. Bach's *Lute Suite No. 1, BWV 996*. By the way, when working out complex rhythms, always omit any ornaments and slurs that are present. After the foundational rhythm is precise and rock-solid, you can work the ornaments and slurs back in.

Prelude from Lute Suite No. 1, BWV 996 (J.S. Bach)

Subdivide into thirty-second notes.

Ornaments have been left out. Always learn complicated rhythms without ornaments first.

11

Metronome clicks thirty-second notes.

T	1	1	1	0	0	3	0
A	2	2	2	0	0	5	0
B	2	2	2	0	0	2	2
	0	0	0	0	0	3	

12

T	2	5	2	4	2	4	0	0	3	0	0	0
A	2	2	2	2	4	0	0	3	5	0	0	0
B	2	2	2	2	4	0	0	3	5	0	0	0
	3	2	2	3	3	3	6					

Again, we subdivide down to the smallest value in the passage (thirty-second notes). Depending on your ability to play the passage, you would set the metronome somewhere between 144 and 208+. Before playing, get in the groove by counting out loud with the metronome: "1234 1234 1234". Continue counting and begin playing the passage. Of course, rather than attempting to play the entire passage, you will probably need to practice half a measure or even one or two beats at a time.

[Watch me demonstrate how to subdivide the measures into thirty-second notes to understand these complex rhythms in Video #18:](#)



Video #18: Bach Prelude from Lute Suite No. 1 BWV 996, subdivision into 32nd notes

You Must Know Precisely:

1. What note is played on each click (beat)
2. What fingers play on each click (beat)

This principle applies to every moment one uses a metronome. One of the main reasons students have trouble following the metronome is that they do not really know which notes or fingers fall on the metronome clicks. They may imitate the way another guitarist plays a piece or may play so freely that they do not know precisely where the beats fall.

Here is an example of this principle on the *Allegro from Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 60 No. 15* by Fernando Sor. It can be tricky to keep the rhythms precise when the music switches from the long note values in measures #1-4 to the eighth notes in measure #5-7:

Allegro from Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 60 No. 15 (Fernando Sor)

1

Metronome clicks dotted quarter notes.

5

The first line is not a problem Something is played on each beat and nothing is between the beats. But starting at measure #5, things can go awry.

For measures 5-7, if the metronome is clicking dotted quarter notes as shown, the rhythms will probably be correct if the player knows:

1. The thumb plucks the first note on the first click of each measure.
2. The "i" or "m" finger plucks the fourth eighth note on the second click of each measure.

Starting at measure #5, most players will be aware that the thumb plucks on the first click of each measure. *But, if the player is unaware or uncertain which finger plucks and what note is played on the second beat of each measure, I can guarantee the rhythm will not be precise.*

[Let me show you what I mean in Video #19:](#)



Video #19: Allegro by Fernando Sor