



What Are Fills?

Imagine a drummer who strictly kept the beat for 3 minutes and never played anything different. It would get boring rather quickly! That's where drum fills come in. Drum fills are short phrases that are used to add excitement and personality to a drum part by creating small "breaks" in the normal beat.

While the main beat is usually played on the hi-hat, kick and snare, fills are usually played on the snare and toms, commonly every 4 or 8 measures. Some fills are short and some are long, typically ending with a crash cymbal. Good fills generally follow the rhythm and tempo of the song and are an excellent way to transition from one part of the song to the next.

Put Fills In The Right Spot

When learning about fills, learning how to put fills in the "correct" places is key! This will instantly improve your drumming and make you sound like you "know what you are doing."

Drummers who throw fills in all over the place and hit cymbals randomly as they are playing may impress some people, but will soon find that **musicians do not want to play with them**. The reason for this is because the drummer should create a solid and steady foundation for the other instruments to follow. When fills are used incorrectly, it creates uncertainty and confusion to the other musicians.

Guidelines for Fills

- Fills should end on the "1" count of the next upcoming measure (99% of the time).
- Fills usually end with a crash cymbal and the kick drum.
- The tempo of the song should not speed up or slow down during the fill.
- A good fill should continue the groove and rhythm of the song.
- Fills should never be used in the place of being SOLID. If you think that trying to do a fill might mess up the beat and cause a problem for the band, it is better to not play the fill, but stay SOLID for the band. That is your primary job.



Sometimes Less is More

It is very common as you get better at using fills to want to use longer and more complex fills that show off all your skill. However, often times a better option is just to use a shorter, simple fill that doesn't take the attention away from the song. A good fill keeps the song rolling along but isn't really noticed that much by the average listener. Yet, without it the song would seem boring.

Correct Mindset

I remember listening to popular drummers as I was learning to play and thinking, "Man, these guys aren't even that good. Even I can play that! Why don't they play something cooler?" As I got older I realized that those drummers were using discipline to "put the song first" and only use what was necessary and subtle, rather than showing off.

When in Doubt, Just Crash on "1"

The easiest fill to play isn't really a fill, but just a single hit on the crash cymbal. This is a great way to keep the drum part interesting without being a distraction. It's very common to hit a cymbal at the end of a group of 4 measures. Sometimes it can be used in the middle of a verse, in between vocal lines.

Grow Your Collection

By the time you finish these lessons, you will have learned dozens of different fills, but that is just the beginning! As you play along with your favorite songs, you will hear more and more fills to add to your arsenal. It is a continual process of having your favorites and learning the fills that work best for you and for each type of song.

How to Practice Fills

One of the hardest things for new drummers to understand is when to start a fill and when to end it. It is common at first for drummers to get off-time when they do a fill. Practicing your fills with a metronome is a huge step to improving.