Text and examples by
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LOOK OUT, HERE come those notes with lots of beams. Okay, okay, I
know for some players, looking at a page full of beams can be a scary
experience. But relax, additional beams don’t necessarily mean you’re going to
have to play so fast that your sticks turn into kindling. More often than not, music
that makes use of thirty-second notes moves at a slower pace than music using
larger note values.

It’s tedious, but let’s start with the basics. First, let’s talk about what thirty-
second notes look like and what they do. Thirty-second notes have three flags
whenever they aren’t connected to any other notes. Most often, you’ll see thirty-
seconds that have three beams instead of three flags—free-standing thirty-
seconds are rare. Similar to the way that sixteenths are grouped, thirty-seconds are
beamed together into groups that usually indicate the counts.

What do thirty-second notes do? Just as eighth notes divide quarters into two equal parts and sixteenths divide eighths into two equal parts, thirty-seconds divide each sixteenth into two equal parts. To look at this in another way, remember that in common time there are four sixteenths in each count. And since there are two thirty-seconds to each sixteenth, there will be eight thirty-seconds in a single count.

Performing a full count’s worth of thirty-
second notes is truly easy. Just count a
group of four sixteenths notes (4 x 8) and
play three syllables with your right hand.
Now, place a left hand stroke in between
each one of those syllables. If you did this
correctly, you’ve just played eight notes between counts one and two, and you’ve
just performed a set of thirty-second notes. Congratulations! See, that’s wasn’t so hard.

If you played last month’s exercise in cut
time, you’ve actually just a jump on understanding thirty-seconds. In cut time, in cut
time, eight notes get the syllables of “1 e 4 z” as they divide each of the two eight counts into four equal parts. The sixteenth notes that were in the exercise forced you to
play two strokes for each of those syllables. In effect, you were playing the rhythm of
thirty-seCONDS (eight equal divisions to each count) even though the notes themselves were written as sixteenths.

Take a look at Example 1 and you’ll see
how thirty-second notes (the stem-up notes with three beams) relate to the
other types of values that you already

Now that you’re familiar with thirty-
seconds, let’s embrace a counting system for
the. Example 3 shows two different ways
to approach the counting of thirty-seconds.
In the first measure, you’ll see that the thirty-
second notes aren’t really counted as

Instead, you simply use your common
sense to tell you how to place two notes
each of the same syllables that are used
for sixteenths. The second measure in the
example shows a counting system that
places a syllable on every third second.
While this method may look confusing, in
reality it’s not. In order to apply this
system, say the “1 e 2 3” syllables for the
first three notes of the count (the number) and
another set of syllables for the second half of the count (the “and” syllable).

In essence, this method lets you think of
thirty-seconds as a set of four notes on the
first eighths of the count and another set of
four notes on the second eighth. Whichever method you choose (and both methods are correct), try to maintain
consistent counting. Thirty-second notes
one way the first time you play a pickup and
another way the next time you play it. It’s easy
to confusion.

Most often, you’re not going to see a
lot of thirty-seconds. Many

In general, rhythms can be created by
combining eighths, sixteenths, and thirty-
seconds together. Example 3 shows several
rhythms that are created when all three of
these note values are included. Notice how
the rhythms, you’ll see the counts that
show you where each eight or sixteenth syllable will fall.

Dont forget, that any note, including thirty-seconds, can be replaced with the
same value of rest. In Example 4 you’ll find
some additional figures that include

For this example, there are no counts written
below the notes. Think about the value and
the length of each note, and “solve” the

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measures. Rhythms of this complexity
usually move very slowly, so don’t try
playing this too fast.

One last type of figure is presented
Example 5. Here, four thirty-seconds are
connected to a set of six sixteenth note
triplets. In the first figure, the three
trips will begin on the first half of the
count and the triplets begin on the “and”
syllable. The second figure is just the
reverse, with the triplet starting on the
“number” syllable and the thirty-seconds
starting on the “and.”

Just as an aside—since things are starting
to get a bit more complicated, it might be a
good time to review some of the practice
suggestions presented in earlier articles.

To be certain that the speed of your
counts is steady and consistent. There should be
no pause between figures, measures, or between lines. Take the exercise very
slowly at first and have a successful
experience. If you are having trouble,
SLOW DOWN! Set yourself some realistic
goals. Then, pace yourself on the back and
do it again. Do it again, and again,
and again. If you play this exercise fifty times in
a row without errors, then you can be
pretty confident that the fifty-first time will
also be perfect.

Counting out loud will serve as
additional feedback to your ears and your
eyes that everything is going along okay. As
you count, keep your verbal syllables short
and crisp so you can hear where the sound
is supposed to occur. If you draw out the
words, you lose the emphasis and the
sound synchronizes the sound of the drum to
the sound of the count.

Always play your eyes in front
of your hands. This means that while your
hands are playing count one, your eyes
need to be looking at count two (at least).
Every count gets placed into a short-term
memory location in your brain. As you play
the count, your eyes are already looking
ahead to see what you have to do for the
next count. This occurs when you read
English. Your eyes are scanning the words
coming up while your mouth is saying the
words that your memory recalls.

Above mentioned, we’re not
doing something a little different. We’ll have
a series of exercises taken from the Reading
Rhythms books available each month from
Bill Kistler’s Ontario, Canada, company. They
may still need some work and get ready to
apply some of these reading skills to the
drumkit. Until then, practice and have fun! 65