

# 10 Steps to Master a Song

Time

Feel

Song Form

Arrange

Style

Memorize



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# **Confident Drummer**

Free Resources

## **10 Steps to Master a Song**

**Confident Drummer Series**

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## - 10 Steps to Master a Song -

1- Listen to it 3 times in a row. Just listen, get inside what the song is about, musically, conceptually, emotionally.

2- Figure out what the exact tempo of the song is, by using the tap function of a metronome.

Each song has a certain tempo that works best for the energy, feel, emotion of that tune.

3- Understand the time feel. Is it eighths, triplets, sixteenths, is it shuffle? Straight feel of swung? If it's swung, is the triplet time feel loose (closer to the straight eighths feel), tight (closer to sixteenths) or right on the triplet? Nailing the time feel is very crucial.

4- Know the time signature and the structure/form of the song. Is it all in 4/4 or are there any time signature changes? Count the exact number of measures for each section.

Ideally you could transcribe it (or find a drum chart somewhere), so that you can see the song in front of you, and understand how the different sections relate to each other.

5- Pay attention to how drum parts are arranged, and to how the drums sound. Is it an acoustic drum set, or are there electronic sounds and samples?

Is there any rhythm that needs to be reproduced on acoustic drums? Do you need to integrate electronic percussion pads?

How are the drums tuned? What sound do the cymbals have? How is the snare drum tuned?

6- Figure out which beats and fills are essential to make the song work, and which ones can be interpreted without changing the meaning of what you are playing. When in doubt, stick to the original parts.

Practice and internalize every groove, every pattern, every fill, each

individual part. If you find a very challenging part, focus on the groove.

That sometimes might mean you have to simplify what you are playing. But, by all means, if you have time, keep practicing until you get it right.

7- Mix all sections. For instance, play each part for 4 bars and then move on to the next one without interruptions or hesitation, especially during the transitions.

Identify the most difficult transitions, isolate them and keep repeating those passages, going back and forth until you have mastered them.

8- Listen to the lyrics and try to play the emotion of what they say. Also, play the emotion of the melody and the chord progression.

Then record yourself playing each part and make sure it sounds right.

9- Play the whole song as it is, still reading if you have written down a chart, or counting the bars to stick to the correct structure, until you have internalized everything in it.

Repeat it until you can play it by memory. You know that feeling when you are completely comfortable with everything in the song.

10- Add your own thing to the song, a bunch of embellishments, ideas, your interpretation of the time feel, different fills, variations and so on.

Be careful and respect the mood of the song when doing this, some music styles allow for a lot of variations (Jazz, for instance), some don't (Pop and Rock, for instance).

Trust your instinct and musicianship.

Then forget about all of this and just play for the music.