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# Chapter 1

## What is a Good Bass Line?

Play both of the examples below.

Track 3.1

$\text{♩} = 110$

T  
A  
B

3 3 3 1

3 3 3 1

Track 3.2

$\text{♩} = 110$

T  
A  
B

3 3 3 1 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 3

3 3 3 1 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 4

Which one is a better bass line?

Many musicians would pick Example #3 because it is more technical, or busier. Their logic seems to be, “the more complex, the better the line.” This is a common mistake! Technique is not about playing complex or fast. A good bass line will support and enhance whatever style of music is being played. A double-thumbed lick in the middle of a swing tune may sound “cool” but does it really fit the music? Great bass soloists from Eddie Gomez (recorded with Bill Evans and Chick Corea, among others) to Victor Wooten (Bela Fleck and the Flecktones) lay down inspired, supporting lines

when they’re not soloing. No matter how far new techniques have pushed the boundaries of the bass and bass lines, its primary role is still a supportive one.

While the examples are different from each other, neither one is better than the other. It is up to the arranger or bassist to decide which line is appropriate in the context of a particular tune. This book will help you determine the best type of bass line for each situation.

Here are some ideas to think about when you are building your bass lines.

A good bass line should provide rhythmic and harmonic support, as well as a constant feeling of forward motion (momentum). In simpler terms:

**The bass line should make the music:  
feel good, in the pocket, groove, swing, cook, etc.**

With these thoughts in mind, let’s continue with a brief discussion of style.

## More Shuffles

Here are some shuffle lines in the style of such early blues greats as Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker and Willie Dixon. Notice how these lines mix up walking bass, swing eighths and triplets to create the

shuffle groove. This was a very common practice among early blues players. In fact, many early shuffles were based on just the walking bass style. Keep that in mind when you are playing older styles.

### Two-bar patterns

Shuffle A) F7 B) G7

♩ = 118

Track 8.1

Shuffle C) A7 D) F7

### One bar patterns

Shuffle A) C7 B) E7 C) B<sup>b</sup>7

♩ = 128

Track 8.2

D) A7 E) E7 F) D7