

# How to write a Drum Chart

I am often asked by students “How did you write the drum chart?” or “Where did you learn how to write out drum scores?”, so here is an explanation to both these questions and possibly some others too.

Firstly, most of my knowledge of charting for drums comes from experience in reading them. My drum teacher, Eric Johnstone, wrote all of his charts out by hand as did I until I learned the intricacies of Finale. His charts were works of art. I later discovered he learned his craft from a book *The Art of Music Copying*, by Clinton Roemer, published by Roerick Music Co., Sherman Oaks, in 1973. I now have his copy. So I started off my copying his style of physical presentation but had to develop my own way of transitioning the song to the written page.

**Step 1.** Select the song on your iPod/MP3 player etc and ensure you have a good pair of closed-ear headphones. This isn't essential, but certainly helps. Now, as you listen through to the song tap your foot to the beat and marked on a piece of paper every bar of music you hear. You'll obviously have to establish before you start what the time signature is going to be. When doing this, group the bars in phrase groupings. This will most often be four or eight bar groupings (see Fig. 1)

As I go, I will quickly mark in what I believe to be the verses, choruses, bridge, solos, and outro. This may change later once I have established what the different sections of the song actually are. For example, some songs do not have a verse/chorus structure but just have a tag line at the end of the verse. 12 Bar Blues is a good example of this.

I will also mark down my own symbols for ease of reference later when it comes to the actual transcription and mapping out the chart. Here is a quick guide to my symbols and what they represent. You may want to devise your own.

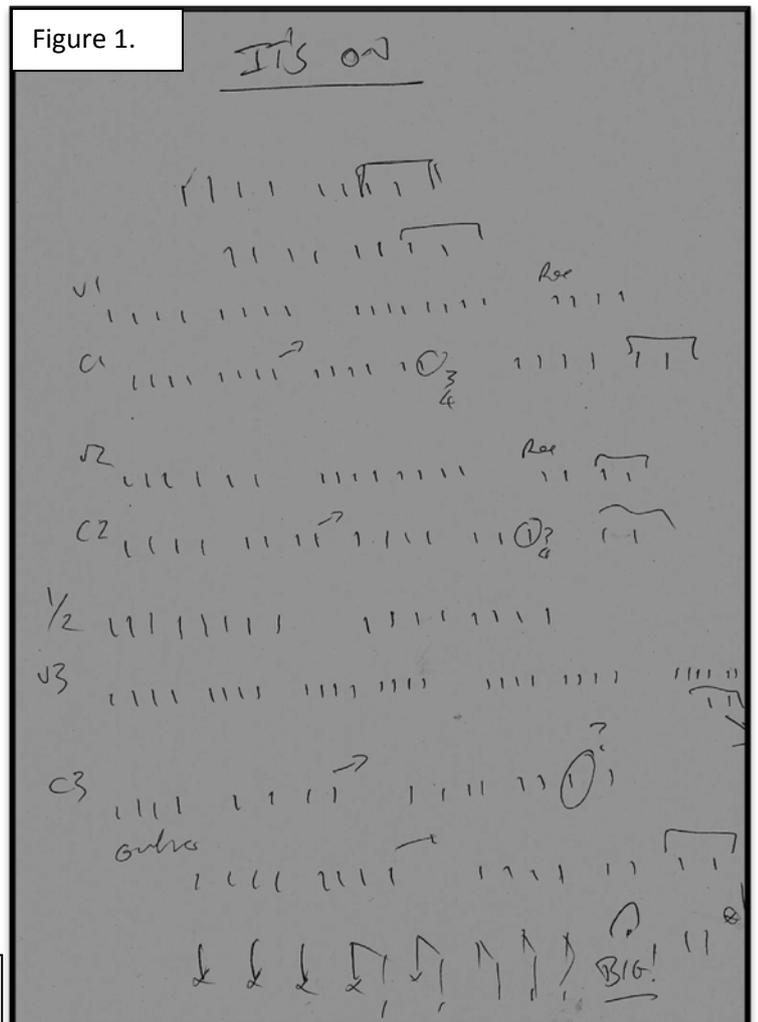


Figure 1.

V1

**Verse 1.** V2 would be verse 2 etc.

C1

**Chorus 1.** C2 would be chorus 2 etc.

B

**Bridge.** The middle 8 of the song.

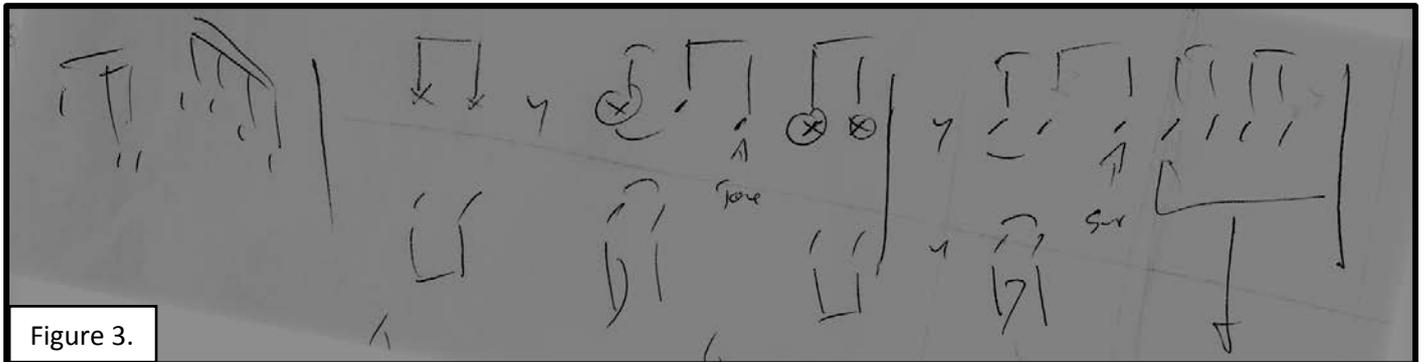
Pre C

**Pre Chorus.** The second part of a verse that occurs as a lead up to the chorus.



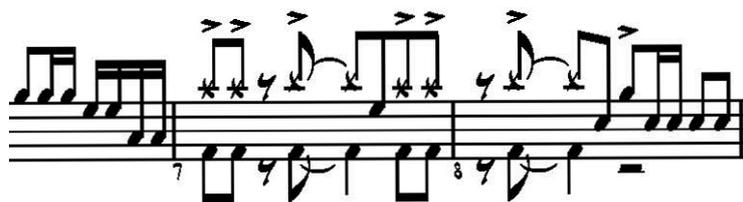
**Step 4.** If I were writing by hand, I would now set out, in pencil, the layout of the chart. This would mean drawing up the bar lines 4 to a line, and marking in where the repeats and verses and choruses would go. This can often change as you may find you can write 8 bars to a line with multiple repeat bars.

As we are looking at the process using Finale 11 my next step is to listen to the first section of music with some blank paper in front of me and roughly write the first 4 to 8 bars. Here is an example from "It's On":



This example shows the fill into and including bars 7 and 8. I didn't need to write the first 6 bars out as I could hear what they were and so input the notes from ear. After I have written in each section I listen and re-listen to make sure the music is correct. Here is what it looks like in the completed score:

Figure 4.



Make sure that if you use the copy and paste function that the section you are copying is exactly the same as the part you are pasting to. Once you have pasted, listen again and make any adjustments. Sometimes the rhythm will be the same but the accents will be on the tom instead of the snare or there are more cymbal crashes.

This process goes on until the whole chart is completed. I then print out the music and listen through again making pencil marks on the print-out where I believe the chart is wrong. I then go in and edit these mistakes. The best test I have found is to play through the chart on the drum kit, or get a student to do so, as this will be the true test of missed bars or wrong scoring.

When I write out a brief guide chart, usually for learning a song for a gig, I will have the layout of the song with my arrow symbols indicating fills and any stops or band stabs. At the head or bottom of the chart I will write the rhythm of the Verse and Chorus. Here is an example for the song “Wonderwall” by Oasis:

Sometimes I will write out an even brief guide showing only the beats and any unique fills or rhythms pertaining to the chart. Here is an example for the Wheatus song “Teenage Dirtbag”:

Figure 5.

So, there you have it. A guide to how to write out a drum chart. If you are a beginner I advise starting out with a short and simple song. Don't go trying to transcribe a Dave Weckl tune like “Tower of Inspiration” or a really fast blast-beat song with intricate double kick. I suggest an AC/DC song as a good starting point. For those who do want to transcribe very fast and tricky songs, I recommend a software program like *The Amazing Slow Downer* or similar program that can slow down a recording without changing the pitch. Good luck! If you have any further questions feel free to email me at:

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Figure 6.