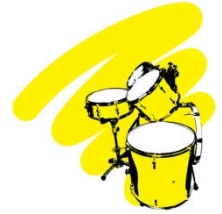


# Master Class

## By Richard Best

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### Let Me Rephrase That

Musical phrases are what music is all about. They are the building blocks of all music. So anything that a drummer does should relate to the tune's phrasing, and anything you practice should translate easily into musical applications.

Phrasing is not difficult. The humble 4-bar phrase is so pervasive that anything else can stand out like the proverbial sore thumb. Four-bar phrases are actually rooted in nature. Before we had instruments, we had only the voice, and most vocalists (and therefore wind instrument players too) have enough lung power for roughly two bars. So if you sing a 2-bar line and then stop to take a breath, chances are you'll fall naturally into a 4-bar phrase: a 2-bar musical statement followed by 2 bars of breathing space (or meditation or whatever). Thus the 4-bar phrase is born.

It's a good idea to practice everything in 4-bar increments. The best way to do this is to count the downbeats of the bars: *One 2 3 4 / Two 2 3 4 / Three 2 3 4 / Four 2 3 4.*

OK, that settles the length issue, now how does a drummer approach phrasing *musically*. I like to use the classic 'call and response' method. I think of the first two bars — the musical statement — as the call (this is usually the vocalist's bit) and the next two bars would be the response.

So:

| 2-bar statement | 2-bar response |

or

| 2-bar set-up | 2-bar resolution |

Listen to any blues guitarist for splendid examples of 2 bars of vocal line followed by 2 bars of guitar embellishment. Drums can do the same: 2 bars of time followed by 2 bars of comping or embellishment.

The opposite form will also work where, for example, a drummer might do some 'colour commentary' for the first two bars and then play more simply for the next two bars. This approach is less common but it can be a good model for soloing.

While the 4-bar phrase may be the basic unit, lots of music is cast from 8-bar phrases. Well that's just two 4-bar phrases. Count the down beats and use a call & response style, this time with 6 bars of time followed by a 2-bar resolution, or 7 bars of time and a 1-bar resolution. We call this technique a turn-around, and it's an important concept. In fact, you'll find that the end of a phrase will often call out for some sort of recognition ... a fill or a figure. Don't just put stuff in 'cuz you feel like it.

So play in 4-bar phrases or 8-bar phrases, depending on the music form, and listen for the call & response structure. Listen also for the 'resolution' at the end of a phrase, which is your opportunity to help finish off one phrase and usher in the next one.