

Sawstroke-

| d u d u | OR 1-1-1-1 Upbowing- | u d u d |

pluses:
conceptually simple,
much like using a flatpick,
lots of melodic clarity. Forces the left hand to get in sync with the bowing arm.
Challenges: Because it requires the most frequent direction changes it places the most stress on fingers, hands and wrist, however, it can also force you to get flexible and efficient. In the hands of beginners to intermediate players it can be rhythmically rather stilted and monotonous. Most often done down-up-down-up. The backwards version up-down-up-down is the basis of upbow fiddling.

Unshuffle-

| d u u u | OR 1-3

Also called Downbeat Georgia Shuffle. This is a great bowing to pair up with sawstroke for variety. Accents the very important downbeat note, making it clear and distinct.

Challenges: Physically somewhat challenging at first because of the mathematics of one note being on a downstroke and the rest being on an upstroke- the natural tendency is for the bow to "climb" up closer to the frog.

This can be controlled with practice, however, and can also be compensated for by blending this with other patterns. Very straight and rather British sounding- good if you want that sound, not so good if you don't.

Georgia Shuffle-

(d)| u u d u | u u d u | Upbowing or "backwards" | d d u d | d d u d |

Backbeat version of the Unshuffle-

the motions are the same, but the downstroke is put in different places.

Great for extreme accents on the backbeat- loved by Bluegrass fiddlers for this reason. Can be mixed with Nashville Shuffle or Sawstroke for different patterns. Useful as a turnaround lick for downbowers, since it starts on an upbow, and ends on an upbow- if you find yourself starting a phrase on an upbow, make it into a Georgia Shuffle, and presto, you are going in the right direction within 4 notes!!!

Challenges:

The more common version favored by bluegrassers has a problem in that the 3 note upward slur begins in an awkward place for starting the tune.

This makes it a bit hard to explain if you can't show the other person what you are doing live or with video.

The first upward slur can be shortened to a 2 note slur to start it off, or you can start with 3 sawstrokes (see Sawshuffle in part 3) or a Nashville Shuffle.

The normal version resembles the second half of a Nashville Shuffle pattern.

There is also a reverse or backwards Georgia that starts on a downstroke and resembles the first part of a Nashville Shuffle, putting the backbeat accent on the upstroke. I have only seen Old Time players using this, Ken Kolodner, for example.

The bluegrass version has the same tendency to climb towards the frog as Unshuffle. The backwards version has a tendency to climb DOWN and run out of the bow at the tip. The backwards version is a bit more tricky to integrate with the more frequent down-up-down-up Sawstroke, but is a natural fit with up-down-up-down sawstroking. Together they make a natural basis for "Upbow" fiddling that puts accents on upstrokes instead of downstrokes.

Two Note Slurs-

| d d u u |

A very versatile and easy pattern- basically a slow sawstroke but with slurred notes. Easy for beginners.

Easy to do while reading sheet music, since it doesn't cross measure lines.

Challenges: Can be a bit bland sounding, but good phrasing can compensate for this. Popular in West Virginia.

Offset Two Note Slurs-

(d) | d u u d | d u u d | d

There is also a version where the two note slurs begin on the second and fourth notes in a series. A bit tricky to get the hang of.

It sounds really good on ragtime tunes. I hear tell Jason Anick considers it a fundamental lick in Swing fiddling too.

Balanced Patterns are patterns where the actual rhythm is four notes long like a short pattern, but repeated in the opposite direction to create a symmetrical pair. Symmetrical patterns have the advantage that "bow climb" is neutralized automatically- the bow stays centered in the same place as you started.

Nashville Shuffle-

(Also known as Single Shuffle to contrast it with Double Shuffle-esp. in BG)

| d d u d u d u | OR 2-1-1-2-1-1

pluses: conceptually simple, easy to teach. Classic rhythm is the same as the bump-ditty banjo pattern and the "church lick" backup pattern on guitar.

Very easy to create a sense of drive with this pattern. Good starting point for learning other patterns that are similar. Classified as a short pattern since the rhythm is the same in both halves.

challenges:

The initial 2 note slur tends to muddy up the first note of a tune. Getting the first three strokes and the second three strokes sounding the same can be a challenge, since they are in opposite directions.

Common as dirt, if you want something unusual sounding, this isn't it!

It can also get boring (and so gives pattern bowing a bad name).

However, many users of Nashville Shuffle do develop unique ways of phrasing it. But then, this can lead to situations where you have several players all with unique but rigid ways of phrasing a Nashville Shuffle, and they can't get their bowing to mesh together. Somewhat stressful on the wrist- best to have a good bowgrip but one that allows flexibility.

Offset Nashville-

Just as the only real difference between Unshuffle and Georgia Shuffle is where you start it, Offset Nashville utilizes the same motions as Nashville, but shifts the pattern so the downbeat comes in a different place.

Offset Nashville starts on a single stroke rather than on a slur.

l d u u d - u d d ul OR 1-2-1-1-2-1

I first heard this at Galax in 1976 in the playing of a fiddler named Dave Viddick. I can't find any trace of him on the web. It's become one of my favorites- it has much of the flavor of Nashville, but lends itself to a bouncy hornpipey feel.

Because the basic motions are the same, if you saw a fiddler do this, you'd probably mistake it for Nashville Shuffle... but it would look out of sync compared to a normal Nashville.

pluses: single note on downbeat promotes clarity

challenges- same physical challenges as Nashville- doing the same pattern in two directions puts a premium on flexibility. It took me years and an improved grip (for better wrist action) to get this sounding smooth and natural

Jingle Bells Shuffle.

l d u d d u d u u l OR 1-1-2-1-1-2

I just realized that there is another balanced pattern made by reversing the long slur and the sawstrokes in Nashville. If you play the first part of the chorus of Jingle Bells you've got it. It also uses the same motions of Nashville Shuffle, but offset to a different place. I can't think of any other tune that uses it, but there are probably others. Ideas???

By "Asymmetrical" I mean that the first four notes and the last four notes of the eight note pattern are NOT mirror images of each other and are not simply repetitions of the same rhythm but in opposite directions.

Sawshuffle-

| d u d u U u d u | (note large U for midbow stress) OR 1-1-1-3-1-1

Just what it sounds like- a hybrid of Sawstroke and the second half of a Nashville Shuffle, but using the 3 note upbow slur like a Georgia Shuffle. It's a little hard to explain how to do it with words, but if you can find someone to show you (Dave Reiner knows it) this is actually a very easy shuffle if you have any stiffness in the wrist. It was my bread and butter shuffle when I started playing again in 2005, and when I recorded stuff in 2006 and posted on ezfolk.com. It's not a flashy sounding shuffle, but it has a pleasant chugging along feel to it. It can be substituted for straight sawstroke in many tunes, giving the tunes a less tight, less rigid feel. Called Melvin's Lick by Brad Leftwich. It can also be used as a way of starting out a series of Georgia Shuffles.

Challenges: 3 note slur across the middle of the pattern is somehow counterintuitive.

Smoothshuffle-

| d d d u U u d u | (note large U for midbow stress) OR 3-3-1-1

Very similar to Sawshuffle, and very compatible with it, yet it sounds very different, since Sawshuffle is 5/8 sawstroke, and Smoothshuffle is 6/8 slurs... or something like that. Brad Leftwich also calls it Melvin's Lick, I think he classifies it as a beginning-of-phrase lick. Tommy Jarrell used SOMETHING similar to it, and Alan Jabbour says that Henry Reed used it. I used it along with Nashville Shuffle in the mid-70's. It's very balanced as far as being unlikely to cause "bow climb".

Challenge: Only that the 3 note slurs somehow make it counterintuitive for people that like to color within the lines!

SyncoShuffle-

| d u u d u u d u | OR 1-2-1-2-1-1

Very similar to Nashville- really just a rearrangement of it by changing the first slur to a single note and the first single note to a slur. As you can tell from the name, it syncopates well, and is a natural choice if you want to add some of this flavor. The fact that it begins with a single stroke gives the downbeat clarity, and it can also be played straight and unsyncopated to take advantage of this. Very good pattern for players with a loose wrist motion. Blends well with Nashville, Smoothshuffle, and Sawshuffle. Very balanced, will not cause "bow climb".

Challenges: It can be hard to learn how to phrase it right- the second sawstroke is a downstroke but must be played very gently with just a flick of the wrist or it will be too strong. It is a bit rough on the wrist if you don't have a flexible bow grip.

Reverse Syncoshuffle-

l d d u d d d u l OR 2-1-1-1-2-1

I don't use this myself, but it's obviously a possibility- I just haven't found a use for it yet- anybody else???

Upbow Backbeat Shuffle (???)

l d d u d d d u l OR 2-1-3-2

Based on a backwards Georgia Shuffle- note the upstroke on the first backbeat. I still haven't found a use for it though, but it seems easy enough to do.

Countdown Shuffle (???)

(because of the 3-2-1 length of the first three strokes)

l d d d u u d u u l OR 3-2-1-2

I think I saw this on a Japanese website that may have gotten ideas from Brad Leftwich. Still on my "backburner" with no application yet.

That's a lot of shuffles!

And I know there must be more- especially longer patterns. I still see plenty of patterns being used on fiddle videos where I don't have a CLUE how to do them!!!

But these will give beginning to intermediate players lots to work on- if you are so minded. Remember though, that it's a catalog- you don't have to "purchase" every item... just the ones that seem appealing, or within your reach.

All the ones I've included are compatible with a downbowing system- they begin on a downbow, and end on an upbow, (with the exception of Georgia Shuffle, or unless specifically named as an upbowing version of a pattern) so they can be chained together and the phrase of the tune will still end up the same way, no matter which one you use.

I am fully aware that some may find them yawn inducing, or headache inducing- read at your own risk!!! ;^) It's also good to take them one at a time. Seriously, you may not have a learning style that works with patterns, especially <reading> about them. Experiment till you find an approach that works for you, but also experiment with different approaches to learning shuffle patterns before you decide they are not for you.

So, how do you decide what shuffle to learn or use???

First of all, a caveat: if you are focused on a regional style, that style may, or MAY NOT make much use of shuffles. Texas fiddling is very strong on sawstroke, so is Ozark fiddling, so is Old Time "Yankee" fiddling. Many of the patterns mentioned here are found in various parts of the Appalachians. That area has been my main area of interest, and so may at least PARTIALLY explain my obsession with shuffle patterns. But even there, there are styles that don't make much use of them. For instance, Franklin George's hornpipey style fiddling is mostly based on Sawstroke. Other styles use a lot of two note slurs, and not much in the way of the more complex patterns.

You can listen to them (preferably live), decide which ones appeal to you, then set about learning those. I have many of them recorded and posted in my Music section.

Or, you can pick shuffles that are closely related to bowings you already know.

If you use Sawstroke already, Sawshuffle is a fairly easy one to learn.

Once you know Sawshuffle, Smoothshuffle is easy to learn.

If you use Nashville Shuffle, Syncoshuffle is very similar, and fits well with it.

If you know Georgia Shuffle, Sawshuffle is a natural progression.

Then, there is the question of WHERE in a tune to use them.

One common way of using them is in tunes or parts of tunes that don't have much going on melodically, like the first part of Spotted Pony, or the low part of Growling Old Man. Some people use Nashville for this purpose- I'm even more likely to use Sawshuffle, Syncoshuffle, and maybe Smoothshuffle.

One traditional way of using shuffles is to use one as a starting lick (Smoothshuffle is often used for this), then a common bowing like Sawstroke or Nashville Shuffle for the main body of the part, then something like Syncoshuffle for the end of the phrase.

I would start with those two methods. Once you get comfortable with the new patterns, you may find other uses for them, and may find them turning into your main bowing licks.

What works for me is this: I learn the shuffle in the first part of my version of June Apple- the way the notes fall act as a grid to let you know exactly what note of the pattern you are on. I created a shuffle exercise based on this version of June Apple that's even easier. Once I get the shuffle going smoothly on June Apple, I try it on similar parts, or just let it happen naturally.

Another thing I do- I attempt to play a tune or part of a tune all the way through with my current favorite shuffle. Some parts will fit great, I leave those places as they are. The places that don't fit so great, I try out other shuffles I'm very comfortable with, usually my PREVIOUS favorite shuffles, until I get a good fit. If no shuffle I know well fits, there is always sawstroke to fall back on.

Another useful way of practicing and using shuffles is to use them on low string double stops as a form of "fiddle seconding". I find Nashville Shuffle, Sawshuffle, and Syncoshuffle all work well for this, maybe with a Smoothshuffle thrown in here or there. The same technique also works well for song accompaniment if the melody is too complex for me to sing and play it at the same time.

A very important way of learning shuffles is to WATCH them as well as hear them. Bowing seminars, private lessons, or just watching fiddlers like a hawk at jams are all options, especially if you have a strongly visual learning style like I do.

Digital video had better be VERY high quality to be of much use, and NEEDS to show the bowing hand!

Of course one option is Brad Leftwich's DVD series, which includes patterns from Melvin Wine and Tommy Jarrell among others.

Dave Reiner's fiddle books also discuss shuffles and he started the first bowing pattern thread here on the Fiddle Hangout.

In addition to Brad and Dave, others that are able to teach shuffle patterns include Alan Jabbour (especially Smoothshuffle), Tom Sauber (I learned Syncoshuffle from him), and Jason Anick (recently taught Offset 2-Note Slurs in a bowing seminar) Jake Krack could show you Smoothshuffle and Sawshuffle, although he might not call them that, but they are bowings he would have learned from Melvin Wine- Brad Leftwich calls them "Melvin's Licks". (Let me know if there are any other names I should add to this list.)

Oh yes- David Bragger, of course- he has stroke-by stroke YouTube videos, teaches in Los Angeles, and is familiar with Syncoshuffle, and probably most of what I've described.

There are of course others like Erynn Marshall, Bruce Molsky, Bruce Green, Rayna Gellert, Matt Brown, Jane Rothfield and Brittany Haas who know a whole lot about bowing, most of whom teach fiddle, but I don't know if they use a pattern based approach, or some other approach. Regardless of approach, they have some good bowing stuff to show you!

For those for whom patterns just do not click, Dan Levenson (fiddledan) has an approach that seems to work.

Regarding the names: I have used: Sawstroke, Nashville Shuffle, and Georgia Shuffle are three names that have become traditional, and I'm not about to buck tradition there. The others I have tried to name as descriptively as possible. If you have suggestions or problems with a certain name, I'd like to hear them. This is especially true for some shuffles I haven't integrated into my playing yet. While I understand the desire to name shuffles after a particular fiddler, I've seen how many shuffles are much more widely used than we realize, and personal or even geographical names only get in the way of the name being accepted.

I'd also like to express my appreciation for Dick Owings, Jeff Cherniss, Tom Sauber, Brian "Hawk" Hubbard, Dave Viddick, Tommy Jarrell, Mel Durham, and Earl Collins, who all had an influence on my bowing and bowing knowledge.

I'd also like to thank all who participated in the bowing threads here at the Fiddle Hangout, and argued your views with passion, you HAVE had an influence on me! In particular, Dave Reiner, Mike Fontenot, and OTJ!!!