

# What is rhythmic breathing?

Breathing patterns are repeated successions of inhaling and exhaling. We can look to drumming patterns for ideas and names. For example, the in-in/out-out pattern is called a “double stroke roll” in drum terminology. Another basic pattern is called a “perididdle”, which is in-out-in-in/out-in-out-out or vice versa as out-in-out-out/in-out-in-in. Symmetrical drumming patterns let the drummer end up on the correct hand (as opposed to the right hand, which might be left). Symmetrical breathing patterns let the harp player maintain a balance of air so we neither take in too much or too little to maintain the pattern.

Breathing is basic to harp playing, and rhythmic breathing should be part of every practice session. Start by using rhythmic breathing patterns to play draw and blow chords on holes 1-3. Practice as fast as you can, but not faster than you can. If you find yourself stumbling over the pattern, slow down and work it into your muscle memory. Be sure to relax, open up your throat, and use your diaphragm to control your breathing, not your lungs, mouth, or tongue.



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This will improve your resonance and the depth and richness of your tone.

Fast improvisation can be achieved by using repeated breathing patterns to select the notes you play, rather than selecting notes some other way then doing whatever you need with your breath to get those notes. Of course this style should not replace other improvisation, or dominate, necessarily, but can add to other styles and put another tool in your bag of tricks. Seems to me that John Popper uses this approach routinely.

The other point with respect to breathing patterns is that analyzing difficult passages to identify the underlying breathing pattern can greatly simplify the learning and playing of the passage.

There are superimposed rhythmic patterns at work when we play:

1. the rhythm of the music



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## 2. our breathing patterns that enable the notes

It is easy to concentrate on the rhythm of the music and ignore the underlying rhythm of our breath which enables the music—we just kind of unconsciously get there by working on getting the right notes. But much of the difficulty is solved once the enabling breathing pattern is learned.



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