

## More About Solo Fills

Ever since Charlie Parker played that incredible 4-bar double-time solo fill on “A Night in Tunisia,” many improvisers have taken that as the model for playing solo breaks. Their goal seems to be playing that perfect double-time fill on each and every solo break.

### The Need for Speed

Granted, a cleanly played double-time solo break can be exciting. But there are more than a few problems with the “double-time, every time” approach to solo breaks:

- It’s tough going from zero to 60 in a few seconds, which is comparable to suddenly launching into double-time. Usually, double-time is something you work up to.
- Solo breaks are usually completely exposed, which heightens the attention on every note that’s played. Once you botch a solo fill, it’s pretty tough to recover and play a relaxed, high-quality solo.
- The approach becomes too predictable. Even if the break contains all regular eighth-notes instead of double-time eighths, there’s little rhythmic diversity.
- Where do you go from there? Supposing you’ve played a decent double-time break, what’s next? Sometimes it’s hard to downshift.

### A Different Approach

Given that the spotlight is on you during a solo break, musical vision becomes even more important. With that in mind, here are some ways to more consistently play interesting and solid solo breaks:

- Think SHAPE to guide the direction of the solo fill. Consider all three dimensions: melody, rhythm, and expression.
- Focus on interesting rhythms – triplets, consecutive offbeat quarters, tied values, 3 against 4, etc. That will generate some rhythmic momentum for ideas to begin your solo.
- Since the background is gone, be very aware of keeping solid time. A very sparse and highly syncopated fill can be effective if you keep the time intact.
- Occasionally try a prolonged or noticeable expression. For example, a well-placed bend, growl, or affected note can get good attention in a solo break.
- When you do decide to go for a double-time fill, be keenly aware of seeing the twists and turns in the melody. Don’t just settle for the same tired licks that you can play perfectly. And be ready to insert a secure offbeat quarter or staccato note when needed, to break up the eighth-note flow.