

Quick Guide:

Arranging Essentials for Worship

The 3 Gs of Arrangement Hacking

From the Worship Workshop Course, *Arranging Essentials for The Worship Musician*

Arrangement Hacking: Listening to a song to determine what's happening in the main parts of the arrangement and then determining how to approximate it with your band.

There are 3 big parts of an arrangement, **The 3 Gs:**

The Groove

The Glue

The Grace

Within those three parts are the five elements of a modern worship song arrangement:

The Foundation

The Rhythm

The Pad or Constant

The Lead

The Fill

Let's explore...

The Groove

Groove is "the predictable, consistent forward motion of the song."
(Norm Stockton)

Groove is the **tracks** that song rides on.

Groove is built on the **Foundation** and complemented by the **Rhythm**.

Foundation

In a typical modern worship band, the **foundation** is created by the two-headed monster known as the drums and the bass. They're what the rest of the song is built on.

The drums function as the **rhythmic** foundation.

The bass functions as the **harmonic** foundation.

NOTE: We need **the harmonic foundation** in our monitors.

- We relate all the other notes we hear to the lowest sounding pitch.
- Vocalists tune to the lowest note they hear.

Rhythm

The **rhythm** creates the forward motion and adds excitement to the music.

The rhythm can be created by anything from an acoustic guitar or piano, to a synth or an electric guitar, or even a percussion instrument.

Summary: You build the **groove** with the **foundation** - the drums and bass. They're creating the **tracks** we drive on. And then the **rhythm** instrument(s) then create that *forward motion and excitement*.

Rookie Mistakes:

1. **Instruments compete for harmonic or rhythmic foundation.**

This often happens between piano players and bass players.

2. **Rhythmic clashing.**

Multiple instruments CAN create the rhythm together, but have to be intentional about how they do that. Typically, the problems arise between the drums and the acoustic guitar. The acoustic is highly percussive instrument and can fight the drummer for the rhythm. The piano player can also get too busy.

3. **Nobody intentionally plays the harmonic foundation.**

If there's no bass player, someone has to be intentional about adding the foundation (roots and bass note inversions). Most piano players do this naturally. But if there's no piano or bass, the acoustic guitarist needs to be thinking about these bass notes. (*It's time to learn those slash chords, six-stringers.*)

4. **Not mixing the foundation properly.**

The bass and drums should be prominent in the mix—just below the lead vocals—since they carry the rest of the band rhythmically and harmonically. Too many churches are scared of this sound. They end up burying the bass and drums in the mix.

Glue

Glue is the middle stuff that holds the band together.

There are two elements of a song's arrangement that fall into this: the **Pad** and **Lead**

The Pad

The Pad, or also known as the Constant, is a subtle, sustained note or chord. Typically, it's played by a keyboard.

It's there as the background glue. The measure of the pad isn't that people notice it, *but if they notice if it stops*.

One of the benefits of a pad is that it takes the pressure off all the other instruments to cover every moment. The pad is there, so it actually allows us to create more space with the other instruments.

Other options for the pad:

- Ambient guitar
- Pre-recorded pads. (Try [Coresound](#) Pads. They're amazing!)
- A lightly played acoustic guitar with constant strumming - either with the side of the thumb or with a light pick. This would need to NOT be prominent in the mix.
- Enhancement Tracks
- Flute or a violin playing sustaining chord tones.

Rookie Mistakes:

1. **No pad.**

It doesn't have to be there, but if it is the rest of the band can be less busy (and even lay out).

2. **Mixing the pad too high or too low.**

Sometimes, the tech may not know it's there, and it's completely lost in the mix. Other times, he or she will assume it's more important, so they'll mix it too hot.

3. **The pad is played too rhythmically.**

THE LEAD

The *Lead* is the lead vocal or the lead instrument.

- Don't confuse an instrumental solo with an instrument fill. They are different and serve different purposes.
- This lead voice should be the most prominent element in the mix.

In a song, a quieter instrumental section or break with no lead instrument is usually called a *breakdown*.

When there's an instrumental break that's not a breakdown, you need to have a lead instrument there. If you don't have a lead instrument, consider cutting that section or reading a short scripture during it.

Rookie Mistakes:

1. **Competing lead parts.**
It's best to designate a lead voice and have all other voices work to blend their tone and match their phrasing to that voice.
2. **Not mixing the lead voice high enough.**
Make sure you communicate to the sound engineer which singer or what instrument is taking lead, and when.
3. **Not being clear on who's playing the instrumental lead.**
Be clear about who's carrying what part.

Grace

Grace is the extra stuff that adds beauty, tension or other enhancements. It's not structurally necessary for the song, but it's musically and emotionally important.

The main element of the arrangement in the category of "Grace" is The Fill.

THE FILL

- Fills generally occur in the spaces between lead lines.
- A good fill is really an answer or response to the melody.
- It's not a solo, but simply something to create interest in the open spaces.

Rookie Mistakes of the Fill:

- **Overfilling:** Filling every open spot (and filling on top of the lead).
- **Competing for the fill:** When two or more instruments try to fill the same open section.

Other Elements of Grace:

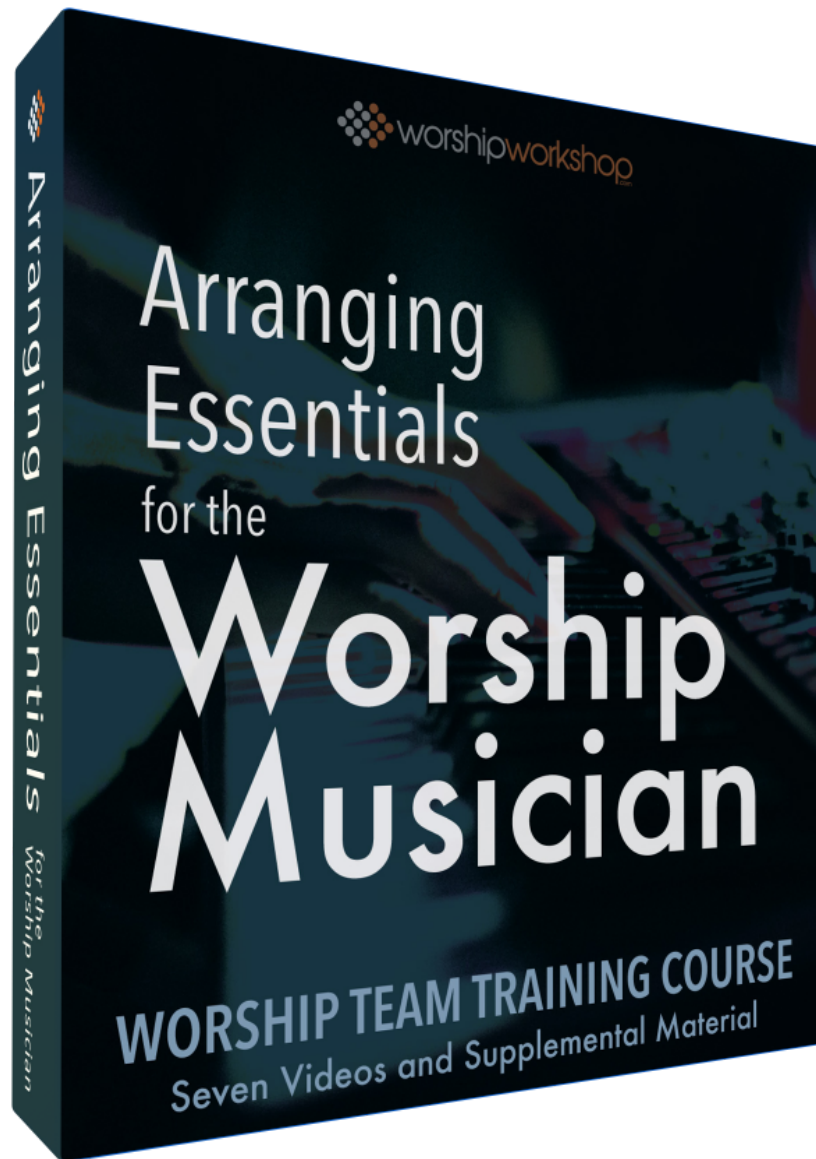
- Single-line motifs or repeating riffs
- “Pixie-dust”:
 - Light “tinging” on the cymbals during quieter moments.
 - High notes played on the piano or guitar far above the main rhythm. Nothing busy or continuous, just “sprinkled in” for interest.
 - It can even be some well-timed delay on the lead vocal channel added by the sound engineer.

Rookie Mistakes of Grace:

1. **Too much/too often.**
Grace elements lose their punch if overplayed.
2. **Competing grace elements.**
Make sure you’re listening to each other.
3. **Grace elements over- or under-mixed.**
They’re either buried and never heard, or they are too loud and distract from the melody or the moment you’re trying to create.
4. **Never adding any.**
Be intentional about finding places to add little elements of grace. People in the congregation may not pick up on it directly, but it will help contribute to the environment that your team is trying to create, which will encourage them to enter into worship.

Your Next Step...

READY TO DIG DEEPER?



This quick guide came from just ONE LESSON from the course, **Arranging Essentials for the Worship Musician**. If you'd like to train your team even more deeply on arranging principles and practical techniques, check out the whole course at *Worship Workshop*. [Go here to learn more](#).