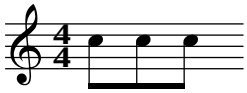
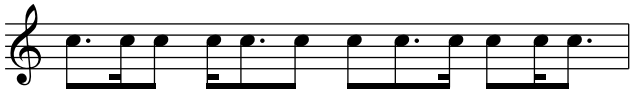
Hand control exercises

This suite of exercises is designed to train your fingers and brain into common fingering patterns used in piping. To begin with, work on getting each exercise in perfect equal rhythm so that every note sounds exactly the same length.

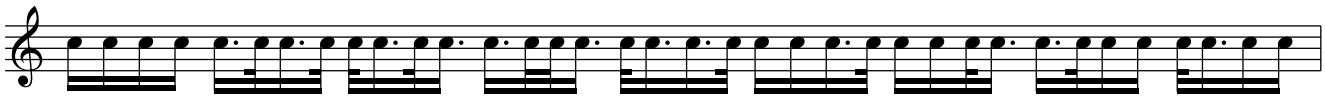
Once you have control, each exercise should be practiced using any possible rhythmical variants. For example:



could be played

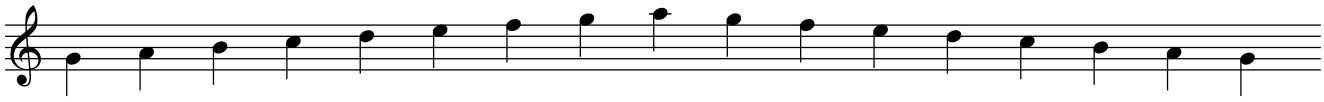


Similarly, groups of four can be played

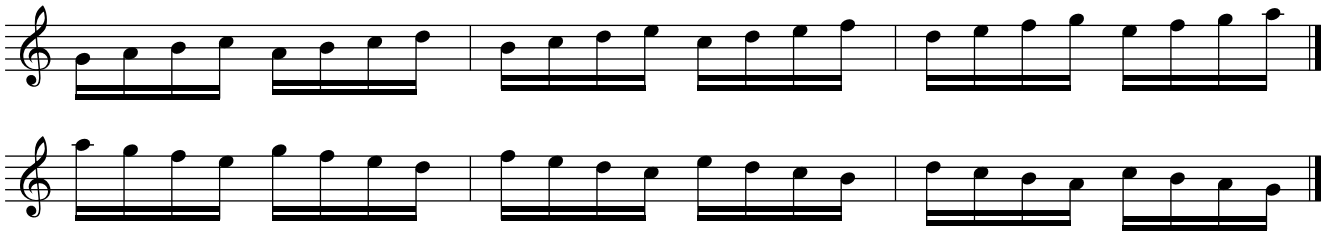


Remember, the aim of any exercise is never to play fast: it is train your hands in making the correct movements at all times. Keep long notes long and short notes distinct and clear. Listen closely for crossing and catching noises. Only play exercises when you are mentally able to give 100% concentration to your practice.

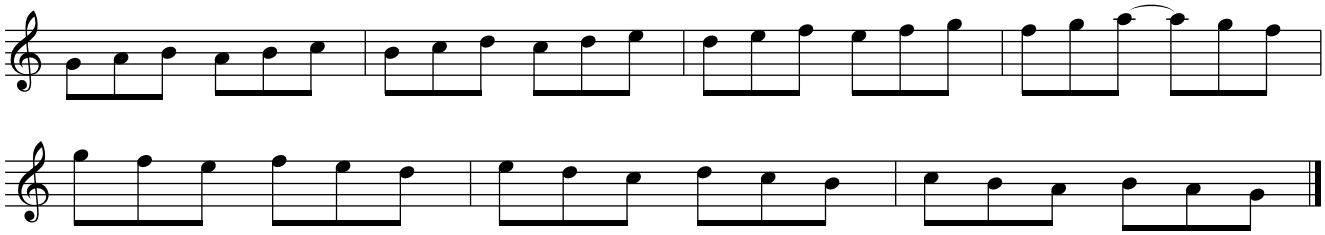
Scale



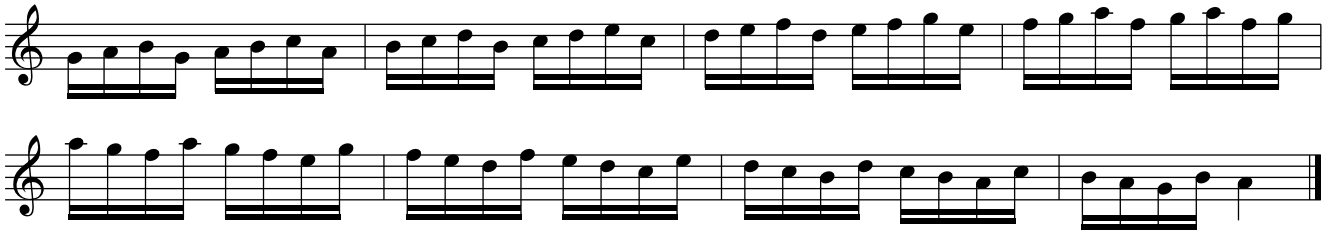
Straight runs in fours



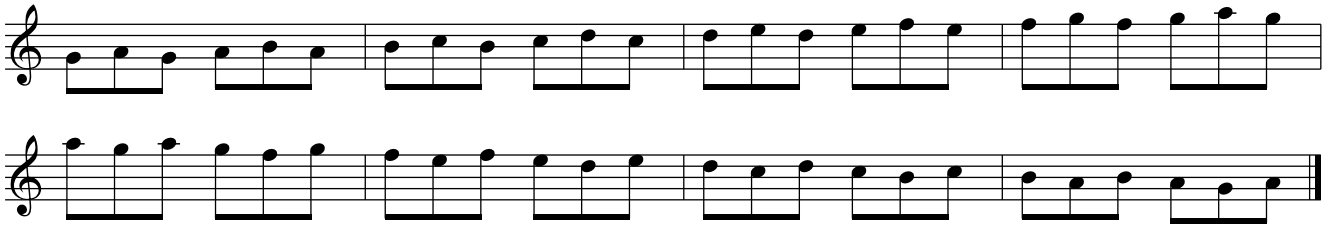
Straight runs in threes



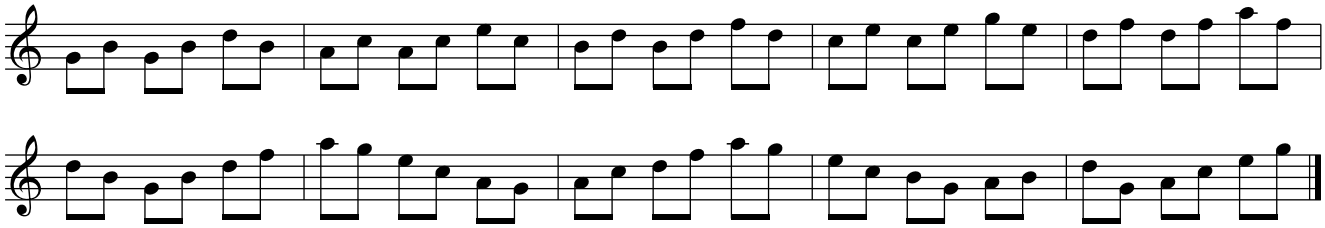
Broken runs in fours



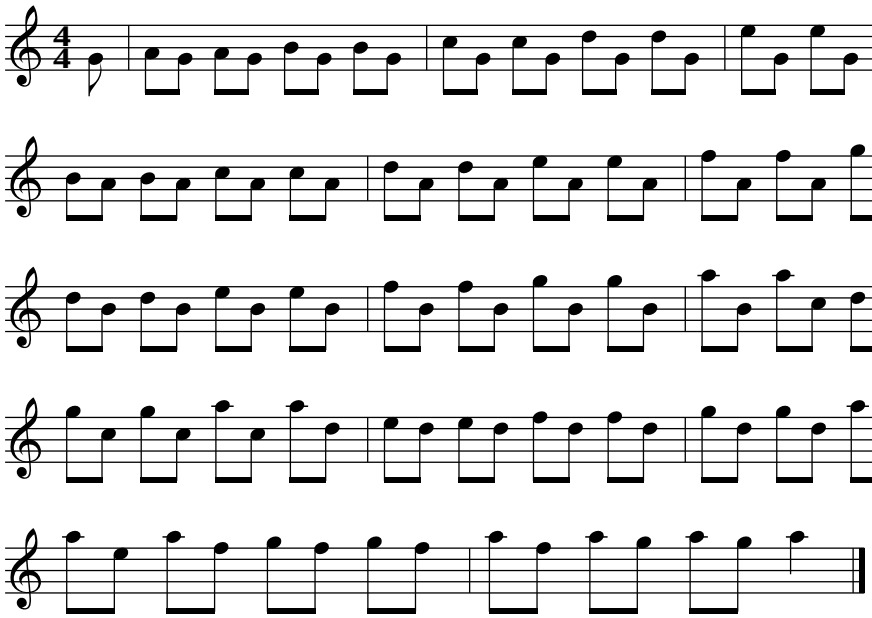
Broken runs in threes



Arpeggios

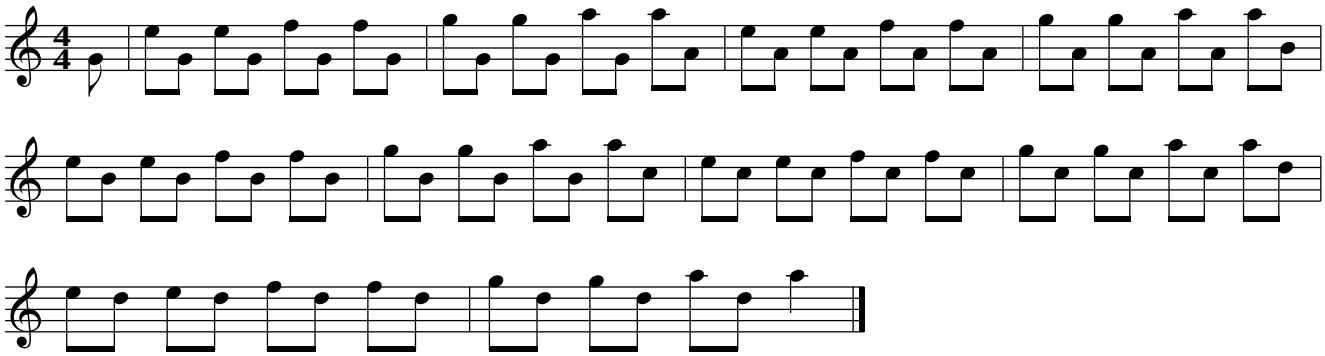


Note changes

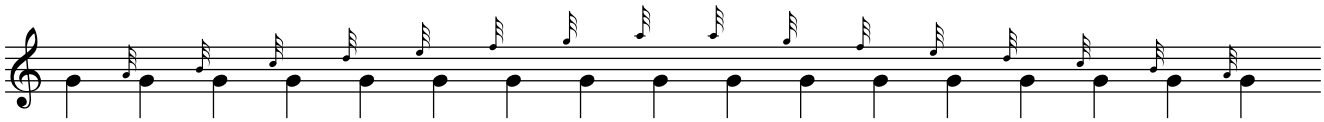


Hand changes

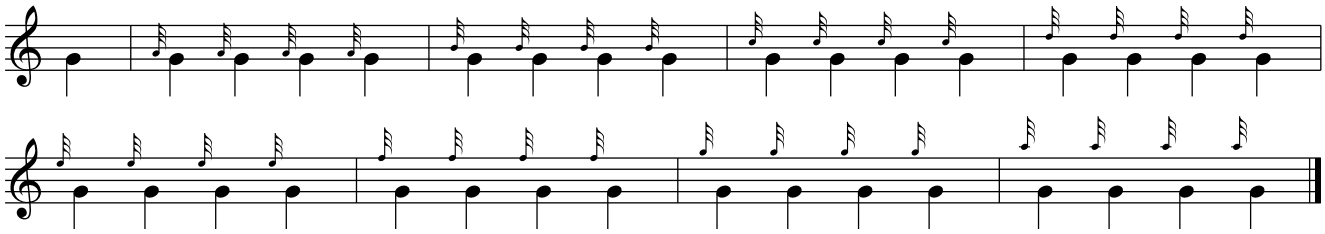
This exercise is similar, but only has changes between hands.



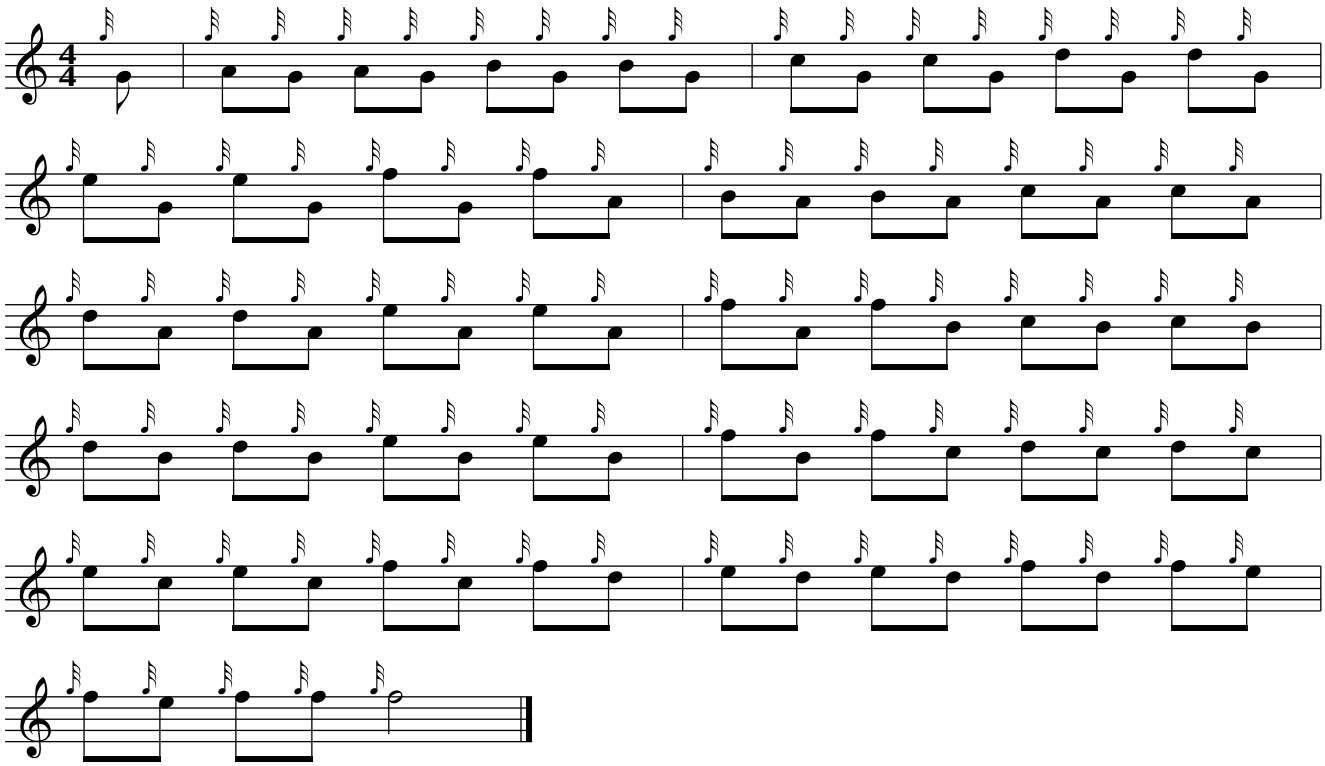
Tipping Exercise



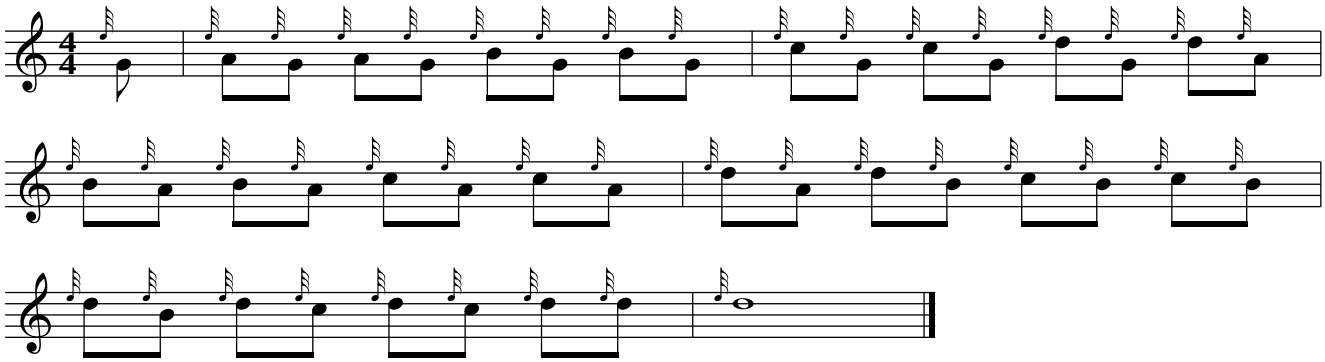
Extended Tipping Exercise



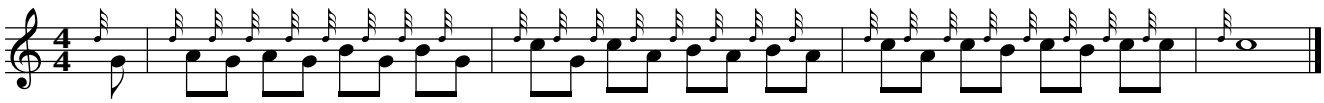
G gracenotes



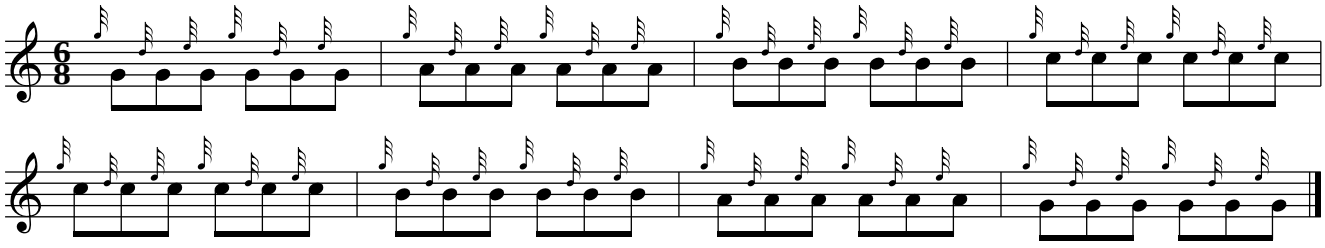
E gracenotes



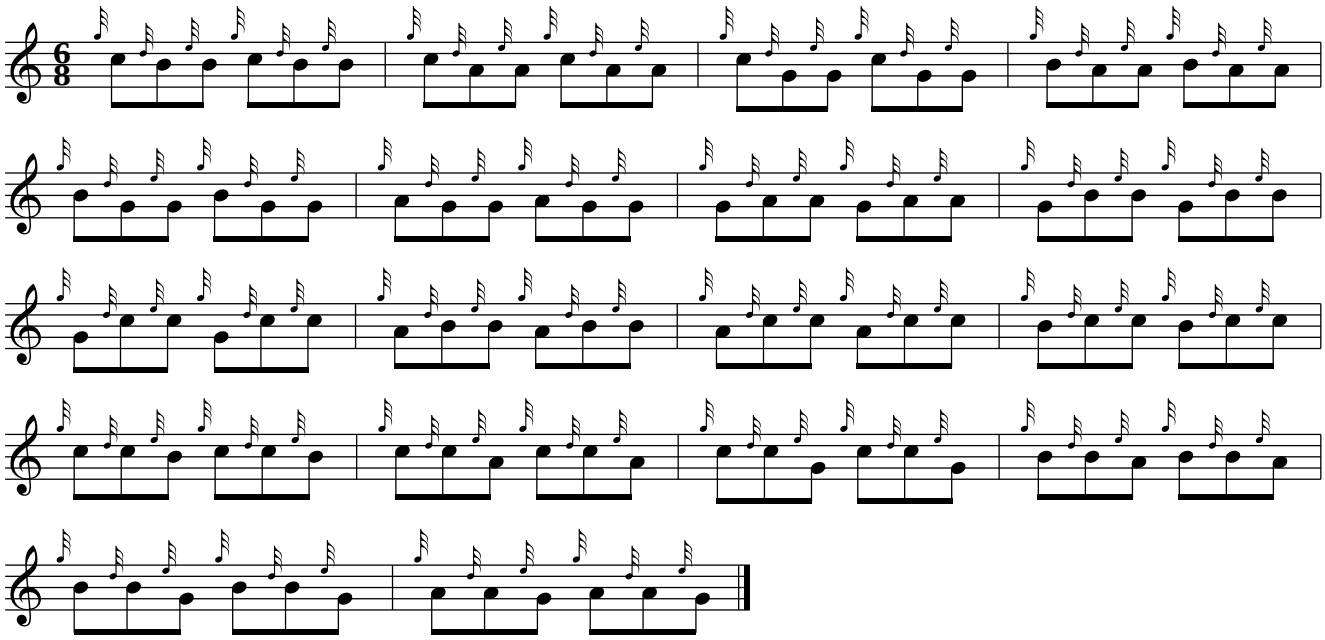
D gracenotes



GDE Exercise (1)



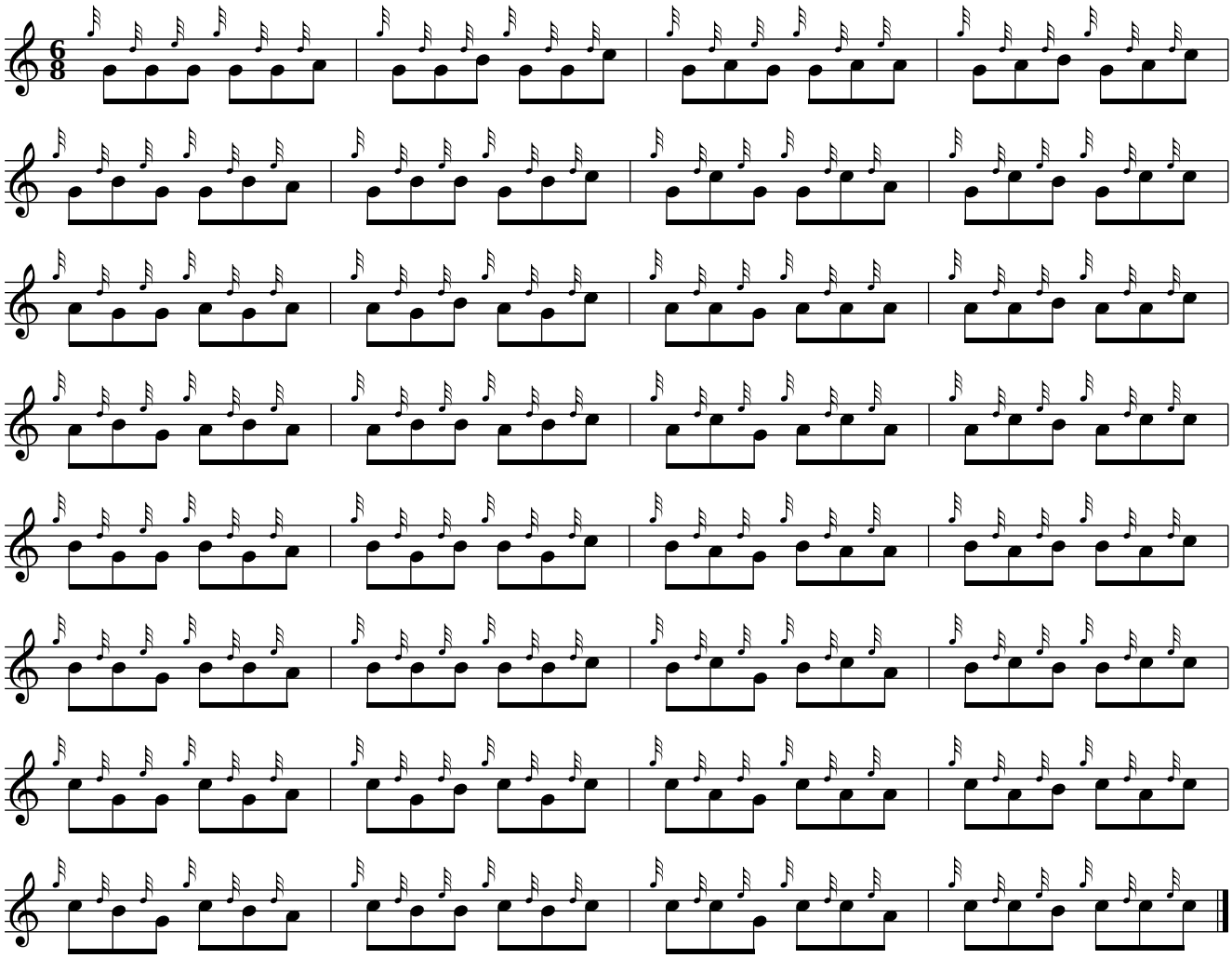
GDE Exercise (2)



GDE/GDD Exercise

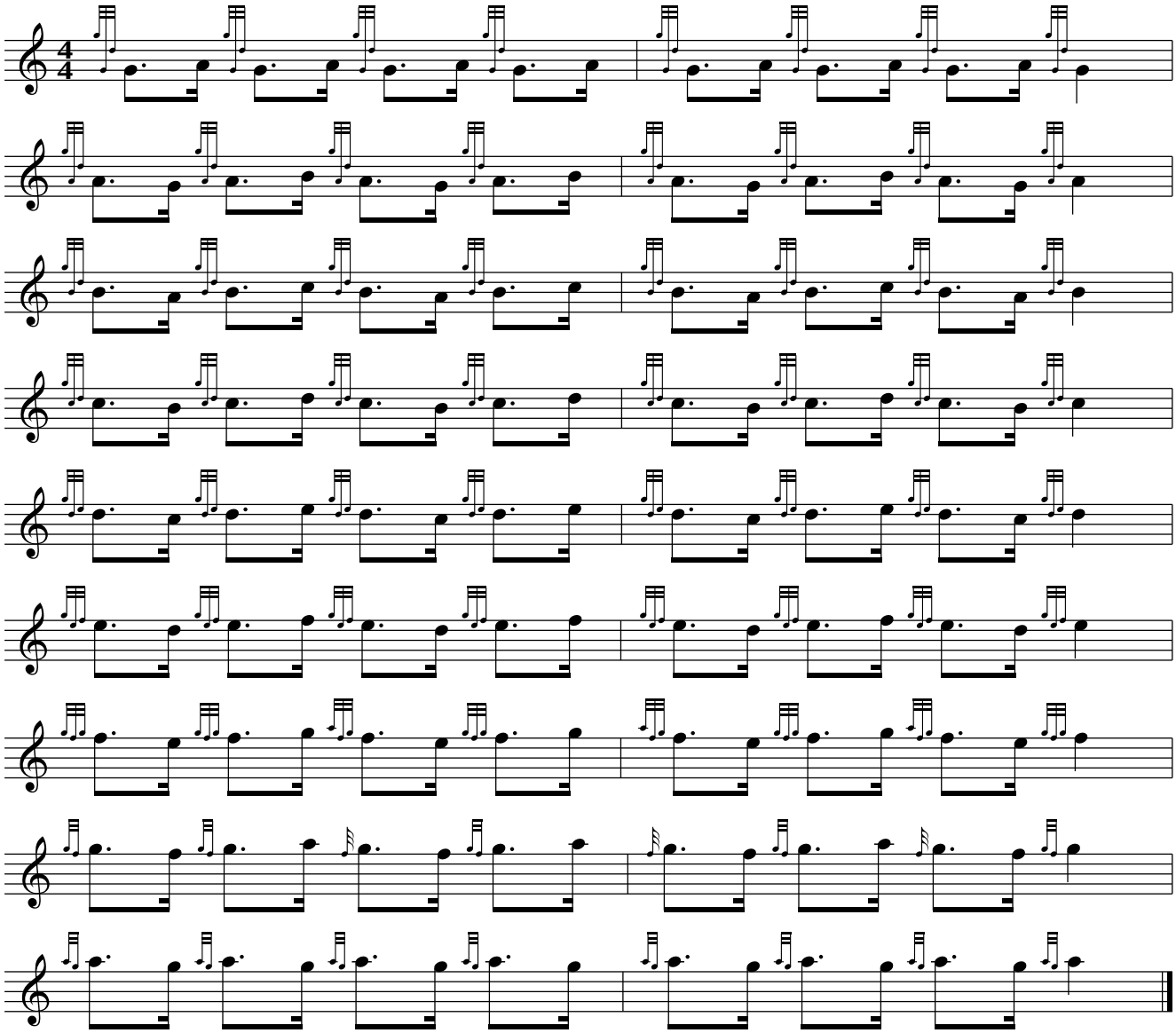
Bagpipe music in 6/8 often contains bottom hand sequences where the gracenotes are G, D, and D. This exercise works on these sequences. Once you've got it at a steady speed, vary the rhythm!

A few of these sequences might be played with GDE or GDD gracenotes (such as B-A-G), but if you can play through this you can probably cope!

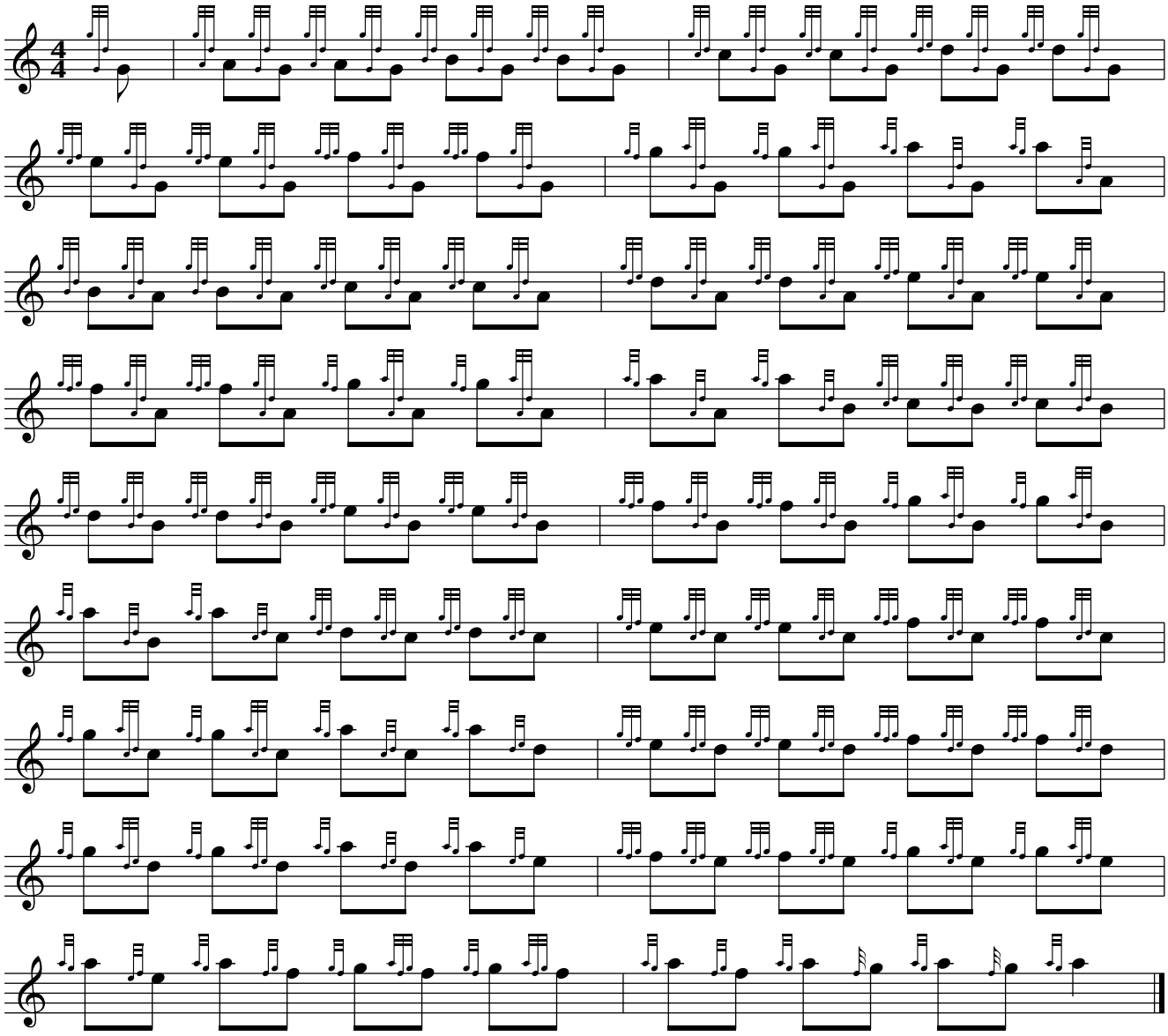


Doublings 1

Doublings are often missed when played from a short note above or below the note of the doubling.

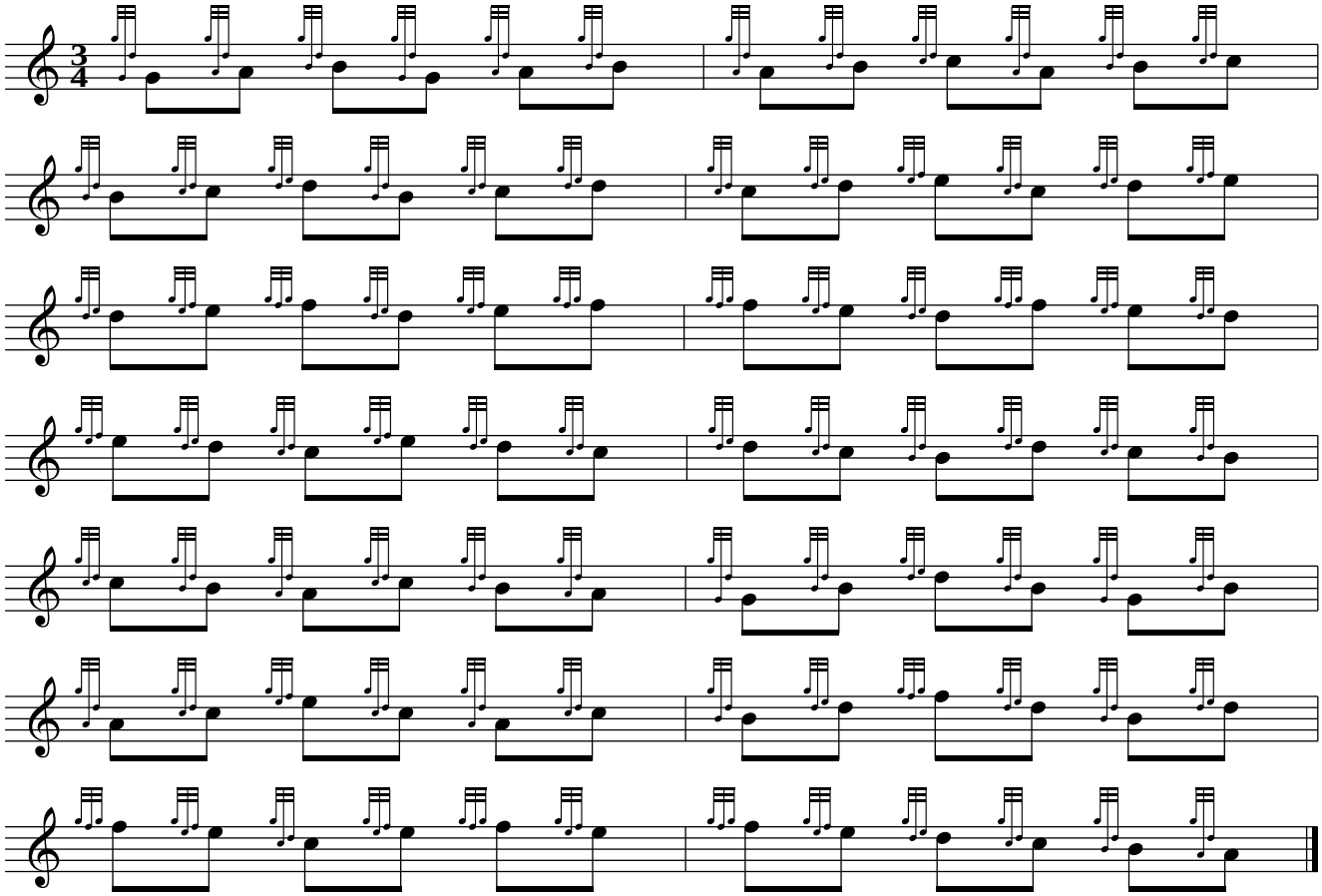


Doublings 2

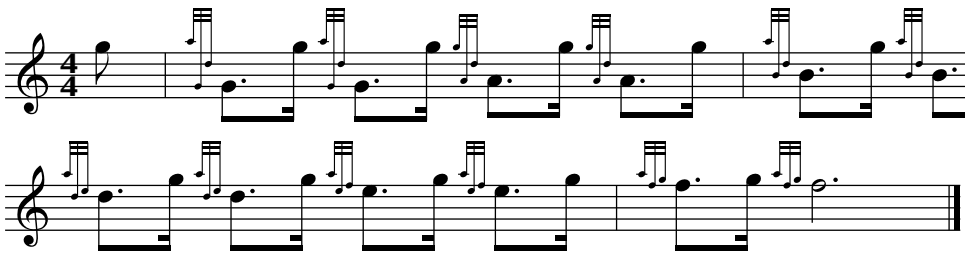


Doublings 3

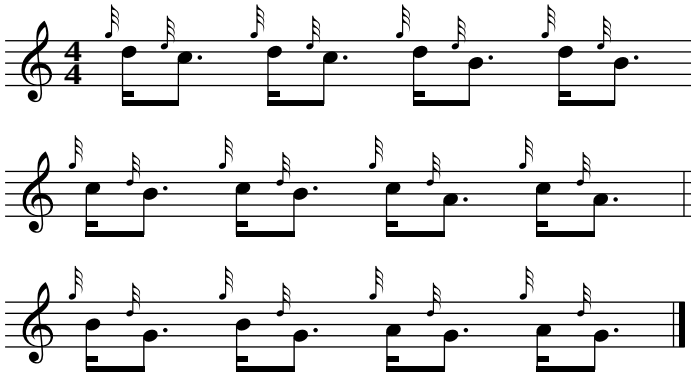
The next exercise tests the consistency of your doublings. Many people play tighter doublings on the top hand than they do on the bottom. This shows if you are one of them!



Thumb Doublings



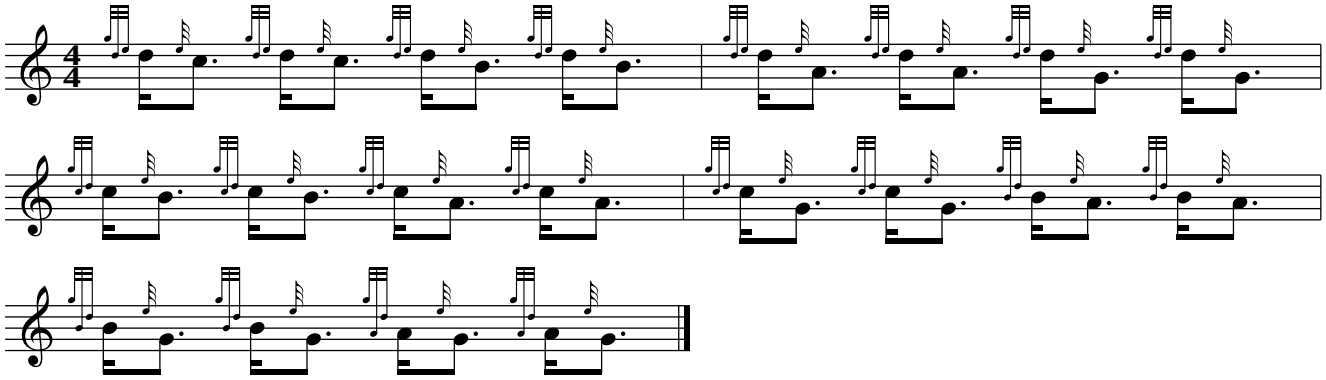
Tachums



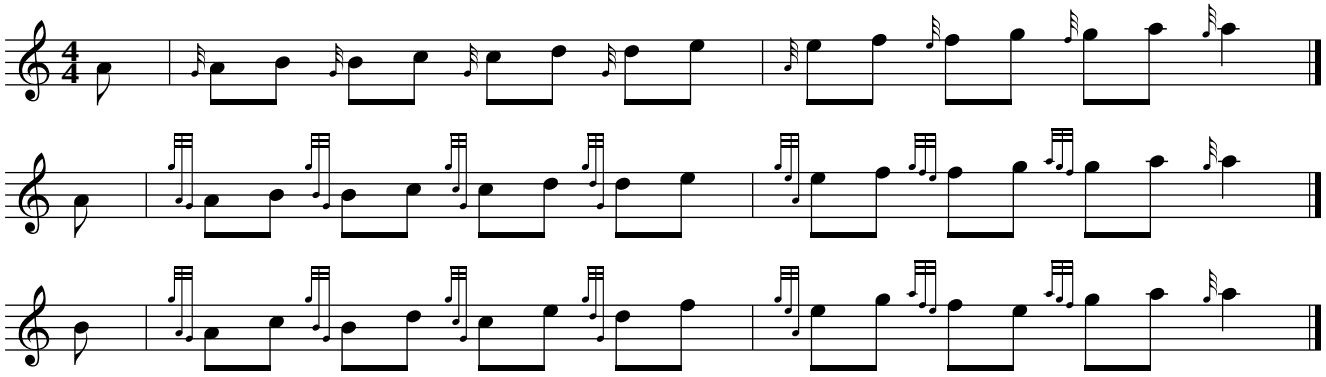
Trachums

Play these with an even rhythm: da-da-dum. The golden rule: if you can't, it's too fast.

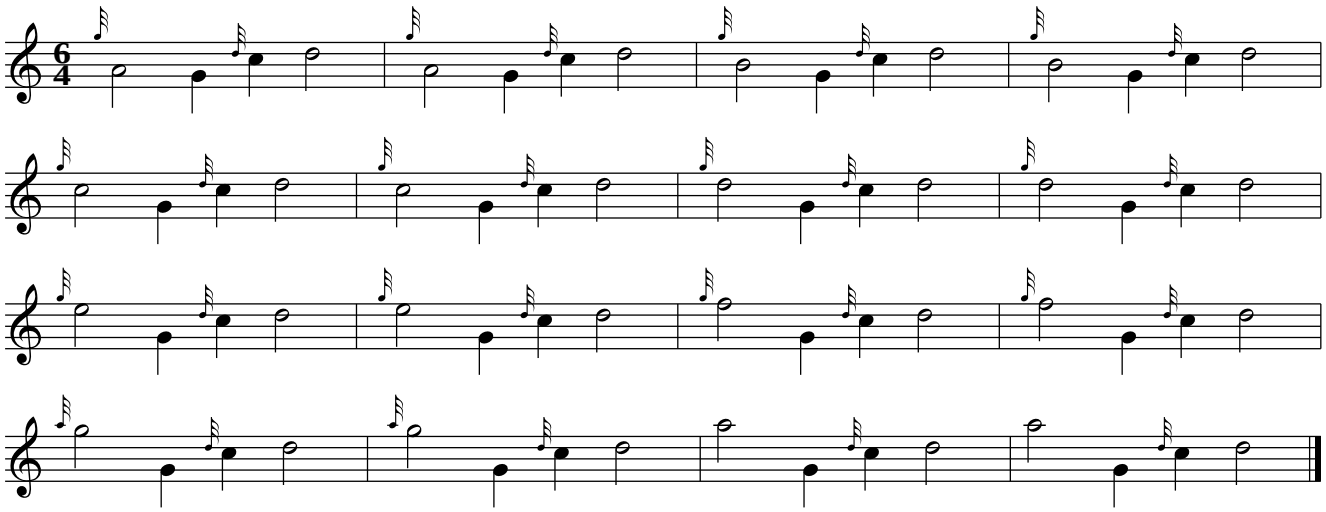
Yes, sooner or later you will play a trachum from D, and you'll be glad you practiced it!



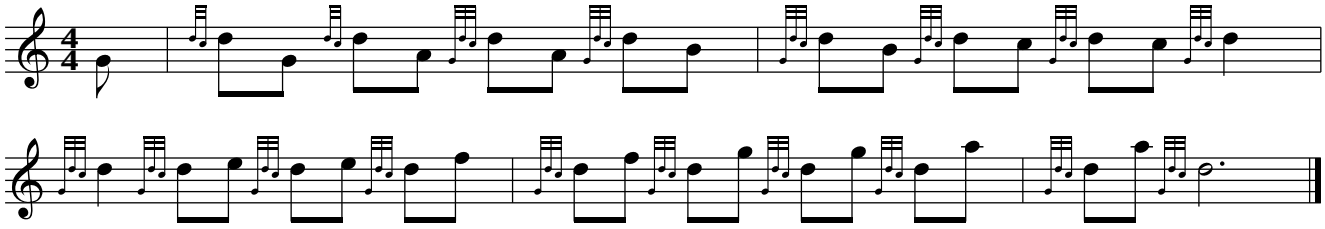
Strikes



Throw on D (1)



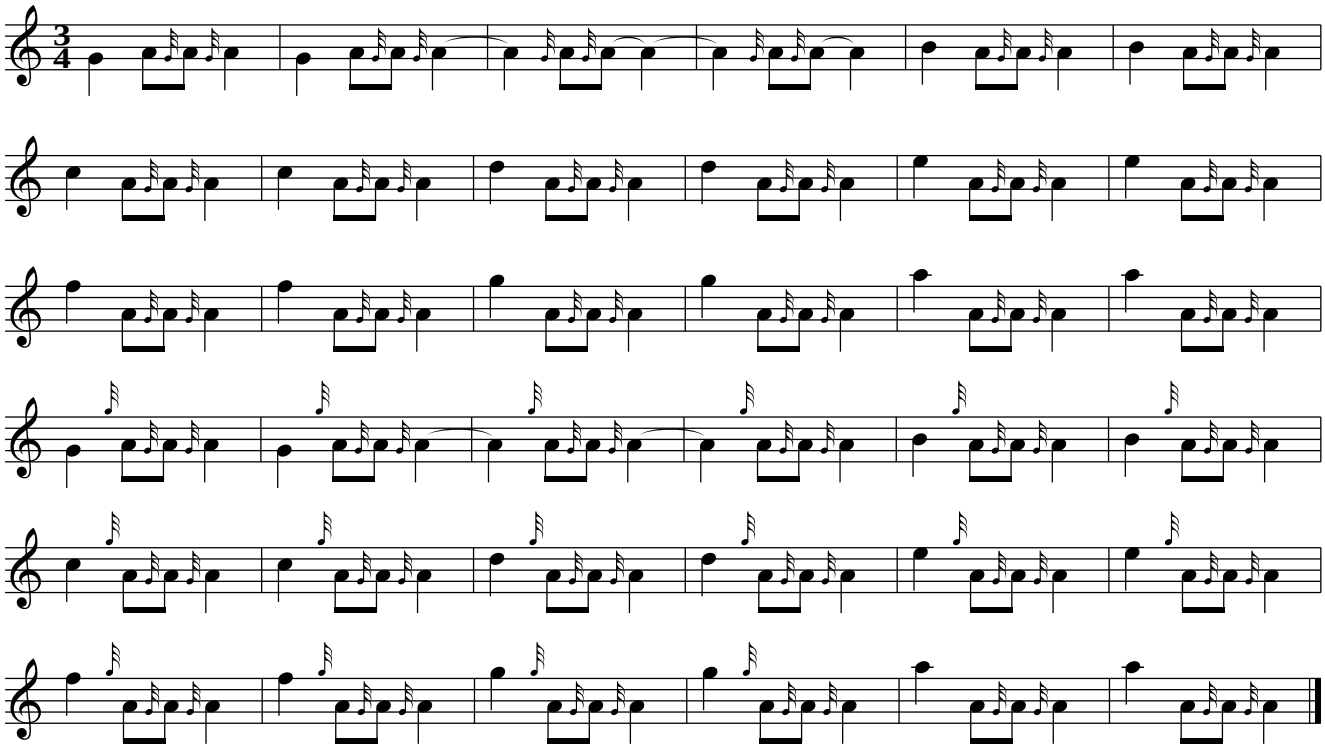
Throw on D (2)



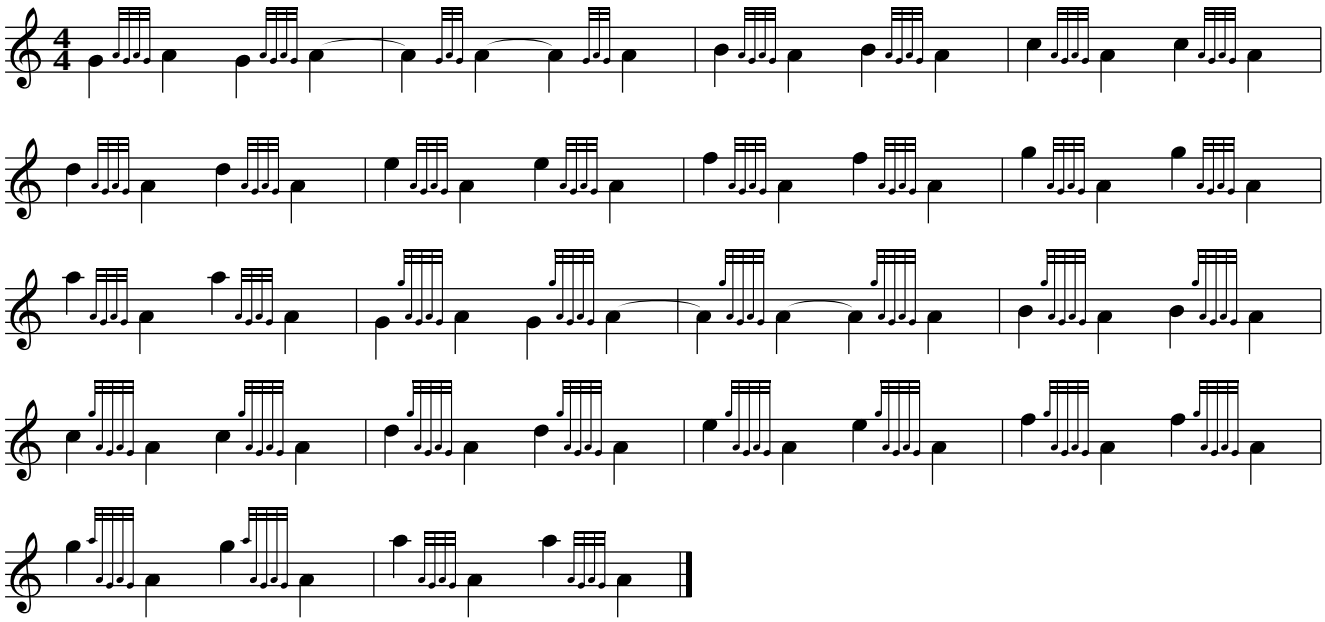
Birl (1)

The birl is a movement that cannot be forced. Give it a few years and in the meantime, don't play these exercises too fast. Always play them in the correct rhythm; if you can't, you're trying to go too fast.

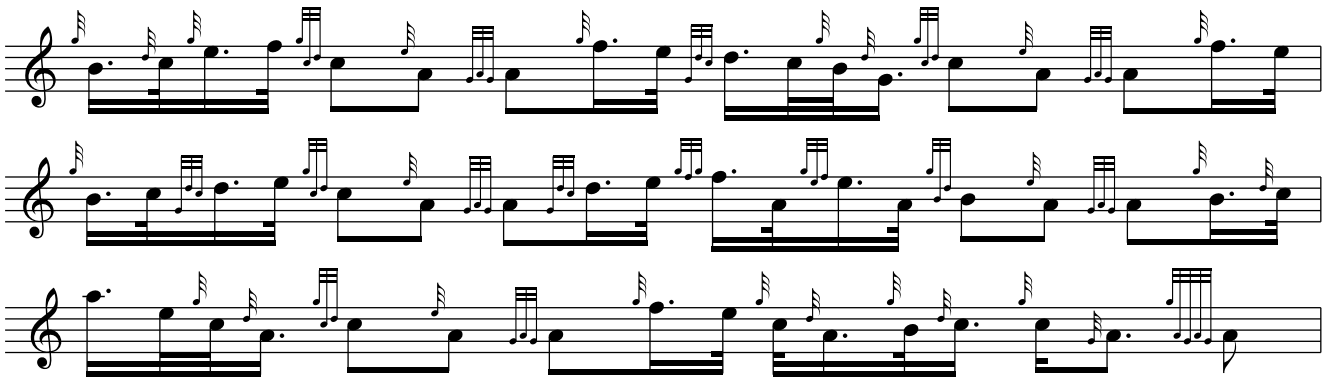
A common problem with these drill type exercises is that they often force the hand into a position more convenient for the birl, but less so for anything else! The last birl exercise tackles this. It is not necessarily to be followed faithully - consider it a base to improvise typical 2/4 march endings from.



Birl (2)



Birl (3)

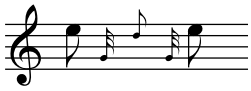


I teach a number of movements with a slightly different fingering pattern than you may be used to. Don’t be alarmed - this approach is an old one, and results in very strong fingers.

You’ve probably been taught, or worked out for yourself, that there are "active" and "passive" gracenotes in piping. In an E doubling, for example, the G and F gracenotes are active, and the E gracenote in the middle is passive, because it just happens. The approach used here essentially inverts what you may be used to thinking of as active and passive gracenotes.

In what follows, where you see a gracenote written with a single flag:

it should be played as a _long_ gracenote, but still with a single finger. Gracenotes written normally, with three flags, should be as short as they can be made. A grip movement:

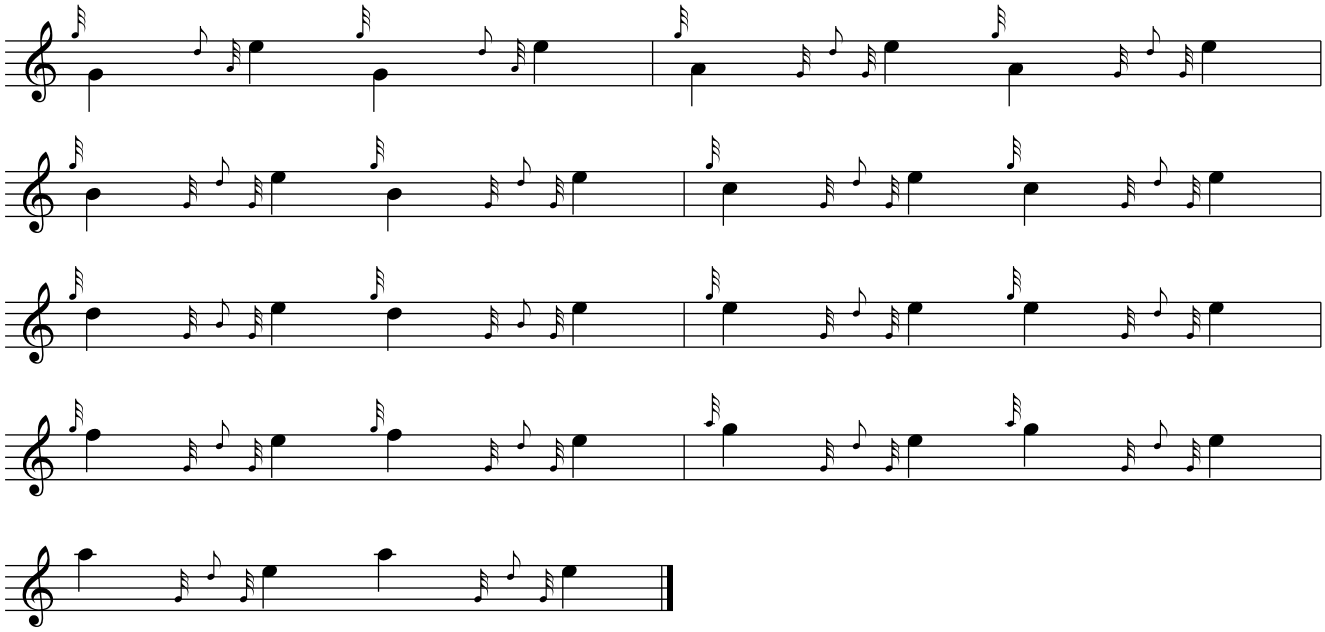


will therefore sound like E - D - E with the Es and Ds seperated by short low G gracenotes - almost like crossing noises!

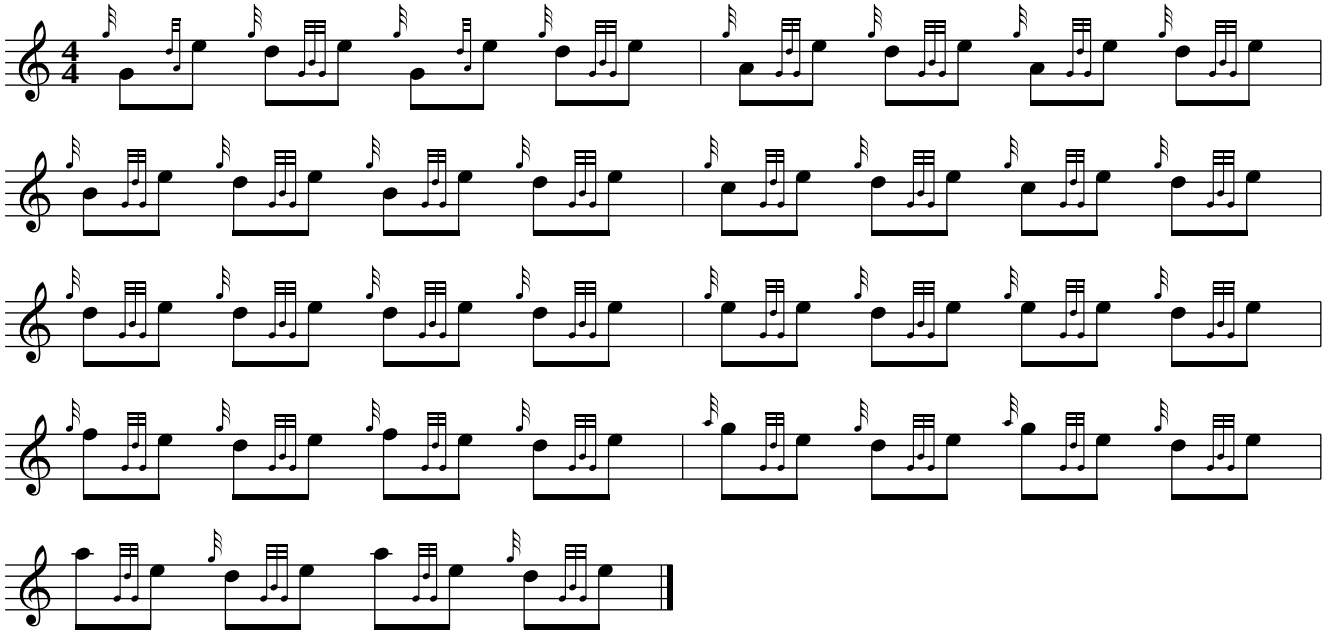
When changing notes - such as the grip from low G - the other fingers come up with the long gracenote. So for the grip from low G, the pinkie comes up at the same time as the D finger.

Each movement is presented in open form to learn from, and written normally as practice material. Movements which have a more unusual form, such as the taorluath from D, appear more often so you practice them just as much!

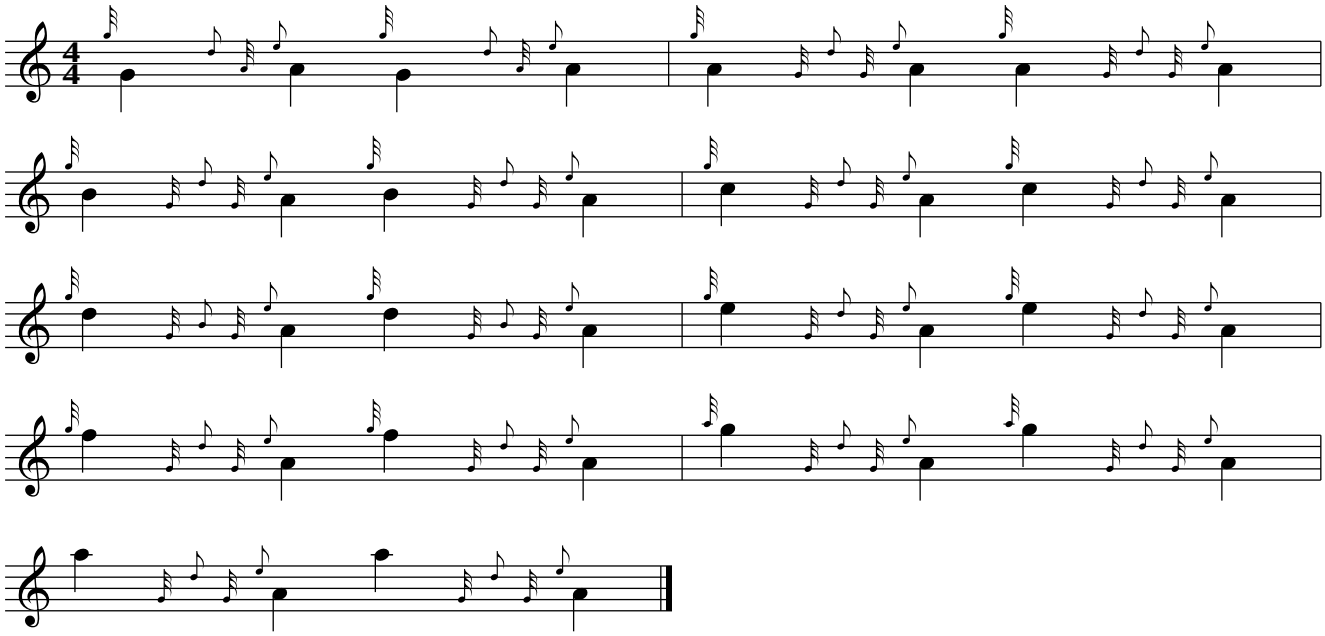
Grips (1)



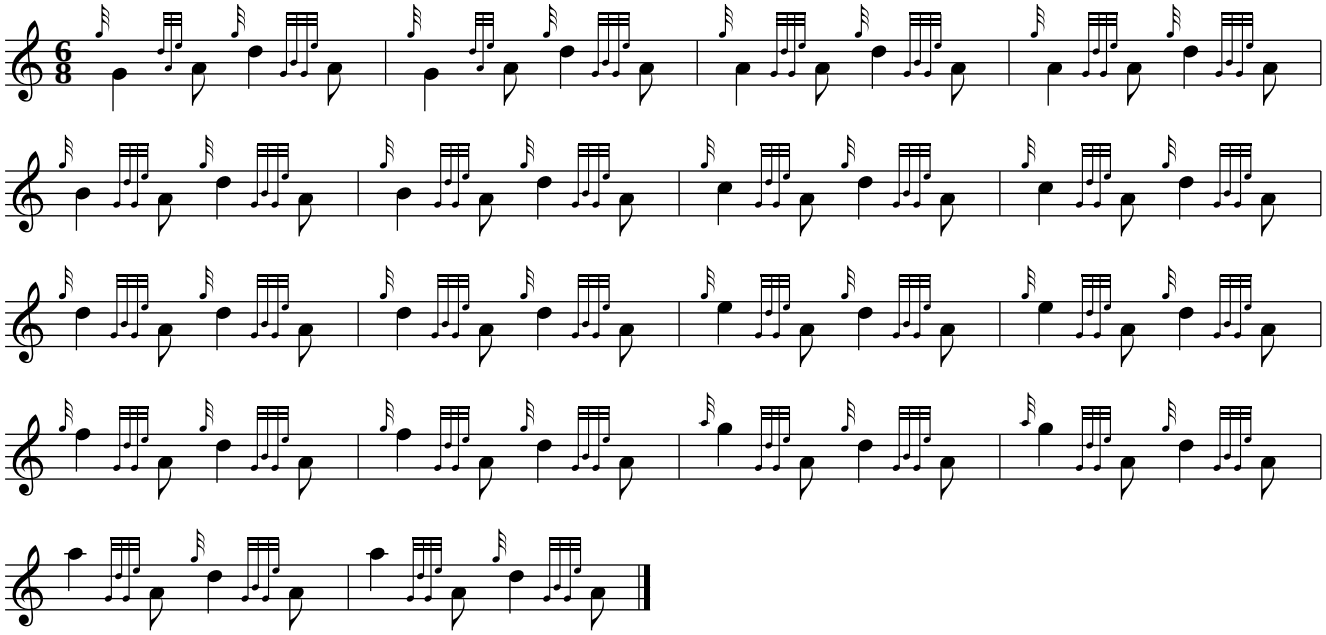
Grips (2)



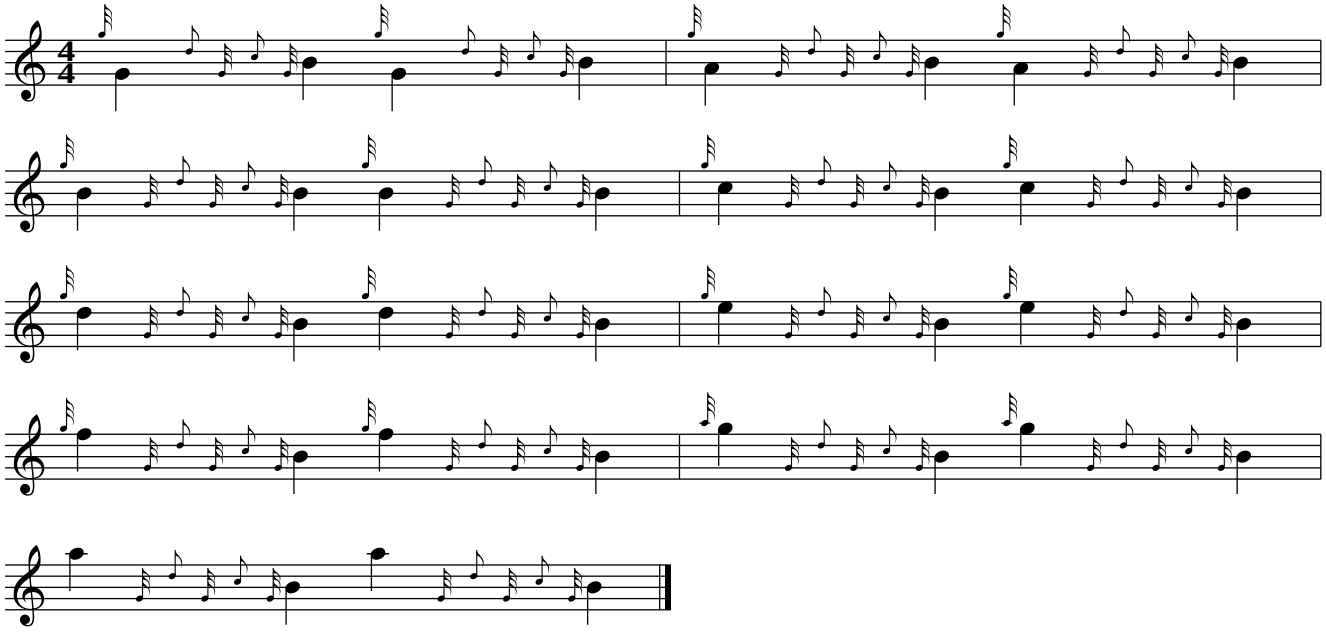
Taorluath (1)



Taorluath (2)

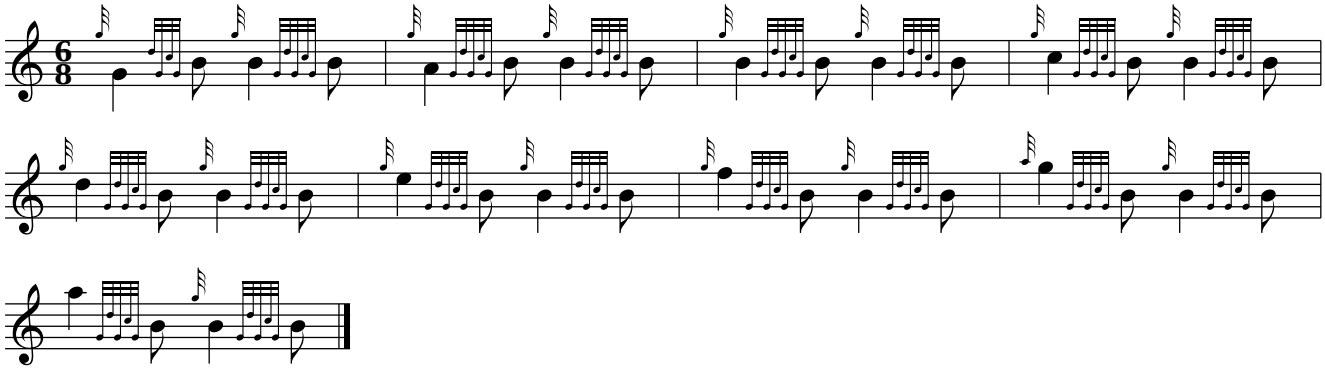


Darado (1)

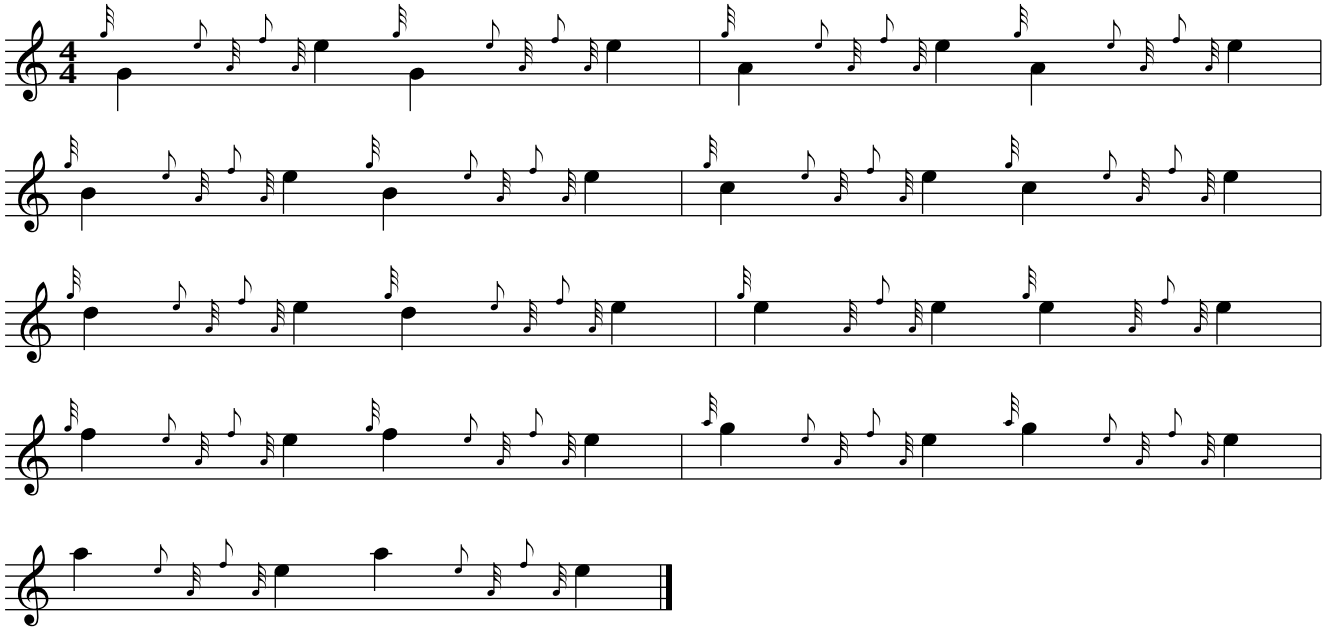


Darado (2)

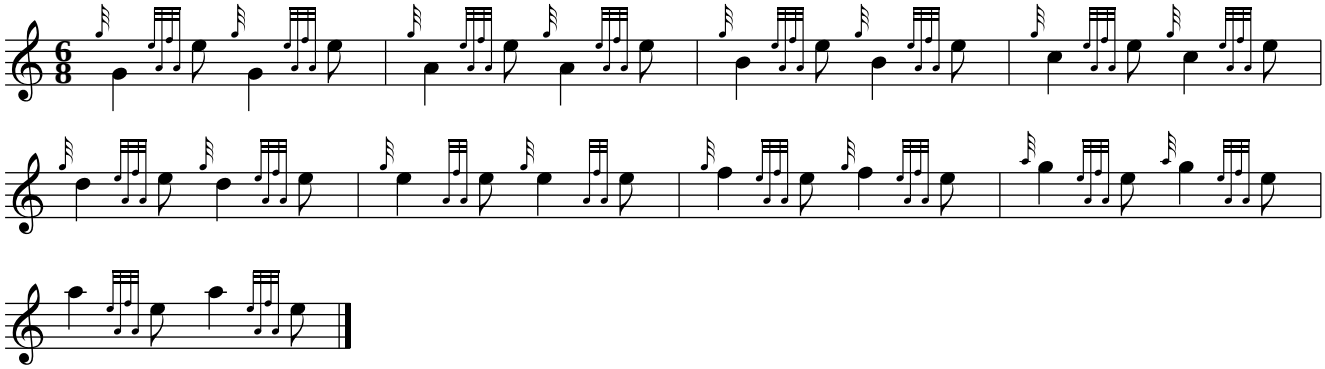
Darados from B are the most common, so let’s work them harder...



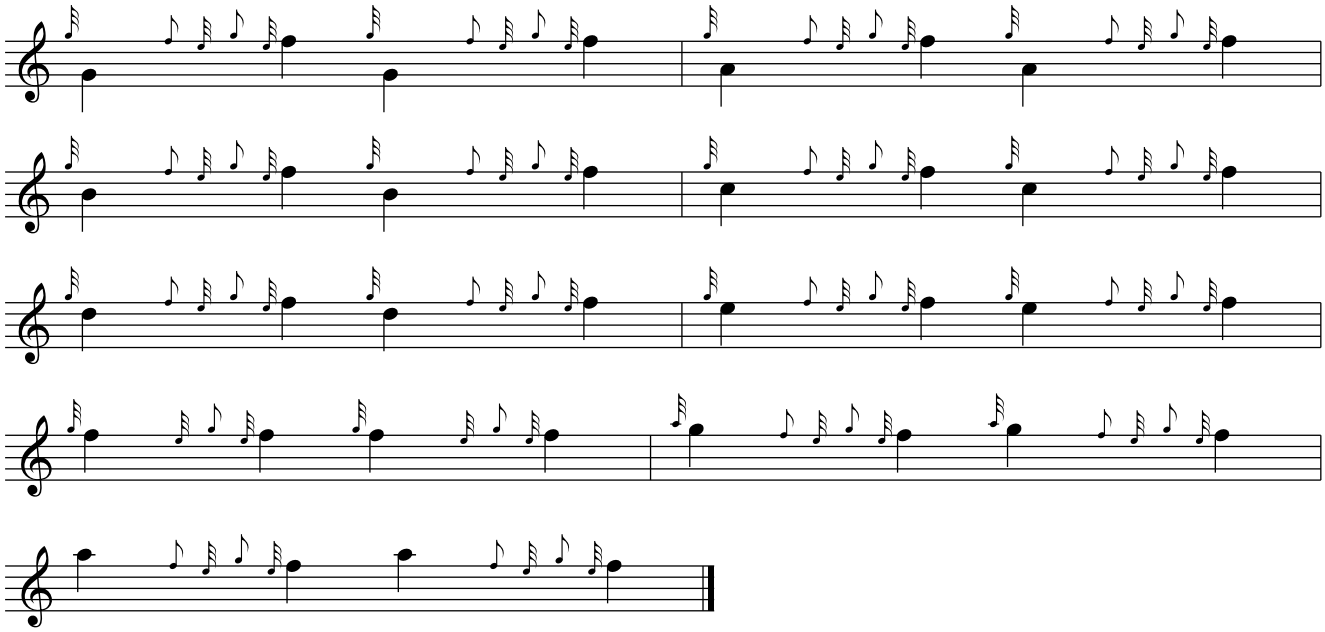
Edre (1)



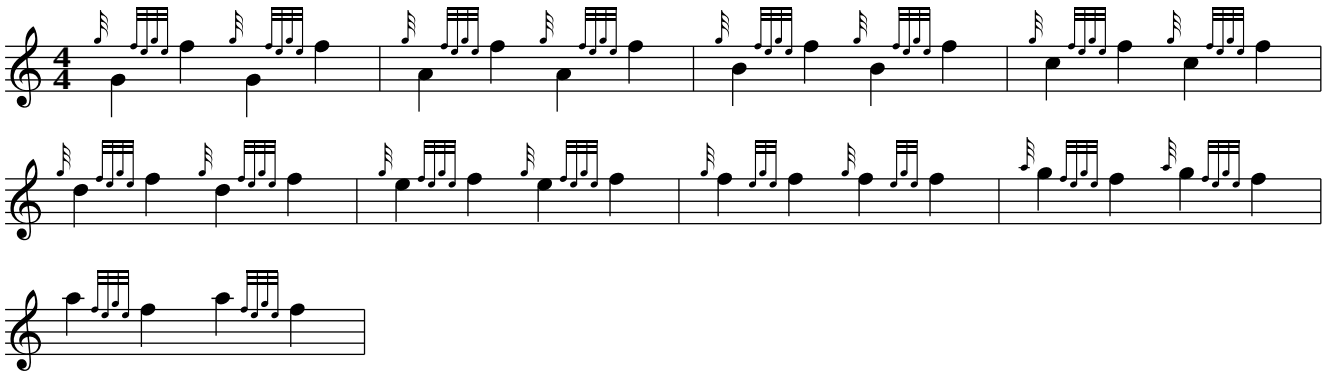
Edre (2)



Dare (1)

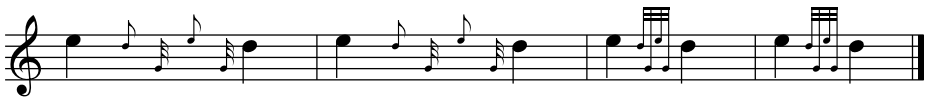


Dare (2)



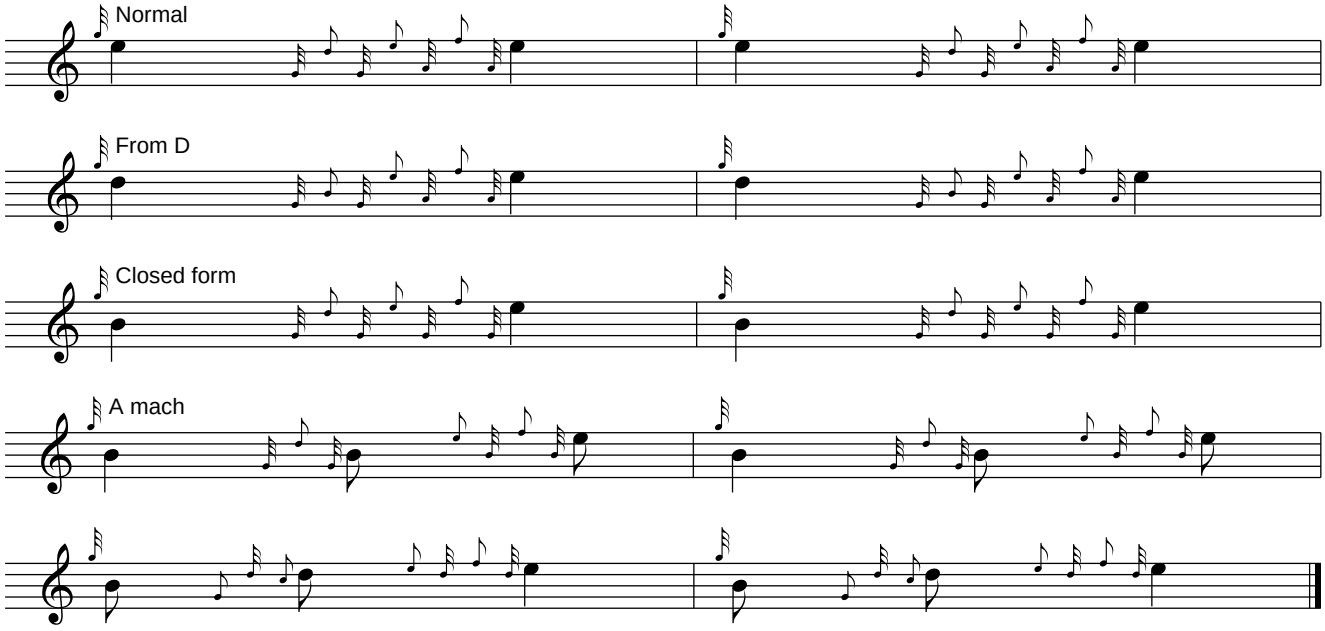
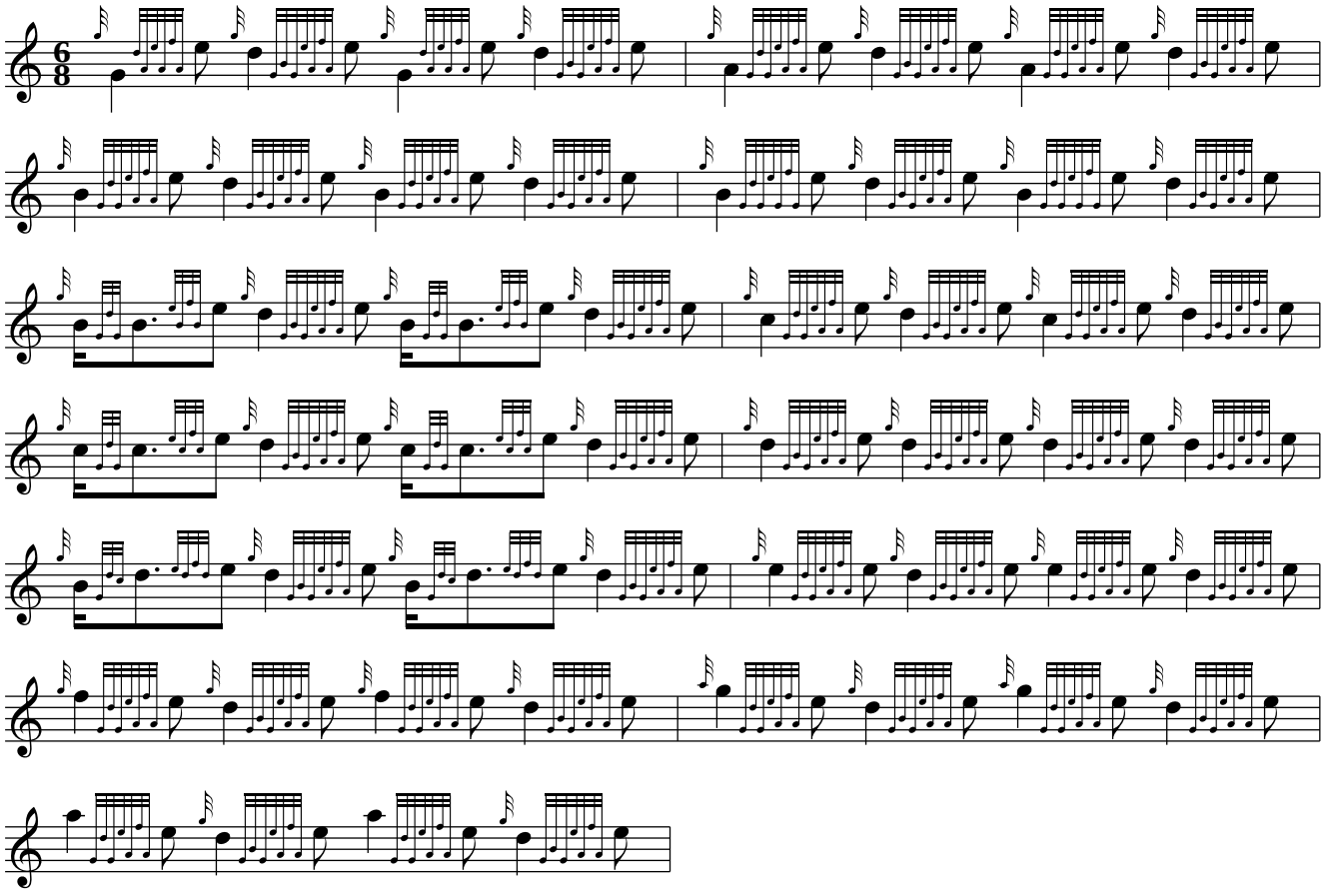
Ademda

This is an unusual movement. The first D is played as if it were a normal melody note, not with a single finger.



Crunluath (1)

Nothing new here. In the closed form crunluath, the pinkie stays down until the final E.



Crunluath (2)