Landrum's Backup Guidelines

1. Playing good backup requires just as much effort and concentration as playing lead, so it requires just as much practice. Many banjo players consider Earl Scruggs' backup playing to be as masterful as his lead playing.

2. Play something different from the lead player or vocalist, but not so different that it detracts from the lead player or vocalist. Avoid duplicating the same notes as the lead player.

3. Play something that contributes to the total sound of the group, not something that draws attention to yourself. Concentrate on balancing the sound.

4. Play something that adds interest, fills in dead spots, and keeps the tune moving.

5. Give the other players space. You don't have to play every note. Think of yourself as adding texture and accent. Especially avoid playing the melody line constantly.

6. To emphasize rhythm, chop off the sound of the chords by deadening them with the fingers on your left hand, and concentrate on your right hand pick technique.

7. Use dynamics. Don't play everything the same volume.

8. Use variation. Don't play everything the same speed, or with the same rhythm pattern. Play different distances from the bridge. Use different positions for the same chord.

9. Don't try to play everything you know in the same song.

10. Watch your speed. Go with the flow.

11. Actively listen to good backup musicians and notice what they do. Listen particularly to the drummer and the bass player when they are not playing lead.