

Teaching Percussion

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Snare Drum

EXERCISES

There are 6 types of exercises. Your warm up should include 1 of each type of exercise. Begin every class period with these exercises. Use matched grip, not traditional. It is easier to teach and it has application to ALL percussion instruments, not just some snare and set.

Exercise Type	Beginning (1st-2nd Year)	Intermediate (3rd Year)	Advanced (4th Year)
Independent Full-Strokes Alternating Full-Strokes	<i>8 on a hand</i>	<i>8-4-3-2 Full Strokes</i>	<i>Sub and Add</i>
	<i>Hup Dup</i>	<i>16th Note Timing</i>	<i>Stick Control</i>
Independent Tap/Accents Alternating Tap/Accents	<i>Bucs</i>	<i>8-4-3-2 Accents</i>	<i>SCV</i>
	<i>Floats Taps</i>	<i>Sequential 16th's</i>	<i>Triplet Timing</i>
Independent Diddles Alternating Diddles	<i>Double Beat</i>	<i>Double/Triple Beat</i>	<i>12/8 Double Beat</i>
	<i>Checkerboard Rolls</i>	<i>Triplet Diddle</i>	<i>16th Note Diddle</i>

RUDIMENTS

They don't need to know them all! After these essentials are mastered, all the others will come easily enough. It is better to know these essential ones WELL:

- Single stroke roll
- Double stroke open roll
- 5 stroke (open and closed)
- 9 stroke (open and closed)
- 17 stroke (open and closed)
- Single paradiddle
- Flam
- Flam accent
- Flam tap
- Drag

Snare Drum

HOW TO TEACH ROLLS

1. Teach open/double-stroke/diddles before buzz/closed rolls.
2. Use this sequence:
 - a. One-handed diddles exercise (double beat)
 - b. Two-handed diddles exercise (checkerboard rolls)
 - c. Isolated rudiments (play 5, 9, 17 stroke rolls alone)
 - d. Read rolls in music (this must be the last step – don't start here!)
3. After double stroke rolls have developed some consistency, teach buzz rolls.
 - a. Buzz one hand at a time, make it last as long as possible. This is the one time where students SHOULD take their back 2 fingers off the stick. But the fingers should not stick out like “bunny ears” or “sipping tea.”
 - b. Alternate hands very slowly. Overlap the buzz (left starts before right has finished buzzing)
 - c. Isolated rudiments (5, 9, 17)
 - d. Rolls in music (again, this is the last step)

PACING

Paradiddles – Begin teaching during first half of 1st year

Rolls – Begin reading literature w/ rolls at end of 1st year or beginning of 2nd year

Flams – Begin reading literature w/ flams at end of 1st year or beginning of 2nd year

Drags – Wait until end of 2nd year or into the 3rd year

EQUIPMENT

Don't use marching sticks on a concert snare!

Concert snare sticks: Vic Firth SD1 General or SD 2 Bolero

Rudimental snare: Vic Firth Ralph Hardiman or MS 2.

Drum pad: The tunable pads with a drum head feel the most like a snare drum. The ultra-bouncy “Real Feel” pads are the least similar to an actual drum. Also, it is helpful to occasionally use a phone book or pillow (no bounce) to build muscle.

Mallets

EXERCISES

Use the scales to develop full-stroke technique and double-stop accuracy.

Start with mallets up in the air, above the note that mallet will strike. Strike the note, and immediately bring the mallet back into the upright position. Lift!

Like wind and string players, mallet players should play scales in various patterns.

ROLLS ON MALLET INSTRUMENTS

Use un-metered single-strokes. Most common mistakes:

WRONG WAY	RIGHT WAY
1. Tense wrists and fingers.	1. Relaxed wrist and fingers.
2. Playing extremely fast or slow rolls.	2. Moderately slow in low range, moderately fast in high range.
3. Accenting the beginning or ending of a roll.	3. Keep all strokes even height. May play 1 st & last note slightly softer.
4. Losing track of the pulse.	4. Practice with a metronome.
5. Playing over the string or node (the part of the bar that doesn't vibrate)	5. Play over the center or edge of the bar to achieve the highest resonance.
6. Rolls on metal instruments, including bells kits, glockenspiel, and vibraphone.	6. Rolls are only for marimba and xylophone, with rare exceptions that almost certainly won't be in the music you play.

PACING FOR MALLET PLAYING

Scales – They should know all 12 major scales by the end of the first year.

Rolls – Begin teaching rolls at the end of the 1st year, or beginning of the 2nd year.

Mallets

4-MALLET PLAYING

I don't recommend 4-mallet playing to a student unless they have private lessons. Usually they can begin 4-mallet playing during their 3rd year with a good teacher. Don't try to teach this in your percussion classes.

RECOMMENDED MALLETS

2-Mallet Marimba (perfect for suspended cymbal, too)

Encore 32YR (medium hard)

Encore 34YR (medium soft)

These will cover 90% of all 2-mallet marimba music, for junior high and high school purposes. They're durable and versatile.

4-Mallet Marimba (work for 2 mallet, but designed for 4)

Innovative Percussion – IP100 (softest), IP200, IP240, IP300, and IP400 (hardest).

Vibraphone

Innovative Percussion – IP201 (soft) IP251 (medium) and IP301 (hard).

Bells and Xylophone

Malletech Bob Becker BB34 (blue xylophone mallets, and soft bell mallet)

Innovative Percussion James Ross IP904 (Hard Xylo/Bell Mallets)

These 2 will cover nearly all of your bell/xylo needs. The BB34 is softer and lighter, and the IP904 is heavier and powerful.

Timpani

TECHNIQUE

Placement – Find the “sweet spot” of the drum, roughly 2 inches from the rim (varying by drum size). Too close to the edge will produce a thin, twangy sound. Too close to the center will produce a thumpy sound.

Single strokes - Use an up-stroke or full-stroke, not down-strokes. Professionals will turn their thumbs upward and use more of what’s called a “French grip.” While this is good at the college/pro level, for J.H. and even many H.S. students, it’s really not practical for the time and effort it takes to do it right. Have them hold timpani mallets the same as a drum stick and play with full strokes, until they are very comfortable with it. Advanced high school students may switch to French grip.

Rolls - Use open, single-stroke rolls. Never buzz, doubles, or anything in-between. On a forte-piano, strike forte, then pause, then sneak in with a soft roll.

SETUP

The timpanist needs a stool so their feet are free to use the pedals. Timpanists need 2 music stands. One stand is for the sheet music. The other should be covered with a black towel. Keep mallets and a tuning fork on this stand. Rarely will one set of mallets suffice for an entire piece of music. Place the largest drum on the left and the smallest on the right.

MALLETS

The Vic Firth timpani mallets are not a good choice, but it’s what most schools use. I’d recommend buying some “real” timpani mallets, and keeping them safe in your office. The best brands are Black Swamp, Mike Baker, Clevelander and Cloyd Duff. You just need a staccato pair and a general pair. The big fluffy cartwheels or the ultra staccatos aren’t really necessary. I’ve got about 10 pair of timpani mallets, and I use 2 of them – the staccatos and generals – for 90% of what I play.

DAMPENING

Dampen by lightly placing the back fingertips on the drum. Dampen during rests and sometimes when alternating between pitches.

PACING

Year one – Simple etudes with no tuning changes. Teach tuning to one pitch and dampening.

Year two – Introduce rolls and simple tuning changes (M2, P4, P5).

Drum Set

Your set player in jazz band should take private lessons if they're going to do the job well. Here are some books that will also help:

Jazz: The Chart-Reading Workbook for Drummers by Bobby Gabriel. It teaches how to setup and kick a big band.

Funk/Rock: Advanced Funk Studies by Rick Latham. Everyone loves this book, students and teachers alike. It has developmental exercises, transcriptions, and 10 solos.

Latin/Afro-Cuban: Afro-Cuban Rhythms for Drum Set by Frank Malabe

Auxiliary

I prefer to teach the auxiliary instruments as they come in the music. If a student can play snare drum well, they will be fine on tambourine, bass drum, etc. If they cannot play snare drum well, they will struggle with auxiliary instruments.

There is an excellent DVD that will answer all your questions about how to play each auxiliary instrument. BYU Percussion Professor Ron Brough produced it. The title is "Percussion Techniques." It is available at c-alanpublications.com

Day of Percussion – 3rd Saturday in March

Learn a percussion ensemble piece (or a few), and take your percussionists to the Day of Percussion. It is the single best thing you can do for your percussionists! It is as important for percussionists to go to their festival as it is for jazz band and concert band to attend their festival. The money is worth it! Share a bus with another school to cut costs. The kids will perform in the morning/early afternoon. Throughout the day, there will be excellent clinics about mallets, drum set, auxiliary percussion, rudimental snare, timpani, and more. Our Utah Chapter always schedules top clinicians and performers from around the country.

Helpful Websites

Vic Firth – has countless education videos, online lessons, rudiment demos, etc.

Rowloff, Drop6, and C-Alan Publications - Publishers

Drummerworld – site with bios and videos of great drum set players

PAS – Percussive Arts Society

3 Sample Lesson Plans (75 minutes)

LESSON ONE – FOCUS ON SNARE TECHNIQUE

15 min. – 8 on a Hand.

- Designate a student leader who is in charge of count-off. While they are running things, you can take roll.
- Start at 100 bpm. Increase by increments of 20.
- As they play, go around the room and fix technique.
- Variation one – play each measure as a diminuendo or crescendo.
- Variation two – play at different heights – 3, 6, 9, or 12 inches
- Challenge: See how fast they can play with good technique and time (let younger players drop out and veterans shine)

15 min. – Bucs.

- Start at 72 bpm. Increase by increments of 10.
- Variation one – play everything tap height (about 2 inches)
- Variation two – play the accents only
- Variation three – split class (half all taps, half accents only)
- Challenge – play “limbo” – how low can your taps go?

10 min. – Double Beat.

- Start at 92 bpm. Increase by increments of 10.
- Variation one – split class. Half play quarter notes (metronome) while others play exercise.
- Variation two – Split group. Student on left play, student on right watch and give constructive criticism.
- Challenge – Let advanced players try playing with quarter notes in the hand that rests, or fill in all 16th note spaces with the opposite hand.

10 min. – Hup Dup.

- Start at 8th note = 120, increase by increments of 10.

- Variation – sing “hup dup watermelon....hup dup strawberry strawberry)
- Variation – Split class, half play steady 8th notes (8 on a hand), others play hup dup. 8th note should line up throughout.
- Variation – Play exercise with accents on the 8th note subdivisions (including in the middle of the 16th and sextuplet patterns).
- Challenge – Have advanced students play left hand lead

10 min. – Floats Taps.

- Start at 80 bpm, increase by 10’s.
- Variation – taps only or accents only. Split class and do half and half.
- Variation – All accents on right, taps on left, or vice versa.
- Challenge – Have advanced students add in flams to the accents, or any other rudiment. Drags, flam drags, tap drags, rolls, left hand lead, etc.

10 min. – Checkerboard.

- Start at 72 bpm, increase by 20’s.
- Variation – Play on a phone book, pillow, or other surface that doesn’t bounce.
- Play with accents on the 1st and 4th eighth note, and low rolls.
- Challenge – increase the tempo to max out the older students, so they can demonstrate what a good roll looks/sounds like.

5 min. – Clean up

LESSON TWO – FOCUS ON MALLET ETUDES

10 min. – Snare drum warm up (run by advanced student while you take roll).

Even on a “mallet day,” I start with snare drum. It keeps the kids in routine. Also, we don’t have enough mallet instruments for 26 kids to play simultaneously.

Split up by level. All students playing Level One mallets start first, so I can help them know how to use their time productively when we’re finished. When I split up the kids this way, I have small groups of about 6 kids each, so I only need 3 mallet instruments. There are plenty of others for people to practice, plus they can use pianos or work on timpani and snare drum.

15 min. – Work with all Level One mallet players.

- Say the note names aloud and in tempo.
- Sing the note names with proper pitch.
- Count the rhythms aloud while singing the proper pitch.
- Say the stickings (right or left) in tempo and right pitch.

15 min. – Work with all Level Two mallet players.

- At this level, sticking and technique will be the primary issues to fix.
- Work on lifting, using full strokes, not down strokes.
- Help them choose proper sticking. Double sticking occasionally, but almost never more than 2 in a row on one hand.
- Use more wrist and less arm.

15 min. – Work with all Level Three mallet players.

- By level three, they will be using more complex rhythms and keys.
- The primary concern here will likely be rolls. See the tips above for proper mallet rolls.

15 min. – Work with all Level Four mallet players.

- By level four, the primary concern will likely be phrasing.
- They should be able to solve rhythm and pitch issues themselves.
- Help them learn proper shaping of lines, musicality, etc.

5 min. – Clean Up

LESSON THREE – FOCUS ON CONCERT BAND OR PERC. ENSEMBLE

15 min. – Snare drum warm up (run by advanced student while you take roll).

10 min. – Split the class. Group one (concert band music) stays in band room with director. Group two uses practice rooms to work on pass-off's or their ensemble music. As the concert band kids set up, help direct the other students in how to use their time well.

50 min. – Begin rehearsing the concert band. It will help to have a recording of the piece so they have to count rests, rather than just stop and start.

Rehearse the percussion just as you would a concert band. Every 15 minutes or so, leave the concert band kids on their own and check up on the others who should be practicing. Daily participation points can be a motivator here.

While the concert band students clean up, give the other students the opportunity to do any pass-off's they may have prepared during their practice.

Or for percussion ensemble:

Split the group. Choose your ensemble music so that 2 ensembles can rehearse simultaneously. For example, have a mallet-only piece, and a battery/auxiliary only piece with different kids in each. They can be rehearsed at the same time in different rooms.

If instrumentation is such that this isn't an option, the kids you aren't working with can practice for pass-off's. If some students won't use the time well, give them worksheets that they need to complete in order to earn their daily points.

What if Winds and Percussion Share a Class?

PERCUSSIONISTS STILL NEED THIS SAME MATERIAL

A percussionist in a full band class needs all of the same training that a percussionists in a percussion class needs. That means they should still begin rehearsal with snare technique. They should master scales. They should still learn rudiments. They should still learn snare drum, mallet and timpani etudes.

Warm ups can be done effectively one of two ways.

First – you can train the percussionists to warm up on their own in a different room. Also train the winds to warm up on their own. Then the teacher can meet with either group while the other still has a productive start to rehearsal.

Second – organize your music warm ups so the percussionists can play basic snare technique patterns while the winds play long tones or other warm up patterns. The Foundations book has some of this already written for you.

AN ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BUFFET – WITHOUT DESSERT? NO WAY!

SHOULD YOU PLAY PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE LITERATURE IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PERCUSSION CLASS? YES!

Meet with them before or after school, even if it's just once or twice a week. I know this means more time for the teacher and student. But a school band program without percussion ensemble is like an all-you-can-eat buffet dinner without dessert. If you had two all-you-can-eat buffets to choose from, and one of them doesn't offer dessert, you would choose the other one.

For wind players, concert band is the main course. Jazz band and marching band are the salads and side dishes. If that is all you have, it may be a functioning, working, successful music program – for the wind players.

Without percussion ensemble, one of the sweetest, most appealing parts of the overall experience is missing. It takes extra work to prepare dessert. But for some, it is the best part of the meal. They eat the main course to “earn” dessert. For your percussionists, that percussion ensemble experience will likely be the most memorable part of their school music experience. Do not deny them this! They earn their dessert by playing with the concert band.

While the director may think of the percussion ensemble dessert as an optional thing that could be left out, it doesn't feel that way to the percussionists. For them, percussion ensemble is the meat and potatoes, while concert band is a side dish that they could do without.

Concert band is NOT the most musically rewarding experience for percussionists, especially at the junior high/high school level. Their parts are easy and they have lots of rests. They need parts with more substance, that require more practice, and that give them the spotlight. Percussion ensemble gives them this opportunity.

Do not deny them this!