

Teaching Young Percussionists: Fundamentals for your beginners

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SNARE DRUM

Equipment:

- Snare drums from kits will probably need to be tuned
- Using practice pads is fine
 - Gum rubber pads will be appropriate through high school
 - Smaller drum head style pads are really only good for a few years
- Quality sticks matter!
 - Vic Firth SD1 or Innovative Percussion IP-KW are solid choices
 - If smaller diameter is needed, a 2B stick would be fine
 - No nylon tips!

Grip:

The grip is the foundation of everything we do as a percussionist.

- Building the grip
 - Stick lays across the palm on a 45-degree angle
 - Butt end of sticks exits palm at the side of the hand
 - Fulcrum is created with 1st knuckle of index finger with thumb nail directly on other side of stick
 - Fulcrum is located approx. 1/3 up the stick
 - Index finger is curved, thumb is in line with stick
 - “Thumbprint” on the stick
 - Remaining fingers gently curve around stick and support
 - Capital T fulcrum shape
- Fulcrum location experiment
 - Play single strokes only holding stick with fulcrum (no back fingers) in three locations:
 1. Too far back (a couple of inches from the butt end)
 2. Too far up (1/2 way)
 3. Proper position (1/3 way from butt end)
 - Have students take note of how the stick reacts and rebounds differently in each position
- Watch out for common grip issues:
 1. Fingers extended out from under palm/stick exiting at base of fingers
 2. Thumb not in-line with stick
 3. Tip of thumb on stick
 4. 2nd knuckle of index finger used in fulcrum
 5. Extended index finger (either in-line with stick or off of stick)

Body position at drum:

• Posture

1. Feet shoulder width apart and facing forward, weight balanced
2. Knees relaxed, not locked
3. Standing straight
4. Shoulders relaxed, upper arms in line with torso
5. Elbows slightly away from body
6. Forearms at a slight downward angle
7. Wrists in a neutral position
8. Sticks should be in an open "V" position, a little less than 90 degrees
9. Hands fall roughly in line with shoulders

• Where to stand at the drum

Space needed between drum and body

Find the proper drum height:

1. Stand back from drum with sticks in hands, but down by side
2. Raise hands from the elbows to proper arm and stick position
3. Walk forward until heads of stick reach the center of the drum
IMPORTANT: Do not adjust hand/arm position
4. Adjust height of the drum as necessary

Strokes:

• Two main categories – Single strokes & Roll Strokes

• General Concepts of Single Strokes

1. Stroke is generated from the wrist
2. Minimal involvement of fingers and arm
3. Head of stick leads the motion
4. Stroke path is perpendicular to playing surface
5. Grip tension affects sound quality
6. "Soft hands"
7. Dynamics achieved through stroke height adjustments

• Stroke Development

Sticking Patterns

8 on a hand

8-4-2-1

• 4 Single Stroke Types

1. Full – starts up, ends up
2. Down – starts down, ends down
3. Tap – starts down, ends down
4. Up – starts down, ends up

Stroke Types Exercise – Stroke Types Warmup A

• Buzz Strokes AKA Multiple Bounce Strokes

Stroke Motion

- Arm stroke, stabilized wrist
- Stick and arm travel in the same path
- Press stick into head, then relax
- Doesn't have to be a high stroke

Grip adjustments

- Slightly more pressure in fulcrum
- Squeeze – release
- Middle finger should stay engaged
- Ring & pinky fingers give the stick space to move

“Low, Slow, Elbow”

What should they know after the 1st year?

- Technique Concepts
 1. Single Strokes
 2. Buzz Strokes
 3. 4 Single Stroke Types (Full, Down, Tap, Up)
 4. Dynamics
- Skills & Rudiments
 1. Paradiddle
 2. Flam
 3. 5, 9, 13, 17 stroke rolls (closed)
 4. Simple accent patterns
 5. Basic rhythms up to 16th note subdivision

KEYBOARD PERCUSSION

Challenges facing beginning percussionists on keyboard instruments:

1. Learning to read the notes on the page (like all band instruments)
2. Being physically separated from their instrument (unlike other band instruments)

Equipment:

- Mallets - If mallets are hard plastic, use a couple of strips of moleskin around equator of ball
- Bells vs. Xylophones
 1. Xylophone kits can allow for students to develop better sense of tone
 2. Xylophone kits have slightly larger dimensions which are closer to concert instruments

Concepts that transfer from snare drum:

- Body Position
 1. Height of instrument should be the same
 2. Posture should be the same
 3. Distance from instrument should be the same
- Hand & Grip Position
 1. Grip & fulcrum are the same
 2. Hand position is the same
- Stroke Motion
 1. General stroke motions should be the same
 2. Rebound doesn't exist – must be created by player
 3. Have students start with mallets at top of stroke
 - Encourages the rebounding stroke motion
 - Allows player to play on same note with a consistent beating spot
 4. Play 8 on a hand on two adjacent notes, then start to spread hands apart

- Other important concepts

1. Alternating sticking is your ally in the long run
2. Peripheral vision
 - Music stand should be positioned right above the level of the bars
3. Students should keep their eyes on the music as much as possible
4. Development of Kinesthetic relationship to the instrument
 - Work on scale patterns and other repetitive patterns
5. Reading vs. memorizing
 - Encourage the students to read the music, rather than try to memorize parts
 - Memorization at this stage of development may happen naturally, but it shouldn't be the sole method of playing



Dr. David Wolf is the Elementary Percussion Teacher for Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools and an Elementary Teaching Artist for Arlington Public Schools. He is also the Marching Percussion Director for Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. Additionally, he teaches privately for the towns of Acton and Marlborough, as well as maintaining his own private studio. He is also the Owner/Technician of Wolf Percussion Services, an on-site percussion repair service for school programs and other organizations. Prior to relocating back to his home state of Massachusetts, Dr. Wolf was a Percussion Director for two Sudler Flag Award winning High Schools and their feeder Middle Schools in Fairfax County, Virginia for 10 years. Dr. Wolf is an educational endorser for Remo Drumheads & Percussion and Vic Firth Sticks & Mallets.

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