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BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION OF THE SNARE DRUM FULCRUM

by Dr. Dave Gerhart

“YOU CAN’T BUILD A GREAT BUILDING ON A WEAK FOUNDATION” – GORDON HINCKLEY

I think about this quote often when I am teaching a new student. I also stress this point when I teach percussion methods to non-percussion educators. A strong foundation is key in learning any new technique or method. In this article, I will offer a step-by-step guide to teaching the beginning snare drum technique. I teach matched grip to all beginning students because it translates to every percussion instrument. The accompanying video will help illustrate the process. (The timecode appears in the parenthesis).

STEP ONE – HEIGHT OF THE SNARE DRUM (2:10)

Once the student has drumsticks and a drum, it is important that it is set at the correct height. I have found that some students just walk up to the drum and start playing before they adjust the height. To find the proper height I suggest stepping back from the drum. Let your arms hang on the side of your body. Rotating from the elbow, slowly pick up your arm and let them come to a point that is comfortable. The angle of your arm will be approximately 110 degrees. The elbow should stay even with the body and there should be space in between your body and the elbow. Everything should be relaxed and without tension. Once this is established, you can adjust the drum to meet the end of the drumsticks. Remember that you should do this away from the drum.

STEP TWO – DRUM SET-UP (5:42)

The snare drum should be set-up so that the student is perpendicular to the snares (on the bottom of the drum) and the throw-off is closest to the player. When playing a snare drum, it is advisable to play over the snares to get the most snare response and characteristic sound of the snare drum.
STEP THREE – FIND THE FULCRUM ON THE DRUMSTICK (14:23)

Creating a good fulcrum on the drumstick is one of the most important things we can teach a student. Without a good fulcrum, it will be difficult to learn how to produce a good roll. Using the dominate hand, put the drumstick inside the first knuckle of your pointer finger. Position the drumstick so you have approximately two-thirds of the stick coming out the front of your hand. Let the drumstick drop and count how many bounces are created. Reposition the drumstick and try a different fulcrum. Again, count the number of bounces. If there are less bounces, try moving the drumstick the opposite way and see how many bounces are achieved. You have found the optimal fulcrum when you find the position on the drumstick where you achieve the most bounces. Take a black marker and draw a circle around the drumstick so that the student will know where to hold the drumstick.

STEP FOUR – TEACHING MATCHED GRIP (18:33)

As I said in the introduction, I teach all beginners matched grip. Matched grip is used on snare drum, marimba, xylophone, timpani, bells and most percussion instruments in a concert ensemble. Once you have marked the fulcrum on the drumstick, take your thumb and put it opposite the first knuckle. Make sure the thumb is parallel to the drumstick. Once you have the fulcrum, the back of the drumstick touches the love line as the drumstick goes out of your hand. Wrap the other fingers loosely around the drumstick. Do not squeeze or clench the drumstick. Your hand should be relaxed and there should be no tension in the hand or in the fingertips.

STEP FIVE – BRING THE DRUMSTICKS TO THE DRUM AND PLAY A FULL STROKE (23:10)

Once you have the height of the drum and fulcrum set, you bring the tips of the drumstick to the center of the drumhead. (Note, if you are playing on a snare drum, I would suggest that you play approximately one inch above the center of the drumhead). The drumsticks should create a V and the angle should be approximately 60 degrees. Using the wrist, bring the drumsticks up eight inches above the drum. Drop the drumstick and return it to the original starting point. This is a full stroke.

The accompanying video breaks down each of these steps and shows the correct arm positions and grip. At the beginning of every class, I would suggest going over this quick checklist:

1) Step Back from the drum. Bring up the hands to determine the height of the drum.
2) Step up to the drum and set the height.
3) Set the snare drum so the player is perpendicular to the snares and the throw-off is closest to the player.
4) Create a good fulcrum by finding the spot on the drumstick where you get the most bounces.
5) Mark the fulcrum with a black marker.
6) Place thumb on the drumstick opposite of the first knuckle. The thumb should be parallel to the drumstick. Do not squeeze.
7) Bring your drumsticks to the drum and create a V the with tips of the drumsticks.
8) Using your wrist, bring the tip of your drumstick eight inches above the drum. Drop the drumstick and return it original starting point.

A strong foundation is key in learning any new technique or method. Take your time and go slow. Make sure you are deliberate about the small details. Reinforcing these small details will contribute to building a strong foundation. Please feel free to reach out to me via e-mail at drdavegerhart@gmail.com if you have any questions.
Dr. Dave Gerhart, Assistant Marketing Manager, Education for the Yamaha Corporation of America and Lecturer of Percussion at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at CSU, Long Beach, is a nationally recognized performer, composer, and educator. Dr. Gerhart holds a D.M.A. from the University of Southern California in Percussion Performance with a secondary emphasis in Music Education, Ethnomusicology, and Music Industry & Technology. He received a M.M. and a B.M. from California State University, Long Beach. Dave serves on the Board of Advisors and the World Percussion Committee for the Percussive Arts Society. In 2010, Dave co-founded DrumChatr.com and currently curates percussion related content for PercussionEducation.com. Dave’s compositions and arrangements for triangle, timpani, percussion ensemble and steel drum orchestra are published by Bachovich Music Publications, Boxfish Music Publishing and Living Sounds Publications.
CONSISTENCY MATTERS:
Developing a Shared Vernacular for Beginning Percussion and Wind Students in a Heterogeneous Classroom

by Dr. Erik M. Forst

In order to overcome this language barrier, it is important that the educator first accept a simple premise: all students in the instrumental classroom should receive the same musical education. The first mistake that many educators make with their beginning percussionists is assuming that certain musical concepts and skills do not apply to them because their importance is not immediately apparent. Many directors do not involve their percussionists in conversations about embouchure, air support, or articulation, even though many of those concepts are readily adaptable to the percussion world. In addition, percussion students are often left out of conversations about tone quality, intonation, and melodic development, especially those playing non-pitched fixed-resonance instruments, such as snare drum. On the other hand, many directors assume that their percussionists require a higher rhythmic vocabulary than their wind counterparts, mainly due to the higher importance placed on it in the young band repertoire and beginning band method books. In making these assumptions, the director places an imaginary wall between the percussion section and the rest of the ensemble, as certain parts of the rehearsal are seen by both the students and the educator as being “not for them.” However, if the director accepts the above premise as true right from the outset, they may be encouraged to look for the similarities between the sections of the ensemble rather than the differences, which in turn, can help to foster a more inclusive rehearsal experience for all involved.

EMBOUCHURE = GRIP

One way in which educators can begin to include percussionists into their conversations with wind students is to recognize the similarities between embouchure and the way a percussionist holds their implements (sticks, mallets, etc.), otherwise known as grip. In fact, there are so many similarities between embouchure and grip that it is not outside the realm of possibility that the educator may dispense with the word “grip” entirely and simply refer to how the percussionist holds the sticks as their “embouchure.” As the common denominator between the two is vibration, many of the sound issues resulting from a poorly formed embouchure are also readily apparent in a young percussionist with a poorly formed grip. A young trumpet player that applies too much pressure to their mouthpiece finds themselves having the same issues in sound production that a young snare drummer has when putting too much pressure on the stick. Just as the mouthpiece in this scenario does not allow the lips to vibrate freely, the hand does not allow the stick to move and vibrate, and the result in both situations is a pinched, non-resonant sound. On
the other hand, both students may suffer from too little pressure on the mouthpiece/stick, which results in a thin and unfocused sound in both instruments. The ideal for both sets of students is finding a balance between applying too much or too little pressure. The trumpet player must keep the corners of their mouths firm while allowing their lips to vibrate freely, while the percussionist must keep a small amount of pressure on the stick for control without sacrificing the stick’s ability to rebound.

Another embouchure problem commonly found in young players is incorrect mouthpiece placement. Young brass students commonly place the mouthpiece too far to the left or right on their lips or engage too much bottom or top lip, resulting in a distorted and uncharacteristic sound. The correlation for the percussionist can be found in the amount of stick in the hand, as well as the orientation of the wrists. Young percussion students often have too much or too little stick in their hands, which directly affects the amount of rebound and resonance generated by the stick. In addition, a student whose hands are turned too much to the outside will often find their sticks approach the drum at an angle (what percussionists call a “slice”). Much like the trumpet student with the mouthpiece off-center, this slice results in a thinner sound, as the air inside the instrument, whether it is a drum or a keyboard instrument, is not fully activated and the resonating chamber is not fully engaged. Understanding that issues of embouchure and grip often result in the same type of sound discrepancies in both the winds and percussion sections can allow the educator to speak to their percussionists with a vernacular with which they are comfortable and the percussionist to feel as if class conversations about embouchure have a direct and tangible relation to their own playing, thereby incorporating them more fully into the rehearsal.

AIR = STROKE

For obvious reasons, most instrumental educators spend a great deal of time discussing the principles of air speed and support with their wind students without giving due consideration for how those conversations directly relate to their percussionists. While some directors may choose to require their percussionists to participate in the band’s daily breathing exercises, this often misses the more direct relationship found between a wind player’s air usage and a percussionist’s stroke. Indeed, both air and stroke serve as the “fuel” for sound in both wind instruments and percussion instruments, respectively. As such, both are subject to the same tone-production issues derived from problems of consistency and support, and both can be addressed in a parallel manner within the instrumental classroom.

One common way educators work on consistency of air speed in the classroom is through “long tones” exercises. These exercises offer the wind student the opportunity to hear the direct relation between air support and their sound as they strive to achieve what many directors refer to as a “block of sound,” or a consistent sound from beginning to end. While many directors may choose to have their percussionists play single stroke rolls on keyboard instruments during these exercises (a perfectly logical and worthwhile endeavor), a more direct relationship exists between long tones and what percussionists call “full strokes,” two-part strokes that consist of a downstroke and an upstroke that move at the same velocity (also known as a “piston” stroke). These are the fundamental strokes used on any percussion instrument, and their proper execution is essential to creating a consistent sound. In fact, percussion educators will often ask their students to play these strokes in a legato fashion, in this case referring to the stroke being as smooth and connected as possible in order to achieve a fuller, more resonant sound. Full stroke exercises, such as the ubiquitous “8-on-a-hand” and its subsequent variants, can be incorporated in a legato fashion on any instrument (or practice pad) into a long tone sequence in the classroom and be used to accomplish the same results in both the wind and percussion sections. In both cases, the educator is asking the students to achieve a consistent sound. For the winds, this entails keeping the air support constant from the beginning to the end of each sound; for the percussionist, this means a consistency of stroke (height, velocity, head placement) from the first note to the last. In each case, the educator is asking for a “block of sound” from their students, and it is entirely appropriate to use
this terminology with a percussion section, so long as it is explained that the percussionists’ “block” entails every note being consistent from beginning to end, rather than a single note in the winds.

The educator will also find that many of the issues that young wind students exhibit will also be found in the percussion section. Just as a young wind student may put too much air at the beginning of a sound and run out of air by the end, young percussionists typically over-emphasize the first note on each hand of “8-on-a-hand” and bring the stick lower towards the end in preparation for the hand change. For the wind student, this results in a sound that tapers off at the end and often descends in pitch due to lack of air support. For the percussionist, the result is the same tapering off of the sound, sometimes coupled with a descent in tempo as the stick loses energy as it gets lower. Both issues are deviations from the “block of sound” concept, and the educator that remembers that stroke and air are one and the same will be able to address the issue using familiar terminology.

ARTICULATION

Instrumental directors find that teaching articulation to their wind students is particularly challenging, as students often develop habits such as using the wrong part of the tongue or often no tongue at all. While educators spend a great deal of time with their wind students developing the proper vowel shape using syllables such as “ti” and “toh,” it is rare for a director to have conversations about articulation with their young percussionists outside of the obvious discussions of mallet or stick choice. A percussionist is capable of several different types of articulations with one pair of sticks or mallets, mostly dependent on the stroke type, or manner in which the instrument is struck. That being said, the use of syllables can be an invaluable tool for describing the type of articulation that is required of a percussionist in a particular passage. Doing so emphasizes a “sound first” mentality with the student, in which the desired sound leads to the stroke type needed to achieve that sound. In fact, the use of syllables to teach different percussion articulations and tones is so helpful that it actually forms the basis of percussion education in many cultures throughout the world, such as West Africa and India.

For example, a young student playing marimba with medium yarn mallets may be asked by a composer to perform a melodic line in a legato fashion, usually notated with a phrase marking encompassing the line. This is difficult on a percussion instrument, as the fixed length of each note does not easily lend itself to legato playing. However, if the director describes the sound to the student using syllables that begin with “d,” such as “doh” or “dah,” it immediately creates a frame of reference for the student as to what type of sound is required. The educator can then describe for the student the type of stroke necessary to achieve that syllable, although many times the student will find their way to that stroke just from hearing the syllable. In this case, a legato stroke is required, which is a stroke of slower velocity (both down and up) that will produce a more rounded sound, as the bar is mostly actuated by the yarn of the mallet, not the core. However, if the same passage was asked to be played staccato, the educator can describe the sound using a shorter “ti” sound. This would require a more “staccato” stroke, in which the mallet moves with much more velocity (again, in both directions), thereby allowing the core to “bite” through the yarn more and yield a brighter, more separated sound. This approach is also relevant for any percussion instrument; for example, cymbal crashes are often best described as sounding like “cha,” and a good basic timpani sound is often described as “pah.” By employing appropriate syllables to describe articulations, a director can develop a wide range of sound possibilities in their students without ever having to change an implement.
The above examples represent just a few of the ways that the non-percussionist band director can build upon the educational vernacular they have already developed and use it to provide a more inclusive learning experience for their percussionists. Doing so encourages the young percussionist to feel as if they are a more present part of the learning experience, as their needs are being constantly interwoven into the needs of the rest of the band. For the director, these examples will hopefully serve to alleviate some of the trepidation often experienced by feeling as if they do not know enough “drum-speak” to adequately instruct their percussion students. Remembering that they are music students worthy of the same education as the rest of the band will set them on the path to becoming musicians, rather than the technicians they so often become.

AUTHOR BIO

An internationally recognized percussionist and educator, Erik Forst is the Director of Percussion at Messiah University in Mechanicsburg, PA. In addition to his duties at Messiah, he serves on the Education Committee for the Percussive Arts Society and as Vice President for the Pennsylvania chapter of PAS. He would like to thank Erik and Kathy Mason for their invaluable contributions to this article.
PERFECT PART ASSIGNMENTS - ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

by Dr. Joshua J. Knight

From keyboards and timpani to hand drums and accessories, the percussion section in school bands and orchestras is increasingly multi-faceted. Because of this, it is vitally important to strategize how parts are assigned to the percussion section. Poorly executed part assignments, over time, will result in the under-development of young percussionists by limiting their exposure to certain instruments and allowing avoidance of challenges. Furthermore, this will negatively affect ensemble quality, from beginning band to the collegiate level. Oftentimes, the concert band setting is the only place that percussionists gain experience on timpani, bass drum, and a variety of small instruments. Therefore careful consideration when assigning parts will also greatly improve your percussionists’ technical and musical ability.

The considerations below will help you better organize percussion part assignments, avoid embarrassing adjustments, and ensure that you will assign the perfect part the first time, every time!

1. KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Understanding the percussionists’ ability and confidence on each instrument is critical to achieving the perfect part assignments. As we know, percussionists have lots of instruments to contend with, even in beginning band, and many may be attempting to perform on small instruments such as cymbals, and large instruments such as chimes, for the very first time. Before assigning a student to play an instrument, consider whether or not they have played that instrument in the past, or received basic instruction on that instrument, particularly if it is not keyboard or snare drum. If you feel that all of your students have received adequate training on each instrument required by a certain piece of music, then consider whether or not a certain instrument presents additional challenges to specific students. If you are unsure, never be afraid to ask. Consider your students’ abilities, their preferences, their individual willingness, and keep in mind earlier instruction.

2. SET PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Although the primary objective for any performance will undoubtedly consist of similar qualitative goals, these may shift slightly from one performance to the next, i.e., contest, holiday concert, recording session, etc. This context will also inform your strategy, as you may need to rely on your strongest players to cover difficult parts in some cases while allowing for a more challenging experience in others. For example, just as you may want 1st-chair-trumpet to remain on the 1st trumpet part, you may want your best snare drummer on the toughest snare drum parts, etc. However, when the time is right, challenge players to attempt parts which are outside of their comfortable range, technique, etc. This same approach can apply to your percussion section, too.
3. CONSIDER STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Although a recording or contest situation might necessitate students remain on certain instruments, it is generally beneficial to have your students rotate to various instruments throughout a performance. However, because this needs to be achieved while maintaining excellence in the section, study the parts so that each player touches a snare drum, keyboard, accessories, etc., while assigning them the perfect part that can be executed well. For example, an excellent snare drummer will almost always gravitate to that instrument, especially if they do not see themselves as a confident mallet player. You can challenge them by finding the perfect mallet part that is engaging, but within their ability level. Be careful to avoid the potential for embarrassing moments that might be a set-back for the student. There is a perfect part for everyone and the idea of focusing on each student’s strengths while improving weakness is the best way to keep your percussionists engaged, help your program grow, and prepare students for a variety of future performance requirements.

4. KEEP EVERYONE PLAYING

Especially from beginning band through high school, it is strongly encouraged to keep your percussionists playing on every piece whenever possible. Fortunately, many grade 1 and 2 pieces now feature a variety of percussion parts to keep your students engaged! However, this is not always the case and it may be necessary to double or triple some parts. The most common method by which to add percussion parts is to double existing mallet or drum parts, but there are certain limitations and considerations. For example, if a mallet part is doubled or tripled, consider having the additional players use marimbas, or xylophones with soft mallets, vs multiple glockenspiels. If using multiple snare drummers, understand that in order to achieve togetherness and/or soft dynamics that adjustments may be necessary throughout the piece, i.e., only one snare drummer at specific times. Additionally, some pieces might sound great with two crash cymbal parts, or two tambourines. Whatever the case, listen carefully for the inherent problems that may be created, adjust parts in a respectful and constructive way, and prevent your students from having idle hands!

5. SET-UP REQUIREMENTS

Although you have probably checked that you have the inventory required to perform a given piece, it is also necessary to consider the instrument set-up when assigning parts as well. For example, contemporary band repertoire often uses the ‘Percussion 1,’ ‘Percussion 2,’ etc., part delineation. While it may seem that Percussion 1 should be more difficult that Percussion 2, this is not necessarily the case. Many times these parts require the percussionist to set-up, organize, and execute on several instruments which requires additional ability, time, and attention to detail. An understanding of how difficult a multi-instrument part is to set up will also help you game-plan rehearsals and performances in order to avoid delays.

6. POST IT!

Always make a spreadsheet of part assignments and post it somewhere that is easily seen by the section during rehearsals. As a professional performer, I too like to check back at the part assignments to recall the instruments, mallets, etc., needed for the next piece during rehearsal. This simple step will not only save time and avoid stoppages during rehearsal, but also help the section be more proactive and confident.
7. EXAMPLES

Below I have assigned parts for two Grade 1-2 pieces. These contrasting compositions utilize different percussion instrumentation and present various assignment challenges. For this example we have 8 percussionists listed in chair order and each player is equally confident on pitched and non-pitched instruments.

1. ARMORY BY RANDALL D. STRANDRIDGE

Armory utilizes a variety of percussion instruments, which presents both challenges and opportunities. Additionally, it appears that Armory requires only 6 percussionists, therefore it will be necessary to either double parts, or breakdown each part a bit further than the composer intended. Further examination reveals that several instruments may need to be introduced, with basic technique demonstrated, before having the full ensemble attempt the piece. This includes tambourine, sleigh bells, break drum, and china cymbal. Now we need to decide how to assign the parts. I sometimes will begin by deciding what part 1st chair should take, while other times I first decide what part 8th player should take. Also, consider which parts appear to be thematic, project easily over the ensemble, or provide tempo. In this case, snare drum and brake drum have similar rhythms that will certainly project and be an important driver of the tempo and ensemble togetherness. However, because the snare drum part is simple, not requiring rolls or flams, and in a simple meter, this may be a good opportunity for the 3rd or 4th chair percussionist. The timpani part is also rather simple presenting another opportunity for a lower chair to fill that role. Analyze each part in this way and decide what challenges it does, or does not, present before assigning it. Perc 2 and Perc 3 are multi-instrument parts that provide opportunities to have additional percussionists involved. In this case, a quick look through the score reveals how to evenly separate these parts so that each player is comparably engaged. Again, in achieving the goal of having everyone play also consider strengths, weaknesses, and any potential challenges regarding set-up and new instruments.
2. BUNKER HILL BY KARL L. KING/ARR. BY JAMES SWEARINGEN

A quick glance at Bunker Hill reveals different challenges, including 6/8 time signature, a snare drum part utilizing rolls, and a more thematic bell part. Like our last piece, Bunker Hill does not utilize all 8 percussionists. Because this snare drum part features additional challenges, the 1st chair percussionist would most likely be perfect. Additionally, because 1st chair played bells on Armory we have additional reason to consider assigning them the snare drum part on Bunker Hill. Also, because the snare drum will be a natural choice for doubling, in this case, we want to assign another player to snare drum as well providing an opportunity for a lower chair. It is advantageous to choose a student that feels confident because togetherness is going to be an exacting endeavor. Like snare drum, the bell part is also a natural choice for adding players, and we still have two “extra” students. I suggest having at least one of your top three players anchor the group of mallet players. After deciding which students should play certain parts, double check that no student is unintentionally playing the same instrument on both pieces. This is very important during the concert season especially if the marching season kept your students on the same instrument for 3-4 months.

Given the various considerations above, and the challenges presented with each composition, below are the suggested part assignments; additional pieces will naturally make the process more challenging.

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<td>6</td>
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<td>Perc 1 (Snare Drum)</td>
<td>Bells</td>
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Careful consideration of the suggestions in this article will result in a more substantive and positive ensemble experience for your percussionists who will be able to advance through this conscious effort to challenge their abilities and require improvement. This approach will also reinforce a comprehensive rubric that is necessary for success as students advance to competitions and auditions. Achieving the perfect part assignments is not impossible, after all.
Dr. Joshua Knight currently serves as Instructor of Percussion at Missouri Western State University. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Oklahoma, and earned his Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees from the University of Central Arkansas. An active clinician, Knight has presented and performed at regional and international events such as the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy, Texas Music Educators Association conference, College Music Society regional conference, and numerous state percussion festivals including the Arkansas Day of Percussion, Oklahoma Day of Percussion, Missouri Day of Percussion, and the University of Central Arkansas Percussion Festival. As an active performer Knight appears regularly with the Fountain City Brass Band and St. Joseph Symphony Orchestra, and has also performed with the Abilene Philharmonic, Fort Smith Symphony, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Lawton Philharmonic, Pine Bluff Symphony, and Conway Symphony orchestras. Knight is also active in commissioning new works for percussion that include Inside The Shining Stone by Blake Tyson, published by blaketysonmusic, Shattered by Cody Criswell, published by C-Alan Publications, Halcyon Days by Nathan Daughtrey, published by C-Alan Publications, and most recently, The Wind That Turns The World by Blake Tyson, published by blaketysonmusic. Knight’s article, Trends and Developments Through Thirty Prominent Snare Drum Method Books is a featured cover story in Percussive Notes, the official research journal of the Percussive Arts Society. Additionally, he serves on the Education Committee and Ed Companion SubCommittee for PAS, and is a member of the Board of Advisors for the National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy. Knight is an artist endorser for Vic Firth sticks and mallets and Yamaha percussion instruments. For more information about Dr. Knight please visit www.knightpercussion.com, or email joshknight2@gmail.com.
TOOLS TO KEEP STUDENTS INTRIGUED AND MOTIVATED WHILE PRACTICING FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

by Matthew Black

KEEP THEM CURIOUS

A great step towards intriguing your percussionists is introducing them to some of the extended techniques and instrumentation that exist within the percussion family. There are many different cultures that have taken percussion to an extreme level. Steel Pan, Gamelan, Brazilian, Afro-Cuban, and Traditional Indian Classical are all great jumping off points. In western percussion we have very flashy marching percussion sections, fast keyboard passages in percussion ensemble, amazing drumset players, and unique percussion experiences like Stomp, Blast!, and Blue Man Group. I have compiled a free list of videos and resources you can share with your percussionists over on my Patreon at patreon.com/matthewblackmedia.

YOUTUBE RESOURCES

I find that my students spend just as much time learning new concepts from YouTube as they do from their teachers at school. I am always looking for new resources to meet the students where they are used to learning. Marcus Hawkins from Atlanta has a fantastic YouTube channel where he posts free content like middle school drum warm ups. Mark Wessels has done a fantastic job with the “Fresh Approach” to snare drum, keyboard, and drumset. He covers instrument setup, posture, technique etc. Another fantastic resource is “The Complete Percussionist,” which was put together by the United States Army Field Band. The percussionists go through each instrument, demonstrate correct technique, and talk about the characteristics of each instrument. Just be sure to screen videos before sharing them with your students.

MAKE INSTRUMENTS AT HOME

Another great project is instrument creation. This is another quick YouTube or Pinterest search that can yield some amazing results. Students can use video editing apps on smartphones to show off their new instruments. Anything that draws the student to experiment and explore sounds creation is invaluable for percussionists. Send them to the kitchen (wooden spoons and skillets), garage (think clay pots and screw drivers), and nature (sticks and rocks, etc).

TIME TO CREATE

Create a set of parameters that your students can smoothly follow to create music of their own. For example, record 3 different sounds at home using spatulas on the floor, forks on pots, and a salt and pepper shaker. Make your own 4 measure pattern at 92 beats per minute. Compile your sounds using free apps from the App Store like LoopStation!
MAKE FUNDAMENTALS COOL

My favorite tool to keep percussionists engaged is the use of play-along tracks. If you are a Spotify user, I recommend compiling a playlist of tracks that are school-appropriate in a variety of tempos. After you have compiled your playlist, head over to sortyourmusic.playlistmachinery.com and sort your playlist by BPM. The students can now practice their fundamental exercises with music mapped by tempo. After completing this process, duplicate your playlist on YouTube so that your students do not need to purchase a Spotify subscription of their own. Spotify offers free trials which will give you the time needed to build playlists of your own. If you would like to see examples of playlists I have created and many more percussion articles head on over to matthewblackmedia.com/blog.

AUTHOR BIO

Matthew Black is associate director of bands, director of percussion, and sound designer at Carmel High School in Carmel Indiana. He served as the percussion director and sound designer for Marian Catholic High School from 2014-2019. Matthew has spent time with Phantom Regiment Drum and Bugle Corps, Blue Stars Drum and Bugle Corps, Veritas Indoor Percussion Ensemble, and Cavaliers Indoor Percussion Ensemble. Matthew holds a music education degree from Eastern Illinois University, where he also focused on electronic music composition and audio engineering. Matthew designs full percussion and soundscape packages for marching bands across the country. You can find a list of his notable clients at matthewblackmedia.com. Matthew is a Yamaha Performing Artist and endorses Evans drumheads, Vic Firth/Balter sticks and mallets and Zildjian cymbals. He currently lives in Fishers Indiana with his wife Amy and their English Lab Lydian.
BEGINNER MALLET READING: DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM THAT COVERS THE BASES

by Matt Moore

Percussionists have a reputation for poor melodic reading skills. Other instrumentalists with similar levels of experience often outperform percussionists when reading melodic material. This skill gap can be frustrating for students and educators alike, reinforcing self-doubt, and negative stereotypes.

Why is this skill gap so prevalent? Firstly, percussion students need to develop a wide variety of skills to be functional in a band program across non-pitched instruments and keyboards. Percussionists spend only a fraction of the time reading melodic material compared to their peers on other instruments.

Reading music on keyboard percussion instruments also comes with inherent challenges. Percussionists are the only students in the band who don’t maintain physical contact with their instruments. Young mallet percussionists feel a constant temptation to look down to find the correct notes, breaking the connection to their sheet music.

So is all hope lost in our endeavor to train percussionists as functional mallet readers? Not at all. With a plan to cover the bases, thoughtfully-chosen resources paired with attentive teaching can help your students become confident readers who actually enjoy the process!
# The Bases: Seven Component Skills of Mallet Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Skill Description</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identifying notes on the staff</td>
<td>Can the student say/write/select correct letter names when given notes on a staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identifying letter names on the keyboard</td>
<td>Can the student play/select correct notes when given letter names?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Placing notes from the staff on the keyboard</td>
<td>Can the student play/select correct notes when given notes on a staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mallet technique</td>
<td>Can the student fluidly play memorized patterns around the keyboard?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Locating notes with peripheral vision and muscle memory</td>
<td>Can the student play correct notes without looking down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Recognizing and performing stepwise note contour</td>
<td>Can the student see and play stepwise motions up and down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Recognizing and performing intervals, arpeggios, and more advanced patterns</td>
<td>Can the student see and perform 3rd, 4ths, 5ths, etc. and how they combine to create common patterns in music?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For skills **1, 2, 3, 4**, students will look down at the keyboard (or worksheet or device screen).

For skills **5, 6, 7**, students will work to keep their eyes locked on the music stand.
AN OVERVIEW OF SELECT MALLET READING RESOURCES

There are many approaches and resources available for the development of each of these skills. The following is an overview of select published mallet texts, listing the skills they primarily target and displaying their layouts from the performer’s perspective.

A Fresh Approach to Mallet Percussion - Mark Wessels

- A sequence of large print example lines and short tunes with a written music theory element in each lesson.
- Starts with a limited note range and only “black keys” for a peripheral vision-based approach.
- A large amount of easy mallet reading material with a sizeable appendix.

The Packet - Frank Chapple

- A tome of comprehensive percussion material with a portion focused on mallets.
- Uses a system to combine rhythm lines with sets of notes for reading practice.
- Includes a section of exercises to be memorized and applied across different keys.

Firm Foundations for the Beginning Percussionist - John Bingaman

- A comprehensive beginning percussion curriculum with mallet material factored in.
- Focuses on moving fluidly around the instrument.
- Reading examples start on “black keys” for a peripheral vision-based approach.

Developing the Percussionist-Musician - Michael Huestis

- A comprehensive beginning percussion curriculum with mallet material factored in.
- A progressive sequence of solos and duets.
- Includes a section of exercises to be memorized and applied across different keys.

Sight Reading Skills for the Mallet Percussionist - Eric Martin

- Lessons progress through stepwise and intervallic example lines in a variety of keys.
- Each lesson focuses on a specific interval.
- An appendix contains exercises correlating to each lesson.
Primary Handbook for Mallets - Garwood Whaley

- Progressive lessons contain Technical Exercises, Reading Studies, 4 Mallet Studies, Memorization, and Student Composition Assignments.
- Each lesson focuses on a particular key - majors then minors.
- Downloadable audio accompaniment for almost everything.

Mallet Percussion for Young Beginners: A Peripheral Vision Primer - Randall Eyles

- A sequence of very large print, simple individual tunes.
- Tunes use a very limited set of notes to help students memorize their location in peripheral vision.
- Focuses heavily on skill.

Two Steps Forward - Josh Gottry

- The examples on each page are composed for a specific range of notes.
- Focuses heavily on skill for the first half of the book then skill for the remainder.
- Also includes Scale Drills, Composition Prompts, and Recital Solos.

Simple Steps to Successful Mallets and More Percussion - Kennan Wylie

- A sequence of large print example lines and short tunes.
- Each Step increases the range of notes used.
- The second half of the book moves on to other percussion instruments.

First Book of Practical Studies for Cornet and Trumpet - Robert W. Getchell

- A progressive sequence of tuneful short etudes.
- This non-percussion text works particularly well for mallet reading and is commonly used in beginning percussion classrooms.

Modern School for Xylophone, Marimba, Vibraphone - Morris Goldenberg

- A large comprehensive book that continues into advanced difficulty and orchestral excerpts.
- Quickly progresses through many keys and a wide note range.
Reading Mallet Percussion Music - Rebecca Kite

6 7
• A large comprehensive book organized into four parts: introducing the keyboard and scales, stepwise motion 6 in major and minor melodies, intervals and triads 7 in major and minor melodies, and phrasing and musicality in arrangements of classical era melodies.
• Downloadable audio accompaniment for almost everything.

Music Literacy for Mallets - Larry Lawless

6 7
• Introduces note relationships using solfege, progressing from a one-line staff to five.
• Encourages contour reading disassociated from letter names.
• Continues with a progressive sequence of stepwise motion patterns and melodies, then intervallic patterns and melodies.

Mallet Duets for Student & Teacher Bk. 1 & Bk. 2 - Karen Ervin Pershing

6 7
• A collection of mallet duets for use in private lessons.
• Duets progress from C diatonic to fully chromatic.
• The student part in each duet stays within an octave range.

Fundamental Method for Mallets - Mitchell Peters (Book 1)

6 7
• A large comprehensive book that continues into higher difficulty and four-mallet playing.
• Reading Studies and Technical Exercises organized by key.
A SELECTION OF DIGITAL RESOURCES

MusicTheory.net (Desktop)
1. Free.
2. A wide variety of exercises.
3. Many customization options.

Tenuto (iOS, Android)
1. $3.99 app purchase.
2. Mobile version of MusicTheory.net.

Music Tutor (iOS, Android)
2. Students interact using an on-screen keyboard or letter names.
3. Generates individual staff notes with customization options.

Notes - Sight Reading Trainer (iOS)
3. Free.
5. The on-screen keyboard automatically sizes to match the note range in each lesson.

Sight Reading Factory (Desktop, iOS, Android)
6. $35 annual subscription for teachers.
7. Generates an infinite amount of example lines.
8. Customization options.
AN EXAMPLE MALLET CURRICULUM

The process I use for teaching mallet percussion in my 6th grade beginning percussion class changes every year with the discovery of new materials, adapting to each unique class of students, and learning from my mistakes. I have used almost all of the above materials at some point, but this is my current yearly outline:

- **1.** Start the year with a very brief music theory worksheet/exam.
  - Students label notes on a staff with letter names.
  - Students label a keyboard with letter names.
- **2.** Tactilely teach the treble clef.
  - Students and I hold our hands up sideways to represent the 5 lines of the staff. I’ll point to a spot on my “staff” and ask them to say the letter name.
  - Reverse it. I prompt a letter name and they point to the correct spot on their “staff”.
- **3.** MusicTheory.net, “Note Identification” exercise.
  - Students work individually on their devices.
  - Start without accidentals then add them in quickly.
- **4.** MusicTheory.net, “Keyboard Note Identification” exercise.
  - Students work individually on their devices.
  - Start without black keys then add them in quickly.
- **5.** MusicTheory.net, “Keyboard Reverse Identification” exercise.
  - Students work individually on their devices.
  - Start without accidentals then add them in quickly. Use all MusicTheory.net exercises as a speed game. There is a “Challenge Mode” in options that keeps track of correct answers over a set length of time.

Time is spent every class period on the preceding materials, particularly “Keyboard Reverse Identification”, for about two months before students begin playing on actual mallet instruments. This is done to solidify the students’ familiarity and speed with skills **1.** **2.** **3.** before introducing additional challenges. Meanwhile, students are developing technique, chops, and rhythm on practice pads. After two months, we move to mallet instruments:

- **4.** Work simple exercises on a single note.
  - Develop correct grip, touch, and stroke type on the non-rebounding mallet bar.
- **5.** “I say, you play”
  - Students are prompted with letter names and play the note in time with a metronome.
- **6.** Various digital resources projected on a screen in front of the class.
  - Many of the same MusicTheory.net exercises used as before, but now students as a class are playing notes on mallet instruments with a metronome.
- **7.** Begin learning all twelve tetrachords.
  - Four-note diatonic patterns, moving through the circle of fourths.
  - Sequenced with a vocal chant.
  - Students sing letter names, aiming for accurate vocal pitch.
  - Each tetrachord is played twice, alternating off the right then left hands.
- **8.** Sequence through the memorized exercises and reading examples in Firm Foundations for the Beginning Percussionist - John Bingaman
  - Particular focus on the exercise “4-3-2-1-1”.


Sequence through Mallet Percussion for Young Beginners: A Peripheral Vision Primer - Randall Eyles

- I use a modified version of the “Practice Steps” given at the beginning of the book:
  - Adjust the music so that the arrow at the bottom of the page is pointing toward the note indicated in the keyboard diagram.
  - Look at the keyboard diagram and improvise using only those given notes.
  - Continue improvising, but lock your eyes on the music stand and use peripheral vision to find the notes and develop muscle memory for moving between them.
  - Without holding mallets, play through the piece while touching the correct bars and singing letter names in pitch and in time.
  - With eyes locked on the page, play the piece with mallets.

- Begin learning all twelve major scales.
  - Two tetrachords combine to form each scale.
  - Sequenced with a vocal chant.
  - Two octaves, alternating sticking throughout.
  - Students have a visual reference page if needed, each scale graphed on a keyboard.

After the holiday break, we maintain the previous materials to some degree and add the following:

- Learn a solo together as a class.
  - I prefer “Holiday” from the solo collection Shazam! - John Pollard.
- Begin learning additional exercise patterns in multiple keys such as arpeggios and Green scales.
- Assign new solos to students individually.
  - I prefer 20 Solos for the Young Mallet Percussionist - Kennan Wylie.
  - Some of these have audio accompaniment. Students perform with the track.
- Students compete in a scale game.
  - Pass-off chart with progressive tempi.
  - Students attempt pass-offs during class and with videos submitted online.
  - Held over the course of three months.
  - Can integrate with other instrument classes for a full-band game.
- End of year band placement auditions.
  - Includes a mallet etude with progressive difficulty.
  - Students have a minimum expectation but choose how much more to perform.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Any sheet music can be used to develop skill (identifying notes on the staff) by having students label or read letter names out loud. Students can compete by racing through a set of notes and raising hands when complete. Any sheet music can also be used to develop skill (recognizing stepwise note contour) by having students verbalize the note contour direction. Students chant “up” “down” or “same”, pointing thumbs up and down the keyboard with each note.

While memorization certainly has its place, many young mallet percussionists will do so too quickly and mislearn the music. This can be mitigated by encouraging students to keep their eyes on the page for longer during the learning process, and by slowly air-sticking or touching bars on previously learned music with eyes locked on
the page. This forces the student to reconcile what they have learned with what is written in the music. Record practice sessions and playing tests can also help, asking students to reflect on and evaluate their recording while reading along with the music.

There is a temptation by students and teachers alike to focus disproportionately on skill (mallet technique). This leads to students who can perform learned material with outstanding quality but have a frustrating relationship with learning new music accurately. A balanced curriculum that covers the bases is more likely to produce players who enjoy the reading process and can reach performance readiness more quickly.

Like other aspects of music education, educators are likely to see uneven success in the development of mallet skills from student to student. It is important to give sufficient support to the students who need reinforcement of basic skills while providing motivation and opportunity to higher achievers. This can be accomplished on a per-class basis through differentiated instruction and on a larger scale through assigning solos of varying difficulties, games, competitions, and more.

Happy mallet reading!

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Mark Wessels Publications

AUTHOR BIO

Matt Moore is a percussion educator, composer, arranger, and adjudicator in the Dallas / Fort Worth area. Since 2015 he has served as Director of Percussion for V.R. Eaton High School, a winner of the 2020 Percussive Arts Society International Percussion Ensemble Competition. With a popular catalog of works for percussion available through C. Alan Publications as well as arrangements for marching band and indoor drumline, Matt's music has been commissioned, performed, and recorded around the country. Matt holds music degrees from Campbellsville University and Texas Christian University. He is an educational artist for Innovative Percussion sticks and mallets and an ASCAP composer. Matt lives with his family in Lewisville, Texas.

www.MattMoorePercussion.com
“Variety is the very spice of life. That gives it all its flavor”. William Cowper, *The Task* (1785). Accessory percussion instruments create a variety of sounds and colors in a musical ensemble; you might call them the spice in the percussion family. The style and flavor of music is often best communicated with the use of a tambourine, triangle, maracas, cymbals, or woodblocks. We couldn’t imagine Dvorak’s *Carnival Overture* or Tchaikovsky’s *Trepak* from *The Nutcracker Suite*, without the tambourine. The same can be said regarding the castanet part in *Capriccio Espagnol* by Rimsky-Korsakov, the crash cymbals in *Night on Bald Mountain* by Mussorgsky, or the triangle part in *Carmen Suite* by Bizet. The spice that gives this music its style are those wonderful instruments that we label as accessory, but would be more appropriately labeled as necessary.

Accessory instruments are often neglected during the beginning of a percussionist’s education. Young performers don’t always have an awareness of the many possible sounds these instruments can create. Learning proper technique is an important aspect of developing and creating the desired sounds. Often times, the first experiences a young percussionist has with accessory instruments is when they are assigned a tambourine or triangle part in their band class. This scenario often leads to anxiety in the young percussionist’s performance, and frustration for the conductor on the podium. A minimal investment in time, early in the training of young percussionists, will pay off in subsequent musical endeavors.

**HOW TO INTRODUCE ACCESSORY INSTRUMENTS INTO BEGINNING PERCUSSION CLASS**

Presenting students with good quality playing examples is one of the best things an educator can do when introducing accessory instruments. Playing short audio recordings or videos of outstanding percussionists playing these instruments will make young students eager to learn. Not only will this demonstrate the proper techniques and get the best sounds in their ears, it will motivate them to want to play the accessory parts. Research band and orchestra literature, find some exciting accessory parts, and use those as the first impression when introducing these instruments.

One of the easiest ways to get beginning percussion students started with accessory instruments is to have them play tambourine, triangle, finger cymbals, castanets, woodblock, sleigh bells, or claves after their weekly “snare test”. Generally, those initial snare tests are simple quarter notes and rests; they can easily be performed on accessory instruments. Students can learn to properly hold the instruments and perform the techniques while reinforcing their counting. When playing repetitions of a snare drum etude, have students pass the tambourine, triangle, etc. around the room, giving each person a chance to perform.
Another method to introduce these instruments into your classroom is to have an “accessory day” once a week. Students spend a portion of class time watching a short instructional video of the instrument, and then participate in hands-on performing. There are many wonderful instructional videos available through both YouTube, and percussion manufacturer websites. If your school has only one of each accessory instrument, set up “accessory stations” in each corner of the room. Send a small group of students to each station and have them do a recording session with a phone or tablet. One student can perform a short four measure etude while another student counts the rhythms out loud and a third student films. They each take turns with those responsibilities and then after five minutes, students switch stations.

CREATE SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS TO ENGAGE AND REINFORCE STUDENT LEARNING

Writing a short etude for each accessory instrument is another way to get students working on basic accessory techniques. In the examples below, each accessory instrument is given a four (4) measure etude. The etudes can be performed separately or as a miniature ensemble. Begin by having students practice their part individually. Then once they feel confident, have them get a partner and perform the etudes as a duet. When students reach an acceptable level of achievement as a duet, they can partner with another pair of students to form a quartet, and so on. This is a fun way to engage students and get them working together as a classroom community.
USE MUSICAL PASSAGES FROM EXISTING BAND LITERATURE TO EXPAND ACCESSORY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

After students have their initial introduction to accessory playing, there are a few ways for band directors to reinforce and expand those techniques. Use short passages the percussion section can perform repetitively while the winds do their “daily drill” exercises. The percussion students are often neglected while the winds are engaged in long tones or lip slurs. Utilizing the percussion section as the time keepers during these drills will engage the percussion section, give the winds a listening focus for tempo, and allow the percussionists to practice following the conductor while performing these patterns. Short musical passages from the concert band music can also be used in this way. This practice will reinforce skills and create an opportunity for percussion students to get more repetitions on their festival music.

When time is invested in the training of accessory percussion instruments, students will have the opportunity to learn required skills, and with that, begin to achieve a level of success. As students start to improve, they realize how much fun it is to perform these instruments and thus, they are willing to spend more time working on those skills. This cycle of “training – achievement – enjoyment” is a wonderful goal and blueprint for future learning.

AUTHOR BIO

Michael Huestis is the Director of Percussion at Prosper High School in Prosper, TX. Michael serves as the assistant director of the Music for All, Sandy Feldstein National Percussion Festival and as the P.A.S. Texas Chapter Secretary. He is the author of the percussion method book series, “Developing the Percussionist-Musician” as well as a composer of both percussion ensembles and marching percussion arrangements.
ISOLATING SKILL SETS, TECHNIQUES, AND CONCEPTS WITH BEGINNING PERCUSSION

by Scott Brown

I am a big proponent of isolating skill sets, techniques, and concepts as much as possible in the beginning, or whenever learning something new. This philosophy applies to wind instruments, percussion ensemble, marching percussion, etc. For this article, I will focus on the use of isolation with beginning percussion and walk you through a typical year at Dickerson Middle School. We do have percussion separate from the winds, so you may have to be creative in applying these concepts to mixed classes.

The overarching goals of the year are to: learn to read rhythms, develop stroke/technique, learn to read pitches, and become familiar with the keyboard instruments. Of course, there is a lot more that the kids do, and learn, but these are the primary tasks for the first year of instruction.

We begin with hand drums. We are fortunate to have a set of Remo Tubano drums along with djembes and congas, but it is also possible to have the students play on their legs, a table, or chairs. After spending some time learning basic hand drum techniques and doing some basic drum circle activities, we start working on reading rhythms, typically using “A Fresh Approach to the Snare Drum” by Mark Wessels, although we occasionally use other texts. The main reason for starting with hand drums is to allow the students to focus on reading and understanding the rhythms without having to simultaneously think about their grip and stroke using a drum stick. As an added benefit, spending more time on hand drums helps students develop a relaxed wrist stroke with a natural forearm motion. Since the students are completely focused on learning to read rhythms, we are able to move very quickly, and within several weeks are up to 16th note/8th note combinations.

Once I feel comfortable with the students’ understanding of reading rhythms, we begin working on snare drum technique. We use pads with a wooden base and a rubber surface so that the students can learn to play with a full and confident stroke without having to worry about the volume. When beginning to work on technique, I teach everything by rote and play along with the students in order to demonstrate and provide a model. This allows each student to focus on the grip, stroke, and technique without having to worry about reading music. We start with basic 8 on a hand legato strokes then gradually progress through hand to hand 16th notes (legato) then accents and taps (non-accented notes), and up-strokes. We do this using various basic exercises typical of those used in marching percussion. When the students seem comfortable with the technique, we begin to combine drumming with reading rhythms. I give them copies of the exercises we used when developing technique, which are from “Field Level – The
Ultimate Band Director’s Guide to Fielding the Ultimate Marching Percussion Section” by Mike Lynch and myself, and they begin learning solos out of “The Rudimental Cookbook” by Edward Freytag. Using “The Rudimental Cookbook” also allows us to start working on snare drum rudiments.

I feel that it is important to start with drumming skills as opposed to starting on keyboards. Starting with drumming allows the students to develop a good, confident stroke on a large surface, the drum pad. Developing a good up-down motion in the stroke is extremely important as is developing a comfortable grip using snare sticks, which take up more space in the student’s hands than do keyboard mallets. I have found that in years where I did start students on keyboard percussion much earlier, they struggled to play the correct notes due to issues with their grip and/or stroke. In addition, developing the grip and stroke on one surface is much easier than trying to do so while moving side to side to play keyboard instruments.

We typically begin working on keyboard percussion in January, again isolating music reading and technique. Beginning in the first semester, the students work out of the Alfred’s Music Theory book on days when we have an adjusted schedule, there is a substitute teacher, or for homework. By doing this, they are familiar with the staves, note names, and location on the keyboards well before we actually start to work on keyboard percussion. To strengthen this understanding, I sign out a computer lab for a week and have the kids “play” Mark Wessel’s Speed Note Reading Video Game. The game features 10 levels with 100 answers each and starts off very simple and progresses in difficulty. At the end of each level I write down their score, in pencil, then they move on to the next, regardless of how low the score is. After they finish level 10, they are allowed to go back and begin replacing scores. I make it competitive and have prizes for those who achieve ten 100’s; I share the site with them during the first semester so they can practice well ahead of time. Having the students work out of the theory books and spending a week playing the game allows them to understand and practice note recognition and keyboard layout without having to worry about playing wrong notes. Note, the game is typically found on the Vic Firth Website, but is currently unavailable on that site. It may be possible to contact Mark Wessels at mwpublications.com to get a link to the game.

After finishing the game, we move on to developing muscle memory and understanding of the keyboards themselves, as well as understanding and utilization of scales. These are all taught by rote so they can just focus on the skill sets and not worry about reading the music. We start learing scales using several different scale patterns that help them develop very specific skill sets. For example, “scale in thirds” (moving up and down the scale playing 8th notes with the mallets a third apart) is used to help them “see” and feel the shape of the scale on the keyboard while other patterns are used to help them focus on horizontal motion of the forearm to locate the note and vertical motion of the wrist to strike or developing the ability to “track’ the mallets as they expand and contract intervals. “Instruction Course for Xylophone” by George Hamilton Green is an excellent source for these scale patterns.

As we begin learning scales, we use the Circle of 4ths and tetra chords. Try to make it simple. Start with C (no flats), count up four. F is the new scale and will have one flat. Count up four, there’s your flat and the next scale, which has two, and so on. Learning the scales, and scale patterns, is again done by rote, without music. We write the key signatures on the white board as we learn the scales.

After applying the various scale patterns to the scales, and lots of repetition, they start to become comfortable with the layout of the notes on the keyboards. I should note that we have a system of pass-offs for rudiments, scales, and scale patterns in which students are able to place a sticker on our sticker charts as they reach a certain level of achievement. Again, I am a fan of competition, and try to have prizes for the leaders and use the charts to choose which students participate in certain events. Because to this, the students are fairly diligent in practicing at home or before school. Once they are comfortable with identifying notes on the staff, scales, and layout of the notes and scales on the keyboard, then we start to work on reading music while playing.
Since we don’t physically touch the keyboard instruments when playing, we rely on our eyes and muscle memory to find the notes on the instrument. The more comfortable a student is with the layout of the keyboard, and the more comfortable they are identifying the notes on the staff, the more successful they will be with combining the two. I feel it’s important to develop these skills separately and this seems to help eliminate some of the nervousness about playing keyboards, which I’ve found is the primary reason kids don’t want to play mallets. If you consistently build confidence in an isolated fashion, it’s been my experience that the students are very excited to play mallet percussion.

Developing a sense of confidence for young percussionists is essential to their future success. In a concert band setting, percussionists are typically soloists on their instruments from the very beginning! Isolating skill sets, techniques, and concepts allows students to find early success and gradually build a strong foundation without the frustration of trying to learn too much at once. Apply the concept to other areas as well. For example, when learning rudiments, we often isolate each hand or just work on the technique needed to play the rudiment. In percussion ensemble or concert band we will isolate the rhythms or the interplay of rhythms within the ensemble, then add pitches once everyone understands how the rhythms work. With four-mallet keyboard technique, we spend a good amount of time playing on the floor so that they can focus on the technique and not worry about playing the correct notes. When wind players in my concert bands are having trouble playing a certain passage, I will have them play “fingers only”, no embouchure or air, just focusing on and listening to the rhythmic accuracy of their fingers and keys. Then we will do “air only”, no fingers or instruments, just listening to the tongue interrupting the air. Obviously, the list of possible uses of isolation is large! I hope you found this article to be useful for you and your program and that you can use these concepts to help your students learn and develop with confidence!

**AUTHOR BIO**

Scott Brown is currently the Assistant Band Director at Dickerson M.S and Percussion Director at Walton H.S., both in Marietta, GA. Scott is Percussion Coordinator for the Music For All Summer Music Symposium Middle School Camp, Co-Director of the North Georgia Percussion Camp and Atlanta Percussion Symposium, and is a member of the Percussive Arts Society (PAS) International Percussion Ensemble Committee. He served for four years as Percussion Arranger and Consultant for Beatrix Drum & Bugle Corps from Hilversum, The Netherlands, winning the “High Percussion” award for Drum Corps Netherlands and Drum Corps Europe in 2010. Prior to his appointment at Walton, Scott spent 14 years with the 1998 & 2002 Bands of America Grand National Champion Lassiter High School Band and served on the instructional staffs of Spirit of Atlanta Drum & Bugle Corps, Atlanta CV Drum & Bugle Corps, CV Indoor Percussion, and the Kennesaw Mountain High School Band. In addition to the national championships, he has been fortunate to be a part of 9 BOA Regional Championships, The Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (2x), the Tournament of Roses Parade (2x), the Waikiki Holiday Parade, and eight performances for The Midwest Clinic.

Mr. Brown is co-author of “Field Level – The Ultimate Band Director’s Guide to fielding the Ultimate Marching Percussion Section” and composer of “Kumi-daiko”, both published by Row-Loff Productions. His articles on percussion pedagogy have been published in Percussive Notes, Halftime, and School Band & Orchestra magazines. He is featured on the “Snare Drummer’s Toolbox” dvd and has been featured in interviews for TV and Radio in The Netherlands, Colombia, and Malaysia. Active as a clinician, Scott has presented clinics for The Midwest Clinic, PASIC, MEA conventions in Georgia, Texas, and Ontario, and served as a clinician and/or adjudicator in The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Thailand, Brazil, Colombia, and Malaysia as well as guest clinician/lecturer at several universities.

Mr. Brown is a graduate of Western Carolina University, alumnus of Carolina Crown Drum & Bugle Corps, and an educational artist for Innovative Percussion, Mapex Drums, Majestic Percussion, Sabian Cymbals, and Row-Loff Productions.
INCORPORATING PERCUSSION FUNDAMENTALS IN FULL BAND REHEARSAL

by Steve Graves

A frustrating challenge of many non-percussionist band directors is how to keep their percussionists involved in rehearsal. This pedagogical issue can also quickly become a classroom management issue. My goal here is to provide band directors with strategies and resources to help keep their percussionists involved and engaged during warm-up time and rehearsal of literature (in both established and beginning ensembles).

WARM UP/TECHNIQUE TIME STRATEGIES

Preparation

Are your percussionists set up to be involved? Do they know what you’re going to be working on ahead of time? Remember, your percussionists must do more than just open the case and take out their instrument. They are often asked to set up and perform on multiple instruments that utilize a variety of implements, and we don’t want our rehearsal to come to a grinding halt while waiting for a student to go and find the instrument they need in the middle of rehearsal! Start by putting the list of pieces to be rehearsed on the board every day – your students will get in the habit of looking at that first when they walk into the rehearsal hall. You might even put a small white board back by the percussion section where they can have their own daily list.

Routines

Establish within your percussion section a daily routine of equipment set-up that includes everything they’ll need for warmups and literature for the day. Create lists, if needed, for set-up and tear-down responsibilities. I suggest that you take time to go over routines and expectations with the percussionists. For efficiency, do this outside of rehearsal time: before school (with donuts is better!), at lunch, or after school (again, snacks help). It is imperative that every student knows...
every job; use a percussion assignment chart to leave no question as to who should move what and where each piece of equipment belongs. Even with these individual roles, always insist that the section is responsible for the entire section’s equipment.

Planning

When planning your rehearsals, consider the following: What do you need to do with the winds in their warm-up/technique sequence? What elements might also apply to percussion? How can the percussion section help the rest of the ensemble? The percussionists can play a key role in rehearsal fundamentals by providing pulse and subdividing the beat for the ensemble. This can help develop the skill of listening for pulse as an ensemble, while also allowing you to get off of the podium! (By the way, your band doesn’t need you to be a drum major in order for them to play warm-ups). You may also find it helpful with beginners to use the keyboards to provide a pitch center for buzzing.

Evaluate Needs

Think about what your percussionists need help with. Is it stick technique, new rhythms, mallet technique/mallet reading (these are always two different concerns), or ear training and timpani technique? Rather than just having them playing to “keep time,” try to always include a musical goal such as working on a rhythm pattern that’s in the music to be rehearsed, or slowly developing a new rudiment. Below are some examples of how roll rudiments can be developed during slur exercises for the winds:

![Examples of roll rudiments](image)

Do you need supplemental material for your percussionists? It’s really easy to add a page or more of “warm-up patterns” for both snare drum or mallets, and feel free to vary patterns and instrumentation to suit your needs.

Try adapting the percussion tempo to meet the winds needs. For example, if you decide that you’d like the winds to play their long tones for 8 or 16 counts, rather than your usual 4, teaching your percussion section to play their technique/rudiment lines in half time (half tempo) or double time (twice the tempo) and/or adapting the number of repetitions to match will help you gain flexibility in rehearsal without stopping to explain what you’d like them to do.

For instance, with winds doubling the note values shown at 80bpm, the percussionists would play the same tempo, but repeat the first 6 measures and double the last one.

This is especially helpful to achieve the most comfortable tempos for roll exercises.

Once you’ve established your routine, add one player on bass drum (but not always the same one - rotate players, one each day, or every other line, etc.) and have them play the major subdivisions of the beat, or a rhythm pattern that you’re working on. You can also vary note lengths so they can practice dampening.
Timpani

If possible, use timpani daily, even if they’re not required for the pieces you’re working on. It is the only instrument where percussionists can adjust and match pitch, develop ear training, and get a feel for the touch of the pedals (note that it’s helpful to have a stool for use of the pedals with both feet). Long tones are a great exercise to practice matching pitch, roll technique, and dampening (remember to be picky about attacks, releases, and dampening!). Have your students memorize the ranges of each drum so they know where to tune each pitch.

Sample range diagram:

Just like the winds, give the percussionists a timpani “chromatic scale” chart (or have them create one!). Here is one version:

![Standard Chromatic Range for Timpani](image)

Slur studies work great and are also really like two long-tone exercises occurring simultaneously (although you might need to invert the intervals sometimes). In the exercise below, the student tunes drums 2 and 4 to F and Bb to start, then retunes each drum before the next measure, with feet staying on the pedals throughout.

You can try having them play the root and fifth during rhythmic scale patterns:
**Tuning**

During tuning time, don’t use keyboards when matching winds or using the tuner, for a few reasons: one, some keyboards are tuned to A=441 or 442, and two, the pulsing of rolls and timbre can interfere with others hearing the “beats” while tuning. DO have your timpanist for the day work to match your concert Bb or F tuning.

**What You See Is What You Get**

Percussion is “WYSIWYG.” Your percussion section balance will improve greatly if you utilize a system of heights for volume. Everyone can then see when they are playing the correct dynamic. To start, use a basic 3 heights for beginners.

**REHEARSAL STRATEGIES**

As stated initially, your preparation is crucial, but so is your consistency. Stick to the list that you posted prior to rehearsal. Don’t list 3 pieces, then only work on the first one. If you find there are only 6 minutes left in rehearsal and you decide to move on to another piece, that’s probably a good time to focus on the winds and let the percussion section (or at least some of them) start packing up.

If you’re only going to work on a specific section of a piece, check that the percussionists are only setting up what they need for that particular section. If there are percussionists who don’t play on the music you’re working on, consider having them double another player’s part. Three players on tambourine? Sure! Four on triangle? Why not? Consider that each of your percussionists may only have the opportunity to play each accessory instrument once or twice in a year, if that, so any extra opportunity to play an instrument in a musical context is really helpful!

Starting beginners in a homogeneous setting can be tricky enough, and I suggest that when first introducing air/embouchure/mouthpiece exercises, keep the percussionists on pads. Grip & stick control is equal to tone for percussionists, and these concepts must be developed first. Every tonguing and breathing exercise should be accompanied by stick work on pads – don’t leave them out!

Introduce mallets soon thereafter, as new notes are introduced in your method, or as you introduce them by rote to the winds. Beginning percussionists seem to do better on mallets when following the winds’ guided practice on new notes, and playing melodic exercises.

I’ve had better experiences with ALL of the percussionists playing the same thing – all on pads or all on mallets – so you are only commenting on one aspect of playing. (On mallets, it’s almost always note recognition, rather than technique, that is the biggest challenge.) Keep in mind that a beginning mallet percussionist has every possible note in front of them, rather than only the 3 – 6 notes that they’ve been introduced to. Try limiting their choices by blocking off the notes that are out of their current range. A piece of paper and blue painter’s tape works well.
Keep music stands for snare drum/practice pads high (in the line of sight from eyes to music to conductor) and music stands for keyboard instruments low and slightly away (in the line of sight from eyes to keys to music) to facilitate better confidence while reading.

**Inclusion**

It is sometimes helpful to start with the percussion section, particularly if they have a strongly subdivided part in the beginning of the section you’re working on. Have the winds finger, sizzle, sing, or buzz along to establish pulse and articulations. Then add in each group of instruments.

When working a technical section with a section of winds (usually a tough fingering), always do it with percussion. If needed, you can reduce percussion volume by having them play on rims, use the back ends of keyboard mallets, dampen more, etc. Focus on lining up all of the sounds (clicking keys, valve noise, etc.) as one percussion section!

Tempo changes are often initiated or executed by the percussion section, so it’s helpful to work these transitions with them first - if they don’t get it right, it won’t ever be right! Have the winds count the subdivisions while fingerering their notes, or sizzling, while the percussionists play the transitions.

When the percussion section (or one player) has a particularly difficult part, put it up on the screen or board and teach it to everyone. Have wind players “become percussionists” and tap on thighs or tap their toes. Then everyone counts out the same part and learns together. The wind players can then evaluate the percussionists after a few tries, and will be able to relate their part to the percussion part better.

Many important percussion moments often get lost at the bottom of the page, so I suggest marking percussion cues at the top of the score, especially after long rests.

**LISTENING FOR TONE**

Like string instruments and piano, 90% of tone is in their touch, so get your percussionists used to listening to their tone right from the start! Be picky about implement selection (“finding the right tool for the job” – much like reeds) and the proper striking spot. Have them listen for balance within their section, as well as within the band, right away. A fun exercise is to bring some of them up front to play and hear the winds from there. The skill of listening will be a lifetime skill as a drummer/percussionist/musician anywhere!
Steve Graves is currently the band director at Lexington Junior High School, and has been teaching band in Southern California for 34 years. Part of the genesis of the percussion circuit scene in the area, he remains an active adjudicator and clinician for indoor percussion, marching, and concert bands, guest conducting honor groups, and is a regularly performing percussionist with local community bands and rock/pop groups as well. He received his undergraduate degree at California State University Long Beach, where he studied with Greg Goodall and Michael Carney, and has a master of arts in conducting from the American Band College.
YOUR YOUNG PERCUSSIONISTS CRAVE ATTENTION: ADVICE AND TIPS ON INSTRUCTING YOUNG PERCUSSIONISTS.

by Jessica Williams

Band directors have the tools necessary to instruct their wind players, molding them into efficient musicians within their first few years of instruction. However, percussionists, more often than not, require more specialized training and instruction. The most crucial time for instruction for a percussionist begins in middle school, usually around the 6th grade. At the start of the semester, they come into the band room eager to learn and excited to play. These students walk in toting their newly bought sticks and mallets. After observing several sessions of instrument assignments for the rest of the band, young percussionists are eager to put their new equipment to use and learn. However, outside of scales and exercises in band method books, percussion students hardly take part in other band exercises such as breathing, posture, intonation, balance and blending.

Instruction in percussion is often overlooked which puts those students at a serious disadvantage. Percussion instruments produce immediate feedback when struck. Once a student has been shown how to hold sticks and strike the instrument, it immediately generates the sound and does not need any further work to produce notes. With wind players, there is more to consider when trying to execute and note. Therefore, the band director will spend a considerable amount of time working with them to create quality sounds. Young percussionists need instruction on what mallets or sticks should be used, dynamics, blending, tuning, and more. Having identified that there are holes in the education of young percussionists that revolve around students not receiving any guidance during full band rehearsals or extra instruction, how can we best assure young percussionists are getting equal and quality instruction to prepare them on their future musical endeavors?

INVEST IN YOUR PERCUSSION EQUIPMENT

The condition of your percussion equipment is important. Equipment that is broken or not available can interfere with the progression of your percussionists’ education. Purchase decent equipment for your percussion section. A typical middle and high school percussion section contains at least the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALLET PERCUSSION</th>
<th>DRUMS AND CYMBALS</th>
<th>AUXILIARY PERCUSSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marimba (4-Octave)</td>
<td>Snare Drum w/stand</td>
<td>5”-6” Triangle w/ beaters and clips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xylophone</td>
<td>Bass Drum w/stand</td>
<td>Tambourine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibraphone</td>
<td>Timpani (29” and 26”)</td>
<td>Claves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glockenspiel/Orchestra Bells w/stand</td>
<td>18” Suspended Cymbal w/stand</td>
<td>Woodblock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimes</td>
<td>Pair of 18” Crash Cymbals</td>
<td>Cabasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tam-Tam w/stand</td>
<td>Wind Chimes w/stand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you can, avoid acquiring basic or low-end equipment, such as student, starter, or practice models for your section. These instruments are great for practicing and for students to have at home to work on their music. Nonetheless, these models may not withstand the daily wear and tear that comes with consistent play from several band students, compared to one student who plays for at least two hours a day. Practice keyboard percussion models are often sold with no resonators, a part of the instrument that is responsible for amplification and sustain of notes. This makes it an ideal instrument for private practice at home, but not for ensemble performance. Instead, look for models that are for band and orchestra. Contact your local instrument shops and online retailers for assistance in ordering equipment. There is also the option of purchasing demo and used equipment. This can be done by calling local music shops and researching online on websites such as:

- www.steveweissmusic.com
- www.percussionsource.com
- www.reverb.com
- www.malletshop.com
- www.wwbw.com
- www.ebay.com (from reputable sellers)

These websites list open box, used and demo gear for sale. The advantages of purchasing used equipment is gaining high-quality equipment for a fraction of the original price. These instruments will be able to withstand daily use from students. Be sure to check the condition of used equipment and that you are not acquiring equipment that requires additional maintenance or restoration.

In addition to purchasing quality instruments for your percussion section, invest in a classroom set of sticks and mallets. It is typical for directors to have a variety of woodwind reeds, valve/slide oil, cork grease and sometimes spare mouthpieces which is essential for their wind players. Sticks, mallets, replacement heads and cord to restring mallet instruments as well as replacement straps for crash cymbals and beaters for triangles are essential to maintaining the equipment necessary for a full percussion section of instruments. Innovative Percussion provides an excellent middle school and high school purchase lists (Fig 1 and 2). These lists recommend mallets that should be required for bass drum, gong, timpani, and keyboard percussion. They also have a suggestion of “nice to own” mallets for the aforementioned instruments, as well as providing mallet pack suggestions for students to purchase.

Furthermore, band directors should do routine checks and maintenance on equipment. Replace heads regularly, check the strings and bars on mallet instruments, and make sure students are using the correct stick or mallet on instruments which will help avoid expensive repairs and purchases. If one is not privy to percussion maintenance, you can take your equipment to music shops for repairs or network with local percussionists who specialize in traveling to schools for maintenance (such as replacing timpani heads).
PRIVATE LESSONS

Most percussionists do not receive formal instruction until beginning band in middle or school. Encourage your students to take private lessons. Taking private lessons gives the student one-on-one time with an instructor. There, the skill level of the student can be assessed, and the instructor can set a course of instruction for the student. In private lessons, students can be instructed on the kinesiology that comes with percussion performance—how the body moves, the proficient way to hold the sticks, and how to execute correct techniques. One can find a percussion teacher by going to local guitar and drum shops, asking for recommendations on social media, and seeking instruction from local college students who can provide private lessons. With the help of technology, students can take virtual lessons online or instructive media that can be researched on platforms like YouTube and www.vicfirth.com.

If your students lack resources to take private lessons or are having difficulty receiving instruction from videos online, encourage them to practice with the more experienced students, as well as dedicating some time to work with them. It is important for directors to be well-versed in the instruction of percussion. Directors could consider taking private instruction, themselves, to become proficient in percussion. This will help give you a start in building a strong percussion section and maintaining that strength. Attending conferences and conventions can broaden your knowledge of percussion literature, as well.

Fig. 1: Recommendation List for Middle School

Fig. 2: Recommendation List for High School
Some of the conferences you can attend are:

• Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC)
• Day of Percussion events hosted by your local Percussive Arts Society chapters
• Midwest Clinic International Band, Orchestra and Music Conference
• Regional music education conferences

I recommend directors and instructors, along with their students, attend Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC). This is one of the largest drum and percussion event in the world where there are concerts, clinics and presentations given by artists from all over the world. PASIC exhibits all areas of percussion from marching and keyboards, to symphonic and education. There are clinics for professional development, as well as interactive masterclasses for student percussionists, non-percussion band/orchestra directors, and for anyone looking a refresher on teaching and performing ideas and techniques. Also at these gatherings, you can network with colleges and independent musicians who may provide the opportunity for you to provide lessons to your students and work with your section during rehearsals.

BRING IN A SPECIALIST

Bringing in a professional or an advanced college student majoring in percussion can influence the way your section performs and can greatly assist your young percussionists in their instruction. It is important that your students have someone demonstrate how to perform in the way they should. This will provide a reference for them in their learning. The instructor will have the skill set to teach your students correct technique, posture, and balance within the section and the entire band. Having a specialist also means your students get the attention that they need for an extended amount of time rather than for a few minutes. The band director might spend a few minutes working with the percussion section compared to an entire class session with the rest of the band. Generally, those few minutes will involve tempo, dynamics or some other issue which drew the attention of the band director to correct. There are some percussionists who specialize instructing middle and high school percussion programs. Some work exclusively with marching percussion either with both the drumline and the front ensemble or with just one section. Others may work year-round with a program to ensure that the program is also proficient in concert percussion. To maximize instruction while the director is working with the winds, the percussion section can move into sectionals where they can work on band repertoire, as well as percussion ensemble works with the specialist. During sectionals, issues with reading, technique, balance, etc. can be addressed. During full-band rehearsals, the percussion section can play with whichever section is being reviewed regardless of what part is being rehearsed. This will keep the percussionists involved and engaged in the rehearsal and also gives the rest of the ensemble the opportunity to hear the percussion parts for reference. The specialist can direct the students on balancing and blending with the band and ensuring proper technique is being used. Network with your local college and music shop for a percussion instructor who can dedicate a few hours or days a week to come work with your students. If your school is fortunate to have two band directors, considering hiring a percussionist as one of the directors.

INCLUSION OF PERCUSSIONISTS IN BAND EXERCISES

What are some ways that a band director can include their percussionists in band exercises, as well as instructing them in melodic reading instead of potentially just being a time-keeping section? Keeping time is important to musicians, but so is breathing, blending, and balance which is often overlooked in the instruction of young percussionists. Reading melodically is just as important to a percussionist as reading rhythmically, as well. Include your percussionists in band activities and exercises that revolve around these techniques.
Breathing helps relax the body and reduce tension. Being relaxed is key in percussion to performing rudiments and complex rhythms, and holding your breath induces tension in the body which makes it harder to play. Tension can be reflected in a student’s playing, sounding choked and harsh. Staying relaxed and breathing help tremendously to keep good time and playing complex rhythms, as well as playing a role in phrasing and the quality of their tone. Set aside some time for breathing exercises with your percussionists before and while they are playing.

With blending and balance, challenge you students to find sticks and mallets that will blend with what the band is playing, such as finding articulate mallets for a fast, rapid section or mallets that produce a warm tone during legato parts. You do not want your percussion section to overpower the rest of the band or have the band overpower them. Making sure your students have the correct stick or mallet for that instrument, that they are using correct technique, they are standing correctly behind their instruments and balancing with the rest of the ensemble will help them greatly.

There are a number of issues a band director may encounter with percussionists not being able to read melodically. Percussionists can become proficient in reading rhythms but lack the ability to read pitches. There are a few issues as to why a young percussionist may lack the necessary skill to read melodically:

- No instruction on the different types of mallet instruments (marimba, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes and crotales), mallet selections, correct grip, and techniques.
- Percussionists should be rotated to different instruments. When students are not moved around in the percussion section, they can get comfortable behind the instrument they were initially assigned. This will establish “designated players” to certain instruments, meaning they will decide to only perform on a specific instrument(s) and not switch to others. Students could choose to work on the instrument that they chose or were given to them, potentially not exploring the opportunity to learn others. Rotating your percussionists gives them the chance to receive instruction on all instruments, making them well-rounded musicians.
- Students who solely play on unpitched instruments will not receive instruction in melodic reading, while those remaining behind keyboard percussion may lack skills in unpitched percussion instruments.

To increase inclusion across the ensemble and increase the melodic reading capabilities of young percussion students, arranging simple chorales in 4 part texture (such as Bach chorales) can give percussionists the opportunity to work on reading both treble and bass clef music. This may also prove beneficial as a warm-up routine for just the percussion section. Each student would be able to play one part and the switch it with another student. Any other exercises involved with reading music outside of scales and band method books that does not have a part written for percussion, the director can transcribe parts from instruments in concert pitch (i.e., flute, oboe, bassoon, tuba, etc.). Using parts from low brass instruments will assist in becoming proficient in reading bass clef, a skill that many percussionists are deficient at. Be sure to assign these parts to each percussionist and rotate them on mallet percussion.
DEVELOP A PERCUSSION CLASS OR ENSEMBLE

If possible, reserve some time in your schedule to have a percussion class or ensemble for your young percussionists as well as time for private instruction. Focusing solely on percussion, with no interference from other instruments, will motivate your students in learning their instrument. Percussion class and percussion ensemble have their similarities; however, they approach the subject of percussion is different:

- **Percussion Class:**
  - A lecture-based course in which the students are given instruction in more of a classroom setting rather than a rehearsal setting.
  - Here, students can learn the history of percussion, go over standard repertoire (solos, ensembles, and excerpts), and have discussions.
  - Students can learn more about how percussion became part of larger ensembles, as well as how percussion ensembles started.
  - Students can acquire a deeper understanding the role of each instrument and how they function as both solo instrument and part of an ensemble.

- **Percussion Ensemble:**
  - A performance-based course in which students are given instruction in a rehearsal setting rather than a classroom setting.
  - Students can develop and apply their technique, where to strike on the instrument, which beater sounds best on a triangle or bass drum, or which cymbal sounds best for specific pieces.
  - Students develop the necessary skills in blending and performing in a group environment.
  - Students have an ensemble where the focus is on them the entire rehearsal with no interference from other instruments.

As mentioned before, both classes have their similarities. For example, focus on auxiliary and world percussion can be given during both percussion class and ensemble. The approach will be slightly different in how instruction is given; however, students can still participate in learning how to play these instruments. Generally, students will receive a considerable amount of training on snare drum, mallet percussion and timpani during band rehearsals and in band method books, but because so much emphasis is placed on these instruments, auxiliary and world percussion (such as triangle, claves, and bongos) marginalized. Students may be hastily given a crash course in how to play these instruments during rehearsals, or they may have to seek out more experienced students to train them. In both of these classes, students will receive proper instruction on what classifies as auxiliary or world percussion. Otherwise, students can develop bad playing habits which will cost them later.

During the first few weeks of band rehearsals, percussion instruction can be minimal with percussionists sometimes left on their own while other instruments are getting attention. Once young percussionists have been taught how to hold sticks and mallets, they are left to their own accord since they do not have to worry about pitch or intonation. Like everyone else, percussion students should be instructed on good percussion technique from the first day to avoid improper technique. To prevent bad playing habits from developing, provide private instruction from either yourself or a specialist, involve your students in all band exercises during full band rehearsal, make sure your equipment is in working condition, and create a percussion class and/or ensemble. Getting them involved in band exercises and activities, as well as devoting time to their instruction is crucial in a young percussionist's education.
Jessica Williams is the Instructor of Percussion at Alabama State University. She teaches private, applied lessons, prepares music education majors in the percussion methods course, coaches the ASU Percussion Ensemble, and is assistant director of the ASU Symphonic Band and Wind Ensemble.

Ms. Williams has performed with the Grammy award-winning quartet, Third Coast Percussion in a production of John Luther Adams’ Inuksuit at the Fayetteville Botanical Gardens in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She has performed with the Prizm Chamber Orchestra in Memphis, TN, the Contemporary Chamber Players, the University of Memphis Wind Ensemble, the University of Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and the University of Memphis Percussion Ensemble. Ms. Williams has also performed as a percussionist for the Little Mermaid and Newsies at the Desoto Family Theatre in Southaven, Mississippi. She collaborated with Dr. William Shaltis, Assistant Professor of Percussion at the University of Memphis, to have a performance of Inuksuit on April 22, 2018 at Shelby Farms in Memphis, TN. Ms. Williams currently performs with the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra in Montgomery, Alabama.

Ms. Williams is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Percussion Performance with a cognate in Wind Conducting at the University of Memphis. She is currently working on her dissertation, which will focus on the steel pan music of Andy Akiho with an emphasis on his Synesthesia Suite, his experience with synesthesia and the historical significance of the steel pan. She has received her Master of Music Performance from the University of Florida and her Bachelor of Music Education and a Bachelor of Music Performance from Alabama State University. Ms. Williams is sponsored by Sabian Cymbals and Tama-Bergerault Percussion.
TEN TIPS FOR FABULOUS SNARE DRUM FUNDAMENTALS

by Emily Tannert Patterson

1. The stick should be held about 1/3 of the way up from the butt end, primarily between the thumb and forefinger; the end joint of the thumb should align with the second joint on the forefinger, and the top of the thumb with the side of the first finger. This forms the fulcrum. The remaining fingers (“back fingers”) should wrap gently around the stick.

   *TIP:* Watch the thumb position - mistakes here can disrupt all aspects of playing.

2. The hand can be in either an open-palm (“open”) or closed-palm (“closed”) position. In the former, the stick will touch the fulcrum and back fingers only; in the latter, the stick should touch the palm as well, along the ridge of the hand. The position of the stick inside the palm should not change, regardless of technique, stick height, volume, etc., and the fulcrum and back fingers should always touch the stick.

   *TIP:* Students should never hold the stick so tightly that their knuckles turn white!

3. The drum should be set at a height about 3-4”, or about a hand’s span, below a student’s belly button.

   *TIP:* Have students put their hands flat on their stomachs, fingers together and thumb over the belly button, and walk up to the drum/pad to make sure it is the correct height – don’t let them ‘eyeball’ it.

4. The elbows should be relaxed, creating about a 110 degree angle between the upper arm and forearm. This allows the wrist full extension without creating tension.

   *TIP:* Tell students to make their forearms into “ski slopes!”

5. Students’ wrists should be about 1” above the height of the drum, such that the sticks are parallel to the floor if the tips are 1” above the head; the sticks will have a very slight downward angle when the tip hits the drum.

   *TIP:* Wrist that are too high will create too steep an angle when the stick hits the drum, leading to a loss in momentum, resulting in poor sound quality and reduced rebound.
6. The student's body should be at least 6-12” away from the drum.

   **TIP:** To judge a student’s distance from the drum, have the student put the tip of the stick in the center of the drum, and the butt end at their body. This will generally place them the correct distance from the drum.

7. The shoulders should be relaxed, and **the elbows even with and about 3” away from the upper body.** The feet should be shoulder width apart and weight evenly distributed. Students may want to place one foot slightly forward in order to tap the beat; this is fine as long as the student is stable and standing up straight and centered behind the drum.

   **TIP:** Look at the elbows - if they are ahead or behind the upper body, the student is the wrong distance from the drum.

8. When standing behind the drum, the palms should be nearly flat (parallel to the floor). **The tips of the sticks will form a 60-90 degree angle.** An angle that is too large or small indicates that the student’s arms are too close or too far away from the body, which will create tension that hinders playing. Because bodies come in all shapes and sizes, look for relaxation as an indicator of correct position. **If something looks strange or unusual, it's probably incorrect.**

   **TIP:** The elbows should be about a fist’s length away from the body. An easy way to visualize this is that there should be room for an extra set of arms between the elbow and the body. Students love thinking about having ‘alien arms’!

9. If a student is standing correctly (feet shoulder width apart, arms 2-3” away from the torso, about 12” away from the drum) and has the tips of the sticks in a correct position about 1” above the head (wrists and hands mostly flat, sticks at a 90 degree angle), the sticks and the student’s arms and torso should form the shape of a baseball/softball home plate.

   **TIP:** Have students bringing their sticks into “ready position” away from the drum or pad to help them learn to come to the right position, regardless of the height of the drum (which can be adjusted!). Be sure they’re standing with their backs to the drum, or they’ll subconsciously reference the drum/pad when practicing!

10. The stick should be primarily moved by the wrist. The wrist should move up and down in a manner similar to knocking on a door. While the arm and elbow may occasionally move as a result of a relaxed and natural stroke, in general the upper body and arm should be relaxed and still. The fingers will eventually assist in movement and rebound in quick passages, but should not be used to the move the stick outside of quick rebound work.

   **TIP:** Knocking on a table or drum pad without the sticks in hand can be a great way to show kids this motion!
Emily Tannert Patterson is a percussion educator, arranger, clinician, and consultant. She was previously the percussion director at the Rouse High School and Wiley Middle School, in Leander, TX, from 2015 till 2018, and was the percussion director at East View High School, Georgetown, TX from 2011 until 2015. Her ensembles have garnered numerous accolades including winning the 2016 PAS International Percussion Ensemble Contest, the 2014 TCGC Scholastic Concert Open championship, and the 2015 WGI Houston Regional Scholastic Concert World championship. While she was at Rouse, the marching band was a Texas State Finalist in 2017, and the wind ensemble performed at the Western International Band Conference in 2015.

Patterson holds a Master’s degree in Percussion Performance from The University of Texas at Austin, where she studied with Thomas Burritt and Tony Edwards. Patterson earned her Bachelor’s degree in Instrumental Studies, along with an undergraduate Performance Certificate in Percussion and her Texas teaching certificate, from UT in 2008, and received her Bachelor’s degree in Journalism and Political Science from Northwestern University in 2004.

Patterson marched with the Glassmen Drum and Bugle Corps in 2003 and was a member of the 2004 Winter Guard International world champion indoor drumline Music City Mystique. She is the chief judge for the Texas Educational Colorguard Association, and judges actively around the country.

Patterson is an educational endorser for Innovative Percussion sticks and mallets, Remo drumheads, and Zildjian cymbals. She holds professional memberships in the Texas Music Educators Association and the Percussive Arts Society, is a member of the Texas Color Guard Circuit Percussion Advisory Task Force, and serves on the PAS Education Committee.
For additional resources and information on beginning percussion, the Percussive Arts Society - Educators' Companion offers a diverse range of topics. The following articles have been selected from previous Educators’ Companions and highlight topics that non-percussionist band director’s might find helpful. You can find these articles on the Percussive Arts Society website (https://www.pas.org/resources/education/the-educators-companion) or by following additional links.

**VOLUME 1**

- Let’s Accessorize! Choosing Triangles and Tambourines for Your School Program, by Ben Stiers
- Percussion Repair 101, by Christopher Davis

**VOLUME 2**

- The Land of Misfit Toys: An Introduction to the Second Line of Accessory Percussion, by Benjamin Fraley
- #Musicianstoo: Developing the Musical Percussionist Through an Inclusive Warm-Up, by Brandon Arvay

**VOLUME 3**

- Basic Concepts for Teaching Crash Cymbals, by Jason Kihle

**VOLUME 4**

- Educator’s Guide to Sight-Reading on a Keyboard Instrument, by Oliver Molina
- Mastering Suspended Cymbal Rolls, by Joshua J. Knight
VOLUME 5

- Building Better Percussionists: A Curriculum to Advance Your Percussion Section Musically and Technically Year by Year: Part 1, by Scott Farkas

VOLUME 6

- 7 Things Band Directors Should know About Timpani, by Karlyn Vina
- Accessory Percussion Fundamentals: Crash Cymbals, Part One, by Tommy Dobbs
- Selecting Beginning Percussionist, by Emily Tannert Patterson
- Concert Bass Drum Fundamentals, by Joshua J. Knight

VOLUME 7

- Teaching Strategies for Beginner Steel Band: First Steps, by Cj Menge
- The Great Divide: Maximizing Your Percussion Section Full Daily Drill Time, by Ralph Hicks and Eric Rath