

UAB DRUMLINE

SNARE DRUM TECHNICAL GUIDE

Many of these details can be applied to other instruments as well (ie. right hand grip applies to both hands of tenor and bass drum grip). The stroke concepts described below will also apply across the battery, as well as the dynamic descriptors. More than anything use common sense!

Implement Grip

Right Hand:

- Thumb/Index finger connect approx. 1/3 from the bottom of the stick.
- Thumb is parallel with the stick (runs along the stick).
- Middle, ring, and pinky fingers are all wrapped naturally around the stick, while never completely leaving the stick when in motion.
- The butt of the stick should be slightly visible out the back of the hand.

Left Hand:

- Back of the stick should rest naturally in the “webby” connection between the thumb and index finger.
- Stick rests on the cuticle of the relaxed ring finger.
- Pinky rides relaxed underneath the ring finger, while avoiding unnecessary space between ring/pinky.
- Pad of the thumb should connect just to the left of the first knuckle on the index finger (connect roughly 1/3 up the stick).
- Avoid tension in both the first knuckle and the tip of the thumb.
- Middle finger naturally curves along the stick---AVOID straightening the finger or creating space between the middle and index fingers.
- Avoid straightening or opening fingers. Allow for a natural curvature of the fingers (Hand creates a “C” position from a top angle), but do not condense your hand!
- If it were to rain on the hand, water should be able land in the palm and roll off, rather than A) collecting in the palm, or B) not being able to land in your palm at all.
- The back of the hand should create an outward slope leading to the formation of a straight line from the forearm to the tip of the thumb---AVOID the back of hand being flush with the forearm.

Playing Position

Key Points:

- In order to achieve an ideal positioning over the drum, work from the beads of the stick backwards up to the shoulders.
- Generally, drum height is determined by the left forearm being SLIGHTLY angled downward, but will be adjusted on a case-by-case basis---this will affect your positioning on both right and left arms.
- The shoulders should be very relaxed to avoid translating tension while still maintaining correct posture (“soft shoulders”).
- From the shoulders to the bead should be “downhill” at all times.

Stick Positions:

- Beads are 1/2" apart, splitting the center of the drumhead.
- Beads are 1/2" above the center of the drumhead.
- Sticks should create a "∧" with an approximate 90-degree angle between them (slightly acute)
- On a Pearl 14" snare drum, the sticks should be approximately over the second tension rods on either side from the player's belly.
- The bottom of the sticks should be angled approx. two fingers above the outside portion of the top rim).

Right Hand Position:

- The right hand should be rotated slightly outward in relation to the drum, (The hand should not be completely flat to the drum [German grip], nor rotated completely vertical [French Grip], as these tend to hinder use of finger motion and wrist motion respectively).
- Right arm should be naturally draped down, but definitely not resting against the body---avoid pushing the elbow up creating unnecessary tension in the upper body.

Left Hand Position:

- Drop the left hand completely at the side of the body, relaxing the entire upper left arm---from this position bend at the elbow and place the stick over the defined position on the drum.
- Avoid pulling the elbow into the body, or pushing it outward.
- Left forearm should be roughly parallel with the drum.

Strokes

Key Points:

- Described in this section are the Full (Legato) and Down (Staccato) Strokes.
- Always lead the stroke from the bead of the stick.
- Right hand should be more of a hinge motion (rest your arm on a table and knock on it without picking up your arm; this is the primary motion of the right wrist).
- Left hand should rotate similar to turning a doorknob.
- The main focus for both hands is a wrist turn, but allow the wrist, fingers, and arms to work together to create a full/relaxed sound.
- When playing, the weight of the stick generally sits in the middle of the right hand (between the middle and ring fingers), and the "webby" portion of the left hand.
- Having the weight/rotation points further back in the hand (rather than the front finger fulcrums) enables us to achieve a fuller sound while focusing on the proper wrist rotation.
- Minimize the amount of "human interference," allow each stroke to be as efficient as possible.
- If the stick is held tightly, the natural vibrations and resonance of the stick are "choked off," resulting in a very thin quality of sound.
- Consequently, the shock of an improper stroke into the drum will be transferred directly into the player's hands and forearms---potentially resulting in unnecessary injury.
- Always let the stick "breathe" in the hands.

Legato/Full Stroke:

- Think "8 on a hand"
- Sticks start and stop at the same point, letting the stick "bounce" back naturally.
- Goal is to allow the rebound to "do the work"
- Rebound should be the same speed as the initial movement (don't stop it!)
- Avoid letting the stick hit the back of the hand, which stops the motion.

Staccato/Down Strokes:

- Think “tap accents”
- Should sound the same as full strokes, and feel the same prior to hitting the drum.
- Once contact is made with the drum, the difference between full and down strokes is the stopping of the wrist motion, which prevents the stick from rebounding to the initial height.
- Avoid squeezing the fingers to stop the motion.

Dynamics

- We use a dynamic system that includes specific heights---this makes it easier to understand visually, while helping to create uniformity.
- We strive to have a consistent approach to the drum regardless of heights/dynamics.
- In general, consistency of heights dictate volume, however the music is the ultimate factor in defining volume (there will be situations in which players are asked to play a phrase stronger or lighter than normal for musical expression).
- Additional arm is added above 20”
- The sticks will never travel past vertical but will be higher in the air because of the arm extension above 20”

Approximate Heights

- ppp 1” (grace notes)
- pp 2” (For more delicate passages)
- p 3” (common inner beat height)
- mp 6”
- mf 9”
- f 12”
- ff 16” (sticks vertical)
- Above 20” will be specifically defined for visual effect.

How you feel when you drum

- Relaxed!
- Strong!
- Confident!
- Let the sticks feel “heavy” inside your hands---let the weight do the work.
- The stronger a player you are and the more “chops” you possess, the more efficient you become, hence the more relaxed you will be.
- Learning to breathe naturally while playing anything regardless of difficulty will result in a more relaxed, healthy sound and approach.
- If in doubt, **listen** to what you are playing in order to correct issues.
- If you aren’t having fun, you’re doing it wrong!!!

* For educational purposes, some material in this packet is borrowed from The Spirit of Atlanta and Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps audition information packets.