



# Snare Drum Technique For The Non-Percussionist

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Developing and maintaining technical proficiency is a life-long endeavor of any musician. Therefore, it is fair to say that a core construct of musicianship is technique. Moreover, teaching technique is a challenge for any experienced music educator; especially if it pertains to an instrument that is not in one's realm of expertise. Thus, as a means to assist the music educator who is not a trained percussionist, the objective of this article is to outline the foundations of technical development for the beginning snare drum student.

## *Materials*

Students who are beginning their study do not require a snare drum to practice. Any standard practice pad is more than adequate to address their needs. As it pertains to sticks, a student can be left to choose a pair that best meets his/her hand size; hence, what feels most comfortable in his/her hand. But, if a student is unsure what to pick, a size 2B or 5B would be appropriate for most students; the thickness of either model can aid a student as he/she develops the fundamentals of how to hold a stick.

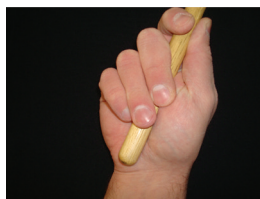
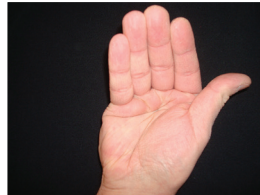
A method book is a personal choice of the instructor based upon one's experience and pedagogical approach. Furthermore, there are many fine methods available to the profession, but there are a few areas one may wish to consider when deciding upon a particular method book. First, most students, who do not study privately, will only use one method during their course of study. Therefore, it would be prudent to choose one that will cover the most common rhythmic patterns one will perform throughout high school; to choose a method that addresses numerous time signatures; and one that addresses the most common

drum rudiments. Additionally, due to the various needs of students, it may be beneficial to choose a method that is simplistic in its structure, thereby, allowing the instructor to coordinate the method with his/her pedagogical approach; thus, alleviating any confusion for the student.

## *How To Hold The Sticks*

There are two grips used to perform on the snare drum: Traditional Grip and Matched Grip. This article will focus on Matched Grip for a few reasons: first it is easier to master and is less complicated to teach, particularly for one who is not a trained percussionist. Secondly, Matched Grip is universal, in that it permits the student to naturally transfer to performing mallets and timpani.

There are three parts to the drum stick: the butt, shaft and tip. Before having the student place the stick into his/her hand, have the student cup his/her hand with the palm facing up. Doing so, will cause a crease in the middle of the palm; this is where the butt of the stick should be placed (Ex. 1). Next, have the student align his/her thumb and index finger on each side of the stick; following, have the student take his/her middle finger and come across the stick and touch his/her palm. It is these three fingers which control the stick; thereby, making the stick an extension of one's arm (Ex. 2).

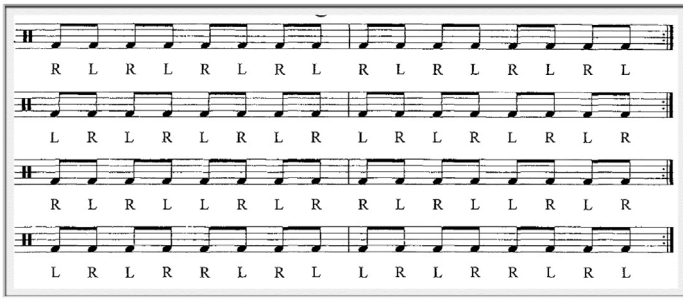


## *Striking The Drum*

The drum should be kept flat and/or level at approximately the student's waist, thus, enabling the student to have a natural bend at the elbow of a little more than 90°. When striking the drum, the student should aim to strike the drum head just above or below the center of the drum. Moreover, the tips of the sticks should be parallel to each other, ensuring that one stick is never above the other. Before the student strikes the drum, he/she should keep his/her wrists bent up ready to play. Next, have the student envision his/her hands like a See-Saw; as one hand is delivering the stick to the drum, the other is up, and vice-versa as the other begins to strike the drum. When striking the drum, the student's palm should be toward the floor, and as the stick hits the drum head, the student should never pull the stick away from the drum. Instead, the stick should be delivered and allowed to rebound; much like throwing a ball.

## *Sticking Exercises*

In the 1930's, George Lawrence Stone devised a series of rhythmic exercises that he developed into a book entitled, "Stick Control". Still in print, the purpose of this book was to refine the technical skill of the student by developing his/her strength, endurance and fluidity of motion through the art of rebounding the stick. The exercises presented are various rhythmic patterns that specify when either hand is to play. Since the creation of "Stick Control", there have been many other methods that incorporate this concept. Furthermore, it is a concept that any teacher can easily create and implement with his/her students to address their needs (Ex. 3).



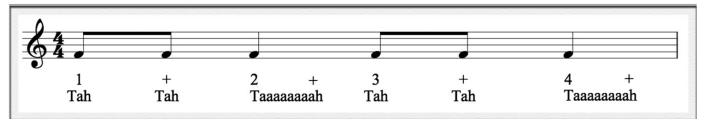
Students tend to forget aspects of what has been modeled and/or discussed in their lessons. Thus, to gain the most out of a sticking exercise, begin by having the student perform it slowly and loud; remind the student of the placement of the butt of the stick and how it is an extension of one's arm; remind the student of the placement of his/her fingers and that they may need to slightly pinch them to control the stick; and remind the student of the See-Saw Motion while performing the exercises. Doing such has a number of benefits: first, it permits the student to study his/her hands to ensure that proper position and technique is being put into practice; secondly, performing in this manner assists in developing the student's muscle memory and hand strength; third, once the aforementioned is adequately demonstrated, the student can begin to increase the tempo of the exercises and focus on the task of rebounding the stick; again remind the student of delivering the stick much like throwing a ball.

### *Timing and Rhythmic Feel*

The most common expectation of a percussion section, is that they perform rhythms accurately and in time. Unfortunately, developing an understanding of timing, and how rhythmic patterns correspond, is difficult to teach, let alone understand by the student. Hence, it is developed over time, for it is a concept that is not ascertained through lecture and demonstration, but through practice until it is internally and instinctively felt. However, there are steps one can employ to cultivate a student's understanding. First, have the student count the down beats aloud at the start. Second, once a student begins his/her study of eighth notes, have the student count aloud while constantly subdividing the down and up beats. In addition to subdividing aloud, incorporate the use of a metronome. Thus, by instituting the use of a metronome at this stage, students can correlate the difference between up and down beats, especially when setting the metronome to click on every eighth note. Furthermore, some students find it beneficial when the instructor taps on their shoulder; thereby, allowing him/her to internalize the metric pulse and/or rhythmic pattern.

Along with developing the concepts of timing and rhythmic feel, is the ability of the student to correlate the aforementioned when following a conductor. This topic is a technical skill and/or art form itself. Percussionists who experience difficulty following a conductor will often confuse what they hear, to the ictus of the conductor's baton. This can be further compounded by the student's lack of understanding as it pertains to conducting patterns.

Thus, incorporating rhythmic solfeggio into the lesson can help the student to correctly interpret, and accurately perform under a conductor. Additionally, rhythmic solfeggio can be beneficial to all students, not just to those who are studying percussion. To begin, have the student count aloud and clap a given rhythmic exercise; again, making sure that the student is always subdividing. Following this, have the student vocalize the exercise by saying *Taah* for each note. While vocalizing the exercise have the student clap on every down beat, even if it is a rest. Thereby, forcing the student to count in his/her head. Once this has been mastered, have the student vocalize the exercise again, but instead of clapping on the down beats, have the student conduct to the corresponding time signature. In turn, the student can now correlate how the pattern, and the ictus of said pattern, define where the down beats lie (Ex. 4).



### *Closing Thoughts*

This article is the first in a series that is specifically for the instructor who is not a trained percussionist. The suggestions provided is this author's interpretation of how to best teach and employ the above. Therefore, experiment with them and make it your own; and if possible, seek the advice of a colleague who is a trained percussionist. Lastly, please feel free to contact me if you have any thoughts or questions through my website at: [www.zarropercussion.com](http://www.zarropercussion.com).

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