



# Davis High School Membership and Technique Manual

2020-2021

# 2018 DAVIS HIGH SCHOOL PERCUSSION SECTION MEMBERSHIP AND TECHNIQUE MANUAL

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# INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in the Davis High School Percussion Section. We here at Davis we pride ourselves on creating a fun, friendly atmosphere where you can become a better percussionist while becoming a better person.

This manual is designed to explain how we do things here at Davis, what will be expected of you should you be offered a position with the ensemble, and will outline a lot of the information you need to be successful.

I'd first like to take a minute to discuss an issue I've seen in the past, and that is people cutting themselves before our staff has a chance to really get to know you. I beg you not to assume you aren't good enough for our ensemble. What you may see as a group of extremely talented performers who currently play better than you can imagine yourself playing is more than likely not accurate. Realize that most of our members started out at a very basic level and work hard, show up each practice ready to learn and therefor achieve what you see as the end result.

It's a long process to achieve success, please do not give up before you've even started. We'd rather have a young, inexperienced performer who's ready to work hard and give everything they have, than a rock star who will coast throughout the year and not do their best to make the group as a whole better. When you've been around the activity enough, you'll quickly learn that the "rock stars" who end up performing with world class ensembles are those students who started out at the bottom and worked as hard as they could until they reached the top.

Show up to clinics, auditions, and rehearsals ready to learn and we'll see to it that you reap the rewards of your hard work and dedication.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

## WHAT WE LOOK FOR IN A MEMBER

Obviously, the ability of a potential member to play their instrument is an important part of the audition process. However, beyond skill level there are many things we look for in a member.

- Our ideal member shows up on time (early) to rehearsals with all of the material prepared. They understand that learning material happens at home. Cleaning and perfecting material happens in the rehearsal.
- An ideal members leaves their ego at the door and understands that the staff has the ensemble's best interest in mind with every decision made. Though they may disagree on occasion, they are willing to put that aside for the benefit of the ensemble.
- An ideal member is willing to make changes when asked, and keep those changes throughout the season. Nothing can be more frustrating than doing the same thing over and over again without seeing any improvement. It is important that we are always improvement, and avoid regressing once things are fixed.
- An ideal member has a positive attitude and always looks for way to bring positive energy to rehearsal. Drama and negativity are cancers among a group that spends so much time together. A good member is a good person, with a genuine degree of interest in the well-being of the other performers in the ensemble.
- An ideal member brings potential issue to the attention of the staff as soon as they arise. This allows us to correct any problems before they have a chance to bring negativity and dissension to the group.
- An ideal member will make sacrifices for the ensemble. Whether that be the sacrifice of playing an instrument other than your primary choice, or the sacrifice of giving up an hour of sleep to perfect that difficult passage of music, or making space in your busy academic schedule, we need your dedication. Everyone, including your staff, is making a sacrifice to be here. A great member will keep everyone else in mind when deciding how much effort to put forth.

I hope we've made it clear that the ability to march and play are only one of many factors in our selection process. If you exhibit most or all of the attributes listed above, we have no doubt we can teach you to be a great drummer.

# THE BASICS

## PREPARATION

Here are some very basic things to keep in mind regarding clinics, auditions, and rehearsals.

1. Place this packet in a 3-ring binder and always have it with you. All of your music should be in here as well.
2. Bring a pencil to every rehearsal.
3. Begin memorizing your music as soon as you get it.
4. Wear comfortable clothes and athletic shoes to every rehearsal. Be ready to march at ANY time.
5. ALWAYS practice with a metronome!
6. Bring a great and positive attitude.
7. Eat well before a rehearsal. Don't load up on junk food before or during rehearsal.
8. Bring water to every rehearsal. We recommend at least a half-gallon size jug so you do not have to refill it frequently throughout the day.
9. If you aren't sure what to do... ask.

## TIPS FOR PRACTICING AT HOME

1. Keep a journal of things you need to work on. This could include spots you know you struggle with, but should also include areas of the music staff members have commented on. Identifying your problems is the first step to fixing them. Once you know what you need to fix, set goals for your practice that will allow you to achieve the desired result.
2. Practice at pace that allows you to eliminate mistakes and errors. If you struggle with a passage, slow it down, then begin to work it back up once the slower tempo is right.
3. Practice small sections of music. Be sure to start with the sections you struggle with the most, try one measure or one beat at a time. There isn't nearly as much to gain from rehearsing music you're already good at.
4. Always use a metronome. Consider experimenting with taking away subdivisions so that the met becomes a check point and not a crutch. It is also helpful to practice exercises to music with a steady tempo (maybe dance/ electronica) so that you get used to playing your instrument in a musical setting. Notice how your part ebbs and flows with the music happening around it.
5. Use a mirror, and film yourself often. A mirror will allow you to see and correct issues as they happen. Video allows you to see yourself perform without the demand of having to perform. This allows you to focus 100% of your energy on noticing issues in your playing that can be corrected. Slow the video down if at all possible.

6. Mark time, when applicable. If you know drill and body movement, try to incorporate that into the feet when you practice.
7. Have a towel handy when practicing. Placing a towel over your pad can force you not to rely on rebound, and can teach you a lot about your playing. Start with two layers of towel, at a slow tempo. Build up the speed, then remove a layer of towel and start over. Once that's good, play on your drum or pad and notice how your hand reacts on the different surfaces.
8. Split your hands. Break down tougher passages by isolating each hand. Consider "cloning" each hand (play the right hand part as double stops and vice-versa) to ensure both hands move the same way. Once you've spent time breaking something down, remember to put it back into context.

## INSTRUMENT CARE AND MAINTANANCE

Care and maintenance of our expensive instruments is a daily concern. Instruments will be checked and cared for before each rehearsal and performance. A simple check of all working parts before practice can help us save lots of time and money in repairs! There will always be an "Instrument Maintenance Box" with common items needed for an emergency repair. Notify a staff member if you encounter any problems and we will be happy to assist you. All of our instruments have specific covers that must be on at all times, unless being played (battery covers remain on except for performance). Covers protect keys, heads, and hardware from dust and damage and keep them out of the sun.

Front ensemble members will be assigned a mallet bag in which all of your mallets must be stored and carried.– remember that mallets are very expensive and when used incorrectly are very easy to break. The front ensemble will have its own cymbal bag. All cymbals used on individual instruments will be placed in the cymbal bag while not in rehearsal.

## INSTRUMENT TRANSPORTATION

Here are some general tips on how to transport your instruments – remember that improper handling of your instrument can lead to major damage and injury to you or another person!

1. Check wing nuts and support bars BEFORE moving! Tighten anything that is loose.
2. Pull; do not push, over bumps, tall grass, and gravel. Lift and pull over small curbs. Pushing over these terrains and bumps causes undue pressure to the frame which will warp over time.
3. Move timpani by the struts, not the rims.
4. On smooth surfaces, it is best to push from the big end, and even better to have a person on each end. To avoid tipping, push lengthwise (low to high) not sideways (middle).
4. Protect the gear – the instruments are not a table! Do not stack items on the bars or heads for easy transportation. We have several carts, cases, and bags to store things in properly.
5. It is important to be efficient, but there is never so much of a hurry that damage to instruments or injuries to people should occur.
6. When loading equipment into the trailer, make sure all wheeled equipment is properly strapped down. We have plenty of ratchet straps, if you find we need more, let a staff member know.
7. Battery gear should be securely stored inside the cases. Be careful not to blow heads, or ruin stick bags when sliding drums into their casess. Remember, if it isn't tied down, it can hurt someone or something in the trailer!
8. Make sure your section has spare sticks, heads, mallets, etc... in the trailer whenever we leave the school.

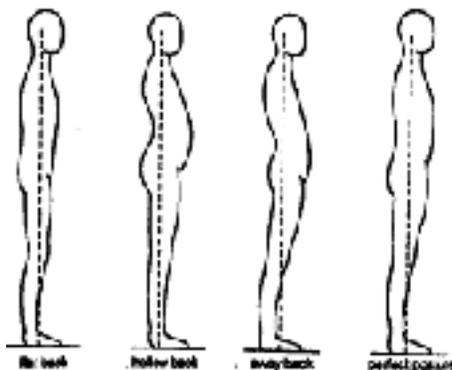
## THE BATTERY

Most of our technique is a compromise to gain the most benefit from a variety standpoints, there really is no “right” or “wrong” technique, as an individual percussionist you need to find what is right for you. However, as a drumline one of our main goals is uniformity. So we all must embrace the technique as our own in order to succeed as a team, I think you will find by learning a technique you may not already know it will inform you of something weak or strong about your own technique and therefore grow as a musician.

## THE GRIP

With the way we hold our sticks we always want to start in the most relaxed position possible, the way you stand or sit is where it all starts. You know what they say about foundations?

Stand with a great posture, you want to make sure your hips aren't rolled backwards or forwards, as this can affect the entire alignment of your body. If there is strain somewhere in your body the rest of your body tends to compensate and add stress or tension elsewhere, this is why great posture is so important.



The next step is to roll your shoulders out and set them in a relaxed position away from your ears, this is a common problem for drumline members due in part to the fact that the weight of the drum rests there from the carrier. This is something worth checking out periodically throughout the season, the shoulder bone is connected to the what?

Short of focusing on a great posture make sure the rest of your body should be very relaxed, by starting with this base level we can be sure that tension elsewhere is not creeping into the way we drum.

With a completely relaxed arm and hand you should have something that looks like this:

The rest of the grip will be based on the “total relaxation” position, by basing all of what we do on a relaxed approach we gain a lot of benefit. First, we eliminate any type of tension that could lead to future injury. Second, by being relaxed in the first place our sound production will come more naturally. When you use the technique properly it's easy to get a great sound out of your instrument.

Note that the wrist isn't bent upwards or forced downwards, this should be maintained as you raise your hand to the instrument, if this is not true you will have tension in your technique before you even play a note.



By looking at the hand we can see that the fingers are more or less straighter than they are curled, and the rest of the grip will be based around this by making only minor modifications. Did I mention tension is bad?

### MATCHED GRIP (Right Hand for Snare Drummers)

Let's start with our right hand in our newly found relaxed position, gently place the stick into your hand so the friction from the bottom of your palm and index finger hold the stick up. Like this:



Note that we are still trying to remain as relaxed as possible, the thumb isn't yet touching the stick and no fingers are wrapped around the stick.



Now wrap the bottom 3 fingers around the stick gently:

Throughout the process you should find that all of these adjustments to your fingers, wrist, etc. are minimal, we want the relaxed position to resemble our grip as much as possible.

At any given point while you hold the stick if someone were to run up and try to take your stick out of your hand it should be very easy for them due to how relaxed you are.



Now we touch the thumb to the stick:

This is the basic breakdown of our matched grip, this applies to the Snare drums right hand, the quads, single toms, and bass drums.

By holding the stick very loosely it should ring as you play, this is very easy to detect on a practice pad. Try playing with a very loose grip and listen to the sound of the drumstick's "hum," no grip it really tight and listen. Do you hear a difference?

By having a "hum" in our sound the drumhead will be able to vibrate more freely and therefore create a much better sound, this is something that is distinct about our sound and is quite easy to hear in professional level players if you know what to listen for.

\*\* we want to hold the drumstick about a third of the way up the stick leaving about an inch from the butt of the drumstick outside the back of our grip.

### **Some checkpoints to help you with the specifics of the grip:**



This is how the stick should lay across your hand there are some variations out there that are a bit common, by having the stick positioned this way we can take advantage of the back fingers for speed and the thumb and index finger for a great fulcrum.

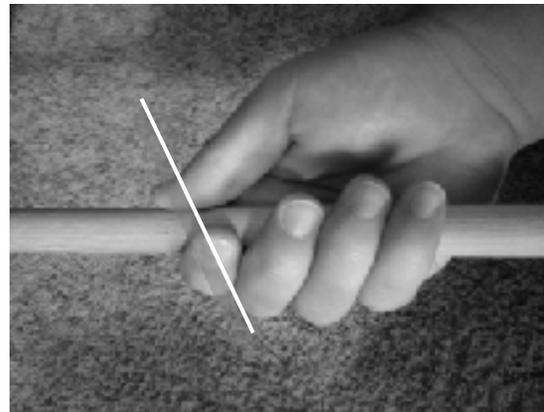
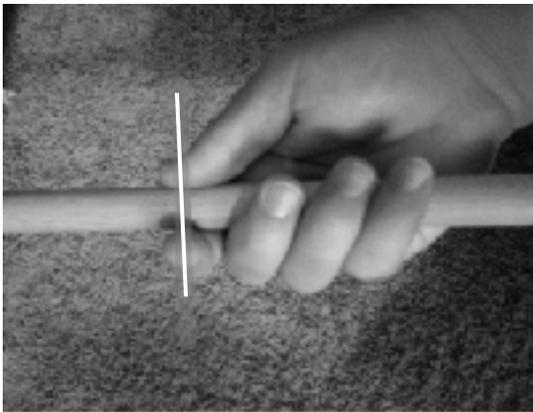
Here are some wrong ways:



As  
you

can see above there are improper ways to place the stick, let's talk about the possible disadvantages to these variations. On the left you see the stick stays too close to the fingers, this will take away most of your useful ability to use fingers in your technique to gain more speed and finesse. On the right you see the stick crossing the life line in your palm instead of the heart line; this technique implies too much finger and takes away from your ability to play very loudly without causing strain.

## THE FULCRUM



As you

can see there is a specific vertical position on the stick we want to see the thumb in, it's very common to see players with the picture on the right their personal choice. There is good and bad to this version, first by using this version your thumb and index finger form the fulcrum which allows for speedy singles and the like. However by using this method there tends to be more squeeze or more strain in the grip at the fulcrum level, remember how we want to work to eliminate tension?

May I present to you the picture on the left? Note how the tip of the thumb is even with the tip of the index finger, by choosing this fulcrum you gain all the benefits of the other one but now the pressure is spread in a triangle between the thumb, index, and middle finger. Now we have a fulcrum where you can push with the index, and pull with the middle. Now we have a fulcrum that puts less strain on the fingers and accomplishes the same thing, I call it the 3-point fulcrum or the triangle fulcrum. Also note that when using this fulcrum the index finger is allowed to relax off the stick a bit eliminating even more tension, at times when the dynamics, tempo, and writing demands it we can very easily switch to wrapping the index all the way around to have a more firm fulcrum, but this is context dependent and will be talked about when the time comes. \*\* If you dislike words and reading: left picture is good, right picture is bad.

## THUMB PLACEMENT



As you can see above both of these

pictures depict wrong thumb placement, the picture on the left is fairly uncommon but happens from time to time. Putting your thumb in this position can change the basic function of your fulcrum forcing you to put more downward energy into the drum and should be avoided. The picture on the right depicts a very common problem; by putting the thumb below the stick you open a gap in your grip allowing for an awkward situation if something goes wrong and the stick gets knocked into the webbing of your thumb and index. This placement also puts an excess of pressure on the side of your thumb where there is less padding in the flesh before you hit bone, which can be dangerous for your hand and cause a weird callous. \*\* it is however worth mentioning that the picture on the right is not all bad, in fact "the gap" is very common amongst great drum set, and concert percussion playing when the stick or implement you are using is significantly thinner than a marching implement. Generally these players still put the center of their thumb on the center of the implement.



The picture on the left shows proper placement of the thumb, once aging placing the thumb centered on the drumstick eliminates extra tension in our technique. Think about leaving a really clean thumbprint for the FBI when your international criminal days really take off.

## TRADITIONAL GRIP



Just like before we want to relax our hand and let it relax by our side, the whole idea is to recreate the feeling of relaxation in our grip. This is not only important when building our grip and technique it's also important when we move the grip, this can be an easy detail to forget however if you consider that your hand has to move to move the drumstick you'll realize that a relaxed state even in motion is absolutely a big deal.



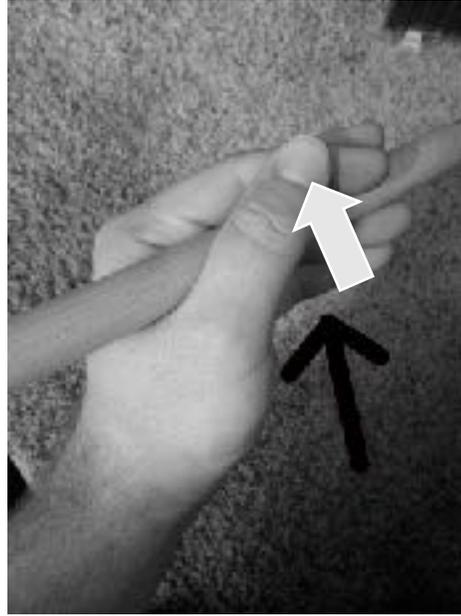
As you can see we want to insert the stick into the webbing between the thumb and index finger, curl the other fingers around the stick to resemble holding a tiny cup. The ring finger will support the underside of the stick on the cuticle or right in between the cuticle and the third joint, the pinky curls to resemble that of the ring finger and will function as "one finger" together.

The Index finger will curl over the stick in a "captain hook" fashion and will point at your belly button when you hold the grip in place, the thumb will contact the index finger at the third joint with the center of your thumb print, and finally the middle finger will curl just outside the grip on top of the stick.



Notice the two pictures above: on the left my thumb is pressing down on the stick and my index too hard, remember

that relaxation thing we talked about? This added tension may reassure the beginning player that the stick won't move out of their hand or otherwise, but only takes away from the flexibility and dexterity of the grip. On the right is another common traditional grip problem where the thumb is too curled over the stick and not touching the index finger in the correct place, I imagine the goal here is the same, to not drop the stick or let it move around. This just adds a different type of pressure and tension we do not want.



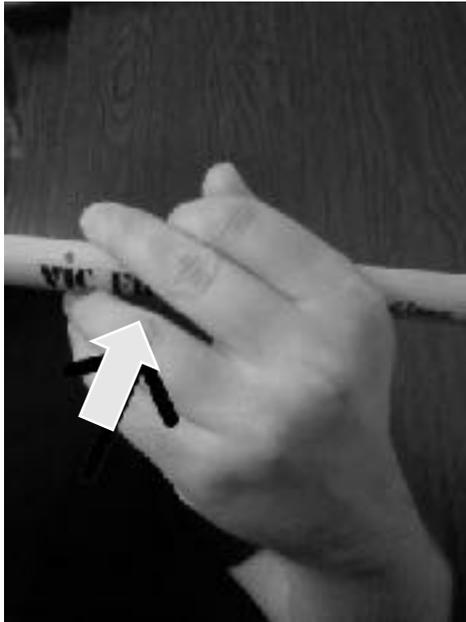
Above is two more pictures of undesired examples, on the left the stick crosses over the

index knuckle which can cause joint injury and pain if the stick isn't in the deepest part of the webbing between your thumb and index finger. On the right the back of the stick is in the correct part of the webbing however the fingers are too long along the stick, this can limit flexibility as well as sound. This is a technique more akin to concert and jazz styles of playing and will not suit our needs for and even sound on a marching instrument.



As seen her is the correct shape for your grip, notice that my fingers are curled to increase rotation flexibility and the stick is in the deepest part of the webbing. This will create a little gap of air in your grip between the base of your index finger and the stick due to the fact that the "tips" of your index finger and middle finger are what contacts to top of the stick, this is another effort to increase flexibility as well as control. The tips of your fingers are the most dexterous part of your hands thus the most control can be derived from those areas.

It's worth noting that this tip of the finger placement on the stick is commonly different from some marching schools of thought, in these schools the index finger wraps over the stick more and the pad in between the third and second knuckle is where the stick crosses, I've found this limits some of the more subtle control things we will employ, as well as flexibility to some degree. The more flexibility we have the more relaxed we can be instead of "forcing" the technique to look the same but create long term injury.



two

Above you see more pictures, on

the left is a common problem where the fingers are spread across the stick too much resulting in a gap between the middle and ring fingers; although even some professionals have this element in their technique it is not what we desire. I find that this gap creates tension on the lower two fingers and possible long term injury. We want to remove all these little incidents of tension in our technique, by doing so we increase natural flexibility in the rotating of the grip and therefor the more relaxed we are the more we can drum.

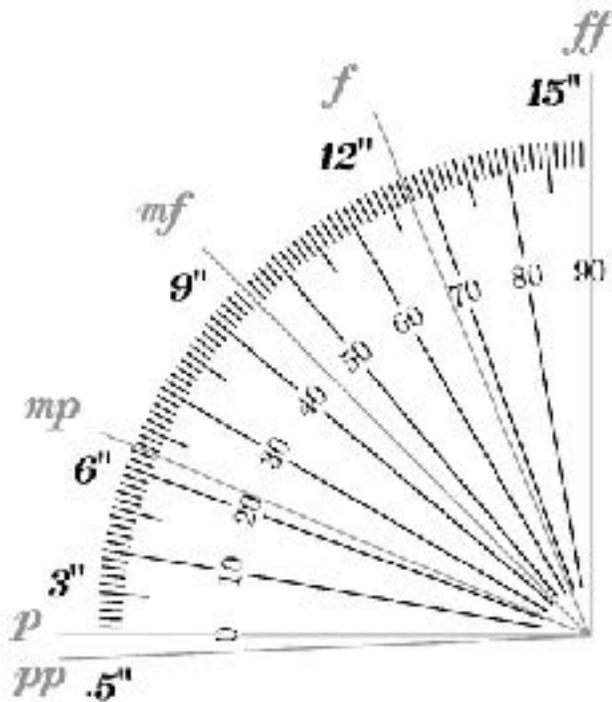
On the right you see the opposing problem, the grip is too curled. Not pictured very well is that the stick rests between the second and third knuckle in the ring finger; this is common in other styles of playing however when I see players with this approach they tend to have a hard time with more subtle control of lower dynamics and down strokes. Yes, initially resting the stick on the cuticle hurts a bit while you get used to it however you are sacrificing a lot in the ways of controlling the stick.



Pictured here is the desired arrangement, note that there isn't a gap between the ring and middle fingers and the stick rests on the ring finger cuticle. When all the guidelines are followed you'll find the grip lines up nicely, the whole approach is to put our hands into a state of relaxation while still having the required tools for control.

With larger hands there can be adjustments made: leaving a little gap between the middle and ring finger as well as widening the gap between the base of the index finger and stick. These adjustments however will be made on a case by case basis in person; we will look at your hands and body to try to help you find the most ergonomically correct approach for you. Relaxation creates the best sound and lets you drum far into the rest of your life without injury.

## DYNAMICS



Pictured here is our guide to dynamics in the marching percussion section, the dynamics will be referred to in one of 3 ways: First we will refer to the dynamics by their Italian name, piano, mezzo piano, etc.

Second we will refer to the dynamics by their angle created by the drumstick or implement in relation to the playing surface of the instrument. We tilt the snare drums here so keep in mind that the angle of the instrument affects the height or angle of the stick respectively, just keep in mind for snare and bass drum 0 degrees is perpendicular to the playing surface.

Using the degree system is the most accurate way to align the heights in a battery percussion section, the path of the drumstick travels in a curve so using the inch system is in practice

quite inaccurate measuring the distance traveled by the bead required some more complicated math and in reality 12" is actually around 15" and change. This is assuming your fulcrum never moves in relation to the playing surface. See the problem? Using degrees is a slightly more complicated way to think of stick heights, but infinitely more accurate overall.

Third, and most common way to refer to dynamics is by using inch measurements, like I've said above this is actually inaccurate due to the fact the bead of the stick travels in a curve. However this is the most common so I've provided the inch equivalents to the system we will use, just keep in mind that it is an imperfect system and if you actually measured with a ruler most of the inch measurements' do not line up with the angle measurements. The angle measurements are the actual system we will use.

3" is however the measurement we will line up with zero degrees, when the stick is at zero degrees and the bead and butt of the stick is 3" away and perpendicular to the playing surface we are at the piano height. This is the distance at which our wrists should be "set" from our instrument.

At the Forte, Double Forte, and Triple Forte dynamics there is an incremental increase of arm added to the technique. The smallest being Forte and the largest amount being triple Forte etc Mezzo Forte and below will generally employ only wrist turn to create these Dynamics.

Double piano is our set position, a great way to find this is to find the piano dynamic and lower the beads of the stick to .5" or below zero degrees.

# THE FRONT ENSEMBLE

## APPROACHING THE KEYBOARD

Great performance begins with great posture. Before you even play a note, the audience is making judgements based on the way you look behind your instrument. You should convey a sense of maturity, confidence, and dignity.

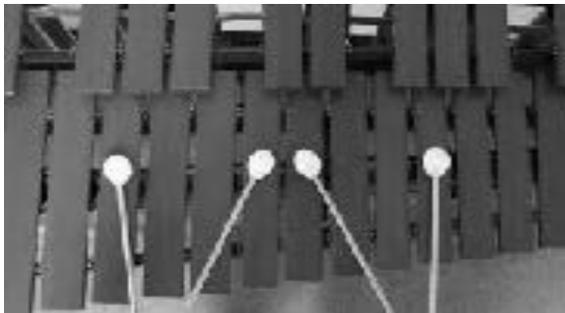
- Keep your feet a shoulder width apart. Relax your knees and keep your back straight. Do not cross your legs to travel up and down the board.
- Stand as tall as possible, your body should be upright with your shoulders back slightly. Keep your head up and look down at the keyboard over your nose.
- Upper arms should be relaxed and hang down from the shoulder without tension. Do not stand up against the board – your pockets can dampen the keys and this leaves your arm and elbow in an awkward and incorrect position for playing. Take a small step back so that your arms can stay in a natural position.

Vibe players will need one foot forward for pedaling. You only need to use your toes, this will help keep your balance and prevent over-pedaling.

## INSTRUMENT HEIGHT

It is important to set your instrument at a height that is appropriate for you. Your forearms should be angled slightly down when you're in the playing position. If your instrument is too low, your forearm angle will be too severe, and will limit your wrist turn. Find a height that gives you maximum range of motion in your wrist, allowing the mallet to strike the bar flat, rather than at an angle.

## MALLET PLACEMENT



Playing zones should be near the middle of the bars whenever possible.



For passages that require more movement and speed, you may need to strike the middle of the bar for naturals and the edge for sharps and flats. When playing on the edge of the bar, try to play on the angle of the bar, as though you were slicing your mallet in half.

## SHIFTING

Shifting is the movement from one tone bar to another. Shifting should occur on the upstroke. As your mallet rebounds, it should move in a smooth arc and stop directly over the next bar to be struck.

## TWO MALLET TECHNIQUE

A large portion of our technique program will focus on playing with two mallets. This is the foundation of our technique and sound development. We will always begin our warm up sequence with two mallets to establish solid fundamentals and focus on the following:

- The mallet is supported throughout the fingers. Do not squeeze or put pressure in the front or the back of the hand.
- The mallet should rest on the first knuckle of your index finger. Set your thumb on top very lightly with minimal pressure. These two fingers serve to “aim” your mallet.
- The back of the mallet should be able to move slightly between the back fingers and the palm of the hand. Your back fingers should not be “loose”, nor should they choke off the mallet motion. The amount of firmness in the back of your hand should allow you to feel like you are transferring weight into the bar. This will enable you to produce a full, dark sound.
- About two inches of the mallet shaft should stick out behind the hand.
- Wrists should be positioned very low to the instrument, the mallet head should be up high.
- Hands should angle in slightly, and not facing down completely flat (like German grip), not turned completely in (like French grip). Your first knuckle on your index finger should be on top.
- Every stroke is initiated from the WRIST. Not the FINGERS, Not the ARM. THE WRIST.
- Your stroke is generated exclusively by the wrist, however, it is important to remember that you should not restrain the natural movement of your arm in response to the turn of your wrist.

## THE STROKE

Unless otherwise specified, we use the piston stroke. This stroke has no noticeable prep before the stroke and no extra lift after the rebound. By eliminating extra movement, we create a more efficient and accurate stroke. Your mallet will always start and stop in the same place. The piston stroke requires a downstroke that accelerates and an upstroke that decelerates. Your mallet path should be straight up and down.

## FOUR MALLET TECHNIQUE

Our four mallet technique will be Stevens grip for marimbas and vibes. This allows all four mallets to move independently of each other and the mallets will not cross. This grip can give you physical problems when played incorrectly, so it is important that you understand how to correctly hold the mallets, the role of each finger and basic strokes. We approach four mallets with the same values as two mallet technique - remember to focus on solid fundamentals and producing the same sound you create with two mallets.

Your index finger acts as a table top for the inside mallet to rest on. It should point across your body, not into it. It should have a relaxed, natural curve to it.

Your thumb forms a fulcrum with the index finger by holding and aiming the mallet. Its only role is keeping the mallet from sliding off the table (your index finger). Keep both of these fingers  
RELAXED!



Your middle finger is “the spiderman”. This finger bends into your palm and makes contact with the mallet shaft where it touches your palm. Its role is to keep the mallet shaft in contact with your palm with minimal tension. This is shown to the right.



Your ring and pinky fingers wrap around the outside mallet to keep the mallet in place. This is their only role. They should be held firm enough so that the outside mallet does not droop. This is shown to the left.

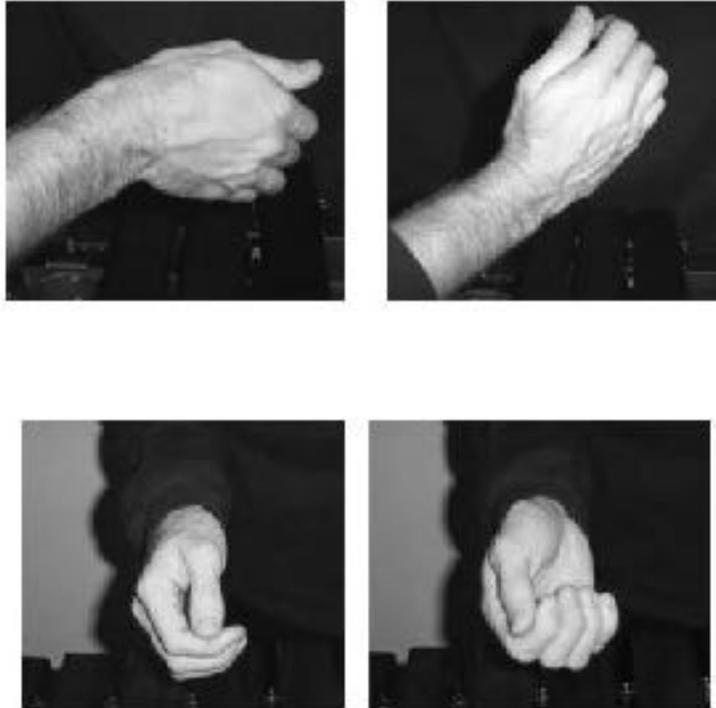


Your wrist should be in a handshaking position with your thumb facing the ceiling. This is shown to the right.

## THE STROKE

With four mallet technique, two choices exist for strokes. When both mallets in your hand play together this is called a double stop or double vertical stroke. When only one mallet plays this is called single independent or rotation stroke. Any other type of stroke is a combination of these two choices. Only two motions are required to complete these:

Wrist it: main stroke production comes from your wrist vertically lifting both mallets at the same time. Your thumb should stay pointed toward the ceiling and your hand will move straight up and down (see below).



Twist it: in order to lift only one mallet in your hand, you need to rotate your wrist like you're turning a door knob. Main stroke production comes from turning your wrist itself, not the thumb and index finger. The axis for rotation will be the non-playing mallet (see above).

## SOUND, BALANCE, AND BLEND

We will spend a lot of time perfecting your technical skills, but it is important to remember that your technique is only a means to creating sound and music. As a percussionist, there are several components to creating sound. Practice requires constant awareness of these components to the sound you produce.

- Duration: The sound you produce can be short (dry) or long (wet). The tighter you grip the mallet into the palm of the hand, the drier the sound will become. As your grip relaxes, the mallet will resonate more and increase the duration of your sound.
- Timbre: The color of the sound you produce can vary by how much weight is transferred to the instrument and the velocity of the mallet. A mallet with more velocity and with less weight transfer will produce a brighter, more articulate sound. A mallet with less velocity and more weight transfer will produce a darker sound.
- Tone: Tone is one of the most important considerations. In general, you should try to produce a sound that is characteristic of the instrument you are playing, with the fullest tone possible. Watch and listen to other professional musicians on your instrument to reference what that sound should be.

- Consistency: You should try to maintain a consistent sound note to note or hand to hand. This incorporates all the components above and is one of the most difficult components to achieve.

Much of our time as a percussion ensemble will focus primarily on rhythmic clarity. While this is a necessity, clarity alone is not our end goal. You as a performer will be expected to be able to balance and blend in addition to being rhythmically accurate.

- Balance refers to multiple players producing identical dynamics, or amounts of sounds. Players should play at the same dynamic level and produce the same quantity of sound.
- Blend refers to multiple players producing identical types of sounds. Components to this factor are stroke energy, articulation, and the ability to control the response of the instrument. Blend requires development through very detailed listening.

We will always be working on all three of these components and it is important to understand that balance is not possible without rhythmic clarity and blend is not possible without balance. Once all three of these are achieved, the result is an ensemble that has a higher clarity than others, a clarity unachievable by rhythmic accuracy alone.

## ARTICULATION

A huge factor in the ability of the front ensemble to speak clearly within the full ensemble is creating a consistent articulation. Articulation refers to the space between each note. As a percussionist, we control the length of a note by changing how we approach the beginning of the note.

- A shorter, more spaced (staccato) articulation will require additional energy and less weight to the stroke, this will give the note more bite and reduce the length of the note.
- A longer (legato) articulation will require less energy and more weight to the stroke, this will give the note less attack and more resonance, increasing the length of the note.

You may also need to consider your grip. In general, the more firm your grip is, the shorter the articulation will be. As you relax your palm and fingers, your sound will become more open. It is important to be able to control the complete spectrum of articulation while maintaining consistent tone and good technique. Spend time playing our "Basic Exercises" in multiple articulation styles.

# APPLYING THIS MANUAL TO YOUR EXERCISE PACKET

## METRONOME USAGE

A metronome is an integral part of practice and rehearsal. You should have one with you at all times during your individual practice that subdivides and has full capabilities. It is important to remember that a metronome is a tool, not a crutch. You should be aware of how everything you play relates to the pulse. Start passages or exercises with the metronome on the quarter note, and as you get more comfortable with what you are playing, work towards having the metronome on the half note, then the whole note. This trains you to control your own pulse while still having a checkpoint every few beats to check your accuracy. We will use the same technique in rehearsal.

## PREPARATION

As you work towards being a member of our ensemble, it is important to isolate stroke types and focus on the details of the stroke before working through the entire exercise. If you encounter new material, isolate the issue and work on it until you are completely comfortable with it. Working through this packet and developing as a player is a marathon, not a sprint, and it requires training in that manner. Detailed preparation and isolation of each issue is required to gain control over what you are doing.

All components - rhythm, dynamics, consistent sound, grip, mental focus - must be accounted for before beginning each exercise. Prepare on your instrument as much as possible so that you can focus on sound and feel. Use every resource available (digital recorders, videos, other players) to be as detailed as possible.

## RESOURCES

<http://www.vicfirth.com/education/> There are many tools on this website, but most applicable to front ensemble would be the Concert/Keyboard section. Feel free to explore any of the videos on this website, but know that their instruction may not match what we do here at Weber State.

For Stevens grip specific instruction, go here: <http://www.vicfirth.com/education/keyboard/howarth.php> This is a video series by Gifford Howarth based on his book *Simply 4*. You can also purchase his book online or at some music stores for additional information. What you learn in these videos will almost always match what we do here.

Finally – Youtube! Watch videos of front ensembles in DCI and WGI. Ensembles that will employ our same technique include: Matrix, Phantom Regiment, Blue Devils, RCC, Pulse, and the Cadets.