

THE DRUMMER'S TEXTBOOK

**A COMPLETE GUIDE ON
BEGINNING TO INTERMEDIATE
DRUMSET MUSICIANSHIP**

BY JOE DEVICO

FOREWORD

This book is a compilation of the most important things I've learned as a teacher over the last 20 years. Although there are great exercises and grooves to be found, the real treasure for the developing student is in the passages of text between the actual music. I have to admit that as a student I rarely read the text accompanying a book as I was too excited about jumping head first into the exercises and "learning" all that I could. Now that I'm older and wiser, and teaching from the same books I learned from, I realize that there was often much more important lessons in the authors words than could be had by just playing through the exercises. It is why this foreword is even here and why the next page exists.

It should also be noted that this book is not meant to be a comprehensive study in styles or different types of music but instead a foundational book to get you playing rhythms and coordination patterns prevalent in all musical styles. It will also teach you not only how to read but also how to understand what you are reading. Because different arrangers use different types of notation for drum music, there are no hard and fast rules to reading drum charts, however as a musician one can learn to interpret what they see on the page and make good musical decisions 99% of the time by following a few simple rules.

Always remember that no matter what style of music you want to play, the basics are all the same and that it should always be fun. Even the most boring practice routine is enjoyable when you are accomplishing something.

**IF YOU ARE NOT GOING TO
READ EVERYTHING
IN THIS BOOK...**

**RETURN IT NOW FOR A REFUND
AS YOU WON'T REALLY LEARN
THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS
IT HAS TO OFFER!**

THE 3 RULES OF PRACTICE

The *3 Rules of Practice* are the foundation to learning any pattern or rhythm on the drums. If you follow these rules each time you set out to tackle a new idea, I guarantee YOU WILL SUCCEED! Bear in mind that there is no shortcut, and although you may not always need to take the steps in order, you will have the best chance of learning properly by doing so.

Here are the 3 rules:

I. **COUNT IT OUT**

Seems simple and obvious, however most students don't. This means that you need to write the counting above or below the exercise if you can't recite it right away, and that you need to say the counting **out loud** while you're playing. Do not, for one second, think that "counting in your head" is that same as "counting out loud."

II. **SLOW IT DOWN**

If you can't play the passage at the tempo you are trying, you should slow it down. This also seems like an obvious suggestion, but is often overlooked by even advanced students. Remember that you are teaching your muscles to repeat a specific pattern and that it doesn't matter how fast or slow you teach them. Once you've mastered the coordination of the pattern itself, you will be able to speed it up with very little effort. Think about any basic fine motor skill, such as text messaging or playing video games. When you start out it takes time for your muscles to learn the basic patterns, but once you've done it for a while your speed increases even though you never specifically worked on doing those things quickly.

III. **BREAK IT UP**

This step is the key. If you have trouble with playing all the parts at once...then don't! Drum parts can be broken up in two dimensions, either horizontally or vertically. I like to have students try the horizontal approach first. Visualize the example as single parts or lines and start with the easiest one first. Note that the easiest part is usually the one that has the most consistent rhythm and not necessarily the least notes. Rests are usually harder to "count" than rhythms that you are actually playing. Then begin by adding one of the other parts to the first one. Continue by trying other parts with the first and then building the complete passage one part at a time. In the vertical dimension, you would try to play all the notes that hit on the first beat, and then all the notes that hit on the following beat. Continue as in the horizontal fashion building the complete passage one beat or section at a time. Both of these "break downs" allow you to focus on the specific areas of coordination that are challenging you and working them until they are comfortable. In the example below you can see a basic groove that has been "broken down" in various configurations.

CONCEPTS IN DRUMMING:

THE STICK:

The basic drumstick has four “parts,” the tip, the shoulder, the shaft and the butt. For beginning students, it’s usually easier to start with a stick of average to slightly heavier than average weight such as a 5A or 5B before moving to something smaller for lighter playing or heavier for marching situations.

The length, taper of shoulder, type of wood, type and shape of the tip all contribute to the sound of the stick. Stick differences are dramatically more apparent on cymbals than they are on the drums themselves. The shape any type of tip (wood vs. nylon) bears the most impact on the sound.

When you first start out, you’ll most likely not notice slight differences between sticks in a pair, even if one happens to be slightly curved. Once you’ve played for many years however, these differences become obvious. I can tell if a stick has a knot in it or is warped from the first few strokes. Most companies do a very good job of matching sticks and boxing them in pairs. If, however, you want a really good pair of sticks, do the following before purchasing.

1. Take the sticks out of the box and roll them on a flat surface to see if they are warped
2. Hold one stick lightly, close to your ear, between your index finger and thumb and strike it with the other stick. They should be very close in pitch to each other. If not then one is denser than the other and will feel heavier in your hand. If the stick doesn’t have a pure tone, or sounds somewhat wobbly in pitch, it most likely has a hidden knot somewhere.

Remember that most sticks are made from “new wood” which hasn’t really had the proper drying time and will change over time. I’ve bought many pairs of sticks that warped a month or so after purchase. Especially when exposed to sudden changes in temperature.

THE GRIP:

When talking about the grip, there is often much discourse between different teachers and students alike. I want to immediately get rid of two phrases. “This is the right way,” and “this is the wrong way.” There are more acceptable methods and less acceptable methods, and I don’t say that to be politically correct. Some of the most talented drummers utilize grips that are certainly outside of the generally accepted methods.

I like to consider the physics involved in playing the drum. Before we even strike the drum and talk about “the proper technique” for doing so, let’s consider this. The goal is to create a pivot point or fulcrum (like a see-saw) for the stick to move up and down in as fluid a motion as possible. Most drummers imagine the pivot point as a line created between the pad of the thumb and the pad between the second and third knuckles of the index finger (fig. 1). Other drummers consider it to be the center of a triangle created by the index finger, middle finger and thumb (fig. 2). I know of one very famous drummer who actually explained that you needed to hold the stick with you back fingers (middle, ring,

pinky) while keeping your front fingers loose (fig. 3). That drummer is considered to be one of Modern Drummers top 25 drummers of all time as voted by the readers. I can't say that I disagree with that assessment. Carmine Appice even holds the sticks between his index and middle fingers (fig. 4)...definitely not standard!

The three common grips (or hand positions) are as follows:

1. FRENCH GRIP – in this grip the stick is held between the thumb and index finger and the palms face each other. The sticks come in to the drum nearly parallel to each other. Mostly used for playing timpani (kettle drums) it allows for controlled soft strokes and even single stroke rolls using fingers and some wrists.
2. GERMAN GRIP – the sticks are held as in the FRENCH GRIP however the palms of the hand face the floor and the sticks come into the drum creating roughly a 90 degree angle (fig. 2) Used by some classical drummers for snare parts, it allows the greatest range of wrist motion while still allowing good arm and finger control.
3. AMERICAN GRIP – this grip bridges the gap between the two grips above by turning the wrists out slightly. The sticks come into the drum at about 60 degrees and it utilizes arm, wrist and finger movements.

So which grip is correct? The answer is none – or all, depending on your perspective. Whatever allows you to execute fluid, controlled strokes is the proper grip for you. The only rule is that you create a pivot point for the stick to move. Beyond that, each grip has its own advantages and disadvantages, (some more than others) but in the end, they all do the same thing. I prefer and teach either the first or second grip from above.

It's very important to keep the idea of ergonomics in your head while working out your grip. As you swing your arm away from your body, your wrist will want to turn up into a more French style grip. This is natural and should be allowed. Never fight your body's natural mechanics, you'll only end up limiting your potential and probably injuring yourself in the long run.

THE STROKE

I like to relate the basic stroke to sports...basketball and baseball in particular. The idea is to get the stick to do most of the work for you. As in dribbling a basketball, you want to "throw" the stick at the head and let physics take over on the rebound. Just as you don't need to lift the ball back from the ground, if done properly, you don't need to lift the stick off the head. In order to make the "proper stroke" you need two things; a good pivot point (fulcrum) and good stick balance. If the fulcrum is too close to the tip of the stick, then the rebound will be too small as there is not enough front weight to give the stick any speed during the descent. If the fulcrum is too near the butt of the stick, there isn't enough counter weight to bring the stick back up from the head and the rebound again will be too small. Imagine

dribbling a flat basketball and you'll immediately get the idea that poor rebound makes playing much more difficult. Finding the balance point is rather easy as with most sticks it's roughly one third of the distance from the butt of the stick.

Once you have the stick held at the "balance point" the stroke is quite simple. Imagine that you are throwing baseballs towards the ground. You'll use a little arm and a bit of wrist in the stroke all the while keeping a firm but relaxed grip at the balance point. Do not tighten your other fingers around the back of the stick as it will prevent a proper rebound.

THE 3 BASIC STROKES:

Although it can be argue that there are many different ways to strike the drum, there are really only three basic strokes that I like to teach.

SINGLE STROKE – this stroke is created by first bring the arm and wrist up and cocking the stick into a ready position, then bringing the arm and wrist down together allowing the stick to strike the drumhead and rebound back up to the ready position. Keep your wrist from dropping to low to avoid hitting the rim of the drum unless you intend to play a "rimshot."

DOUBLE STROKE – this stroke is started the same as the single stroke, however once the stick rebounds to the read position, you will close your back fingers around the stick to create a second stroke. There are a number of techniques to help develop the proper feel for this stroke outlined below.

If you are playing the double stroke properly, you will be able to continue the second stroke (finger stroke) indefinitely. Try practicing by holding the stick "backwards" (fig.1) and getting a continuous set of strokes by tapping the stick with your fingers. Do not use your arm or wrist other than for the first stroke to put the stick in motion. Remember that this stroke is not a pure bounce, but instead a "stroke-pull" technique. Once you have a feel for the technique, you can turn your hand around to the normal position and make the same motion, only this time tapping the back of the stick, instead of the front.

TRIPLE STROKE (BUZZ) – this stroke is different than the other strokes. It is also started in the same fashion as the single stroke, but is created by applying pressure the pivot point while holding the tip of the stick against the drumhead. Often used to create rolls, I like to think of it as an inverted stroke where you keep the stick on the drumhead for as long as possible before lifting again for another stroke. For all other strokes, the stick is kept off the head except for the brief moment where it comes in contact for the actual strike. Employing this method for buzzes will prevent you from having any gaps in the sound.

A good way to practice this would be to place the tips of the sticks on the head and then one at time lift them and return them to the head as quickly as possible as if the head is the ready position and the air above the head is the drum surface.

Another good practice tip is to "think" in groups of three while playing the buzzes. This will help keep the pulsing sound that occurs from one hand playing louder than the other. Try to slightly accent the fist

note of each group of three to keep an even sound during the buzzes. Once you've gained sufficient control you can remove the accents altogether.

ERGONOMICS:

The term "ergonomics" is derived from two Greek words: "ergon", meaning work and "nomoi", meaning natural laws. Ergonomists study human capabilities in relationship to work demands. Applying good ergonomics to drums is both beneficial to your playing and your ultimate long term health. Playing drums is physical exercise and like any sport, forcing your body to do things that are "unnatural" or uncomfortable is simply wasting time. You can shingle a roof with a hammer, but it's much faster and easier with a nail gun. It's important to remember that there is no "right" way to play or setup your drums, but that there are preferred methods. Most drummers with odd posture or setups play that way because they had "trained" themselves from early on in that setup and have overcome whatever obstacles those setups might create. For them it feels unnatural to play any other way and they have been very successful in their own right. This does not diminish the basic fact however that they could have just have easily learned a more ergonomic approach and perhaps saved a lot of practice time that was devoted to overcoming the challenges that there setup created.

POSTURE...

Ergonomists have attempted to define postures which minimize unnecessary static work and reduce the forces acting on the body. All of us could significantly reduce our risk of injury and improve our playing if we could adhere to the following ergonomic principles:

1. All activities should permit the player to adopt several different, but equally healthy and safe postures
2. When muscular force has to be exerted, it should be done by the largest appropriate muscle groups available.
3. Playing should be performed with the joints at about mid-point of their range of movement. This applies particularly to the head, spine, and upper limbs.

Although this makes sense for basic strokes and upper body movement, it is even more apparent when applied to the feet and basic drum setup. It is a common misconception that you should setup your drums and then position yourself behind the kit to play. I prefer to teach my students to first setup their throne in an open space and then simply sit down placing his or her feet in a comfortable position. Then place the snare drum between his or her legs and put the bass drum and hi-hat pedals where the feet are resting. This creates the foundation for the rest of the kit setup. The positioning of one's feet will largely be determined by how you play. For example if you play "heels down" on the pedals, you'll need to sit further from them than a player who prefers the "heels up" or "ball of foot" method. Why? Because of the range of motion in your ankle. Try this exercise:

Sit with the angle of your knee at about 60 degrees and move you toes up and down off the floor. Then bring your foot closer to you, closing the angle of your knee to less than 45 degrees and try again to raise and lower your toes. By closing the angle of your knee you are in reality already flexing your ankle

which only has a limited range of movement making it much more stressful to raise your toes from the floor. If you move your foot too far back, you'll be unable to lift your toes at all.

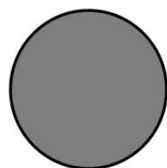
You'll also notice that in a relaxed position, it's very likely that your feet will point at an angle away from your body and not parallel to each other. Therefore, your bass drum should not be perpendicular to your shoulders, but at a slightly angled to the right. If your drums are setup so that the bass drum is perpendicular to the stage, then you need to sit with your body slightly angled to the left in order to remain in that relaxed position. Not common thinking I know, but ergonomically correct and much more comfortable to play. Everyone's body and joints are different so there is room to adjust your particular setup to your body, but always keep in mind the basic idea of comfort and maximizing your potential energy.

Now that your drums are setup correctly, I want to talk about one more issue. It's what I call "chicken wings" when I see it among students. Try holding your sticks with your upper arms extended like chicken wings...and then drop your upper arms down. Which position is more relaxed? Which do you think you could sustain for a longer period of time? This is another excellent example of how important posture and ergonomics are with respect to our playing. By keeping your upper arms in a relaxed position you are able to play for longer periods of time, with less exerted energy and stress on the body and also are able to create more fluid strokes which result in better tones and control from the drums. It's a win-win situation and one that is employed by every good drummer in some fashion or another.

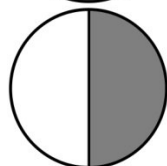
BASIC NOTATION:

Excluding pitch values, notes and rests in music are very simply units of time and notation is the way these units are written on a page so that a musician can play back the intended performance. Notation is in my opinion the most widely under taught music concept. Most students who come to me even after years of lessons elsewhere don't understand exactly why notation is setup the way it is.

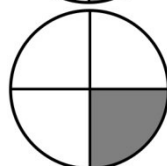
Before we introduce traditional notation I want you to think about something that everyone understands...PIZZA.



Here we have a traditional PIZZA before it's been cut. We would say that it's a whole pizza or pie.



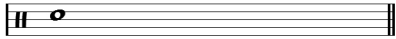
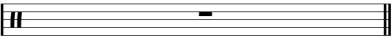
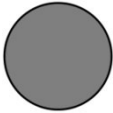
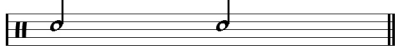
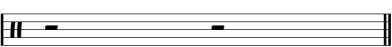
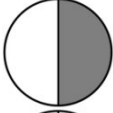
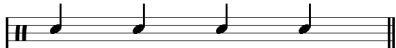

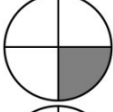

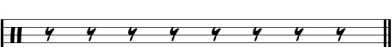
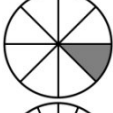

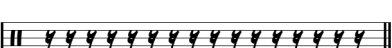
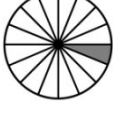
If we were to cut it into two equal pieces we would have two halves as shown here.



If we were to cut each half into two equal pieces, we would get four quarters...and so on.

Note and Rest names:

Notes and Rests work in the same fashion as the pizza above, that is to say that the note and rest names are derived from the fractions they represent. See the chart below to get a better idea. The important thing to remember is that in basic notation the relationship between the notes cannot change. For example, two quarters always equal one half – and two halves always equal one whole.

| Note: | Rest: | Name: | Pie: |
|--|---|-----------------------|--|
|  |  | Whole (1/1) |  |
|  |  | Half (1/2) |  |
|  |  | Quarter (1/4) |  |
|  |  | Eighth (1/8) |  |
|  |  | Sixteenth (1/16) |  |

However – like the prices for pizza at different restaurants are not the same, the values of the individual notes can change. Which brings us to...

TIME SIGNATURE:

The time signature at the beginning of piece of music is like a legend on a map – or the prices on a PIZZA menu. It tells two important items.

- How many beats are in each measure?
- The type of note that is worth one beat.

The sentence I like to use when “deciphering” the time signature is as follows –

_____ 1 _____.

There are (top number) beats per measure and the (bottom number) note equals one beat.

Based on this sentence, we can see that sometimes a quarter note will be worth one beat and other times it will be worth two beats.

The chart below shows the value of different notes in different time signatures. Notice how the relationship between adjacent notes is constant while the value of changes.