

The Tuttle Marching Band **Percussion Section**

Exercises and Informational Packet

Thank for your interest in the percussion section of the Tuttle High School marching band! In this packet you will find technical guidelines and exercises for each section in the ensemble. As the instrumental needs of the band can shift from season to season, make sure you read each section carefully. You may find yourself on a new instrument, and this packet is a great starting point to build your skills as a percussionist. However, it is not everything you need to know! You must be ready to receive additional information from your instructors that will build upon the concepts you learn from this packet. That being said, your instructors will assume you have read this, and will give instructions based off of that assumption. If you are unable to receive instructions and commentary because you don't have the foundational knowledge laid out in the packet, you will be held accountable for your lack of preparation. Additionally, this guideline contains information on skills that every percussionists needs to know. You will benefit as a musician and a percussionist from its contents!

Mental Approach

The success of a marching percussion section begins long before you step up to your instrument. A positive, engaged mental approach is an **absolute must** for every member! This means your brain is ready to take instruction, apply technical and musical knowledge to the assigned segment, reflect on your performance, and receive commentary from instructors. If this seems like a lot to handle, that's because it is! Being a member of a successful marching percussion program isn't easy, but it is very rewarding when all members **start from the beginning** with the right mental approach.

Physical Approach

The next step is to set your body up for success by dialing in how you stand and how you move. You will learn a detailed checklist for both of these things, and it is very important to commit yourself to every aspect! Here is a general overview:

- Heels and toes together
- Long, straight legs (knees are not locked)
- Separation between your ribs and hips (stand up tall!)
- Relaxed shoulders and arms, prominent chest
- Relaxed neck, chin is slightly tilted up
- 60/40 rule, or "forward presence" (most of your weight is forward, not settled on your heels)

Technical Approach

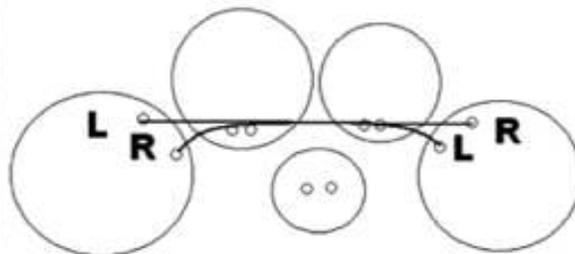
Once your mental and physical approaches are solidly in place we can start to talk about the way we play. Regardless of your instrument, your general approach should be one of aggressiveness. This does NOT mean playing harshly or with any sort of tension. This simply means playing **into** the instrument to get the maximum amount of sound quality for the given height. If you're playing at 12 inches (forte), you should be getting a bold, solid 12-inch sound. If you're playing at 3 inches (piano), you should be getting a bold, solid 3-inch sound. The wrists should always move in a quick, relaxed motion.

The Grip:

Snares and Tenors (matched grip)—The stick should rest comfortably in the hand, running along the base of the fingers. The main pad of your thumb should be in contact and parallel with the stick (not pressed in). Your forefinger should wrap comfortably around the stick directly across from the thumb, forming a fulcrum or pivot point for the stick's motion. The rest of your fingers should remain wrapped around the stick for support. The fingers should be loose and relaxed at all times, but can never leave the stick!



In resting position, there should be a slight downward angle from your elbow to the tip of the stick. There should be no extreme angles along the way, and the stick should feel like a natural extension of your arm. Pay careful attention to the beads of your sticks; they should be very close together in the direct center of the drum head, and hovering about a quarter of an inch off the surface. For tenors, the zones will change depending on the drum you are playing. Study the pictures carefully, and practice moving from drum to drum while maintaining the proper zones. Maintenance of these details is essential to a successful drumline!



Bass Drum: The grip is similar to snare and tenor drums, but the hand is rotated so that the wrists are vertical. The same fulcrum point should exist between the thumb and forefinger. There should be no gap between the thumb and the base joint of the pointer finger. Remember, this is a point of pivoting and contact with the stick, **not** a point of pressure or squeezing in the fingers! The forearm should be parallel to the ground, and the mallet should be as close as possible to the head, directly in the center. Do not give in to the temptation to rest your hand or arm on the rim of the drum; they should hang in place from a relaxed but engaged upper arm.



Keyboards: The grip is similar to the snare and tenor drums, but you will be dealing with a thinner stick. While your forefinger and thumb will form a fulcrum, you will rely more on your back fingers since there is no rebound on keyboard instruments. The mallet will still lie across the base of the fingers, and they will be wrapped around the mallet in a relaxed fashion. There can be a slight opening between the thumb and the rest of the hand, but it should be minimal. The key point is relaxation in all parts of the hand!



The Stroke:

Snare and Tenors: All motion initiates from a deliberate (but relaxed!) wrist motion. From resting position, the bead should come straight off the drumhead in an arc that follows the line of your arm. We will discuss many instances that involve the use of arm and finger in the stroke, but the initial mastery of wrist motion is an absolute must! When playing, the wrist should move freely with zero tension, while the fulcrum and fingers remain relaxed. If the slightest bit of “tightness” is felt, immediately stop and reevaluate your technique and motion. Quick, deliberate motions that drive the stick into the drum head and produce a full, “resonant” rebound with zero unnecessary tension can and must be mastered!

Bass Drum: While the grip is similar to snares and tenors, the bass motion initiates from a wrist rotation rather than a wrist bend. Imagine a rod running through the middle of your forearm from your elbow through your hand. Now imagine that rod turning, and that causes your wrist and hand to rotate. As with the matched grip technique, all motions should stay 100% relaxed. The fulcrum should not be squeezed, and the fingers should stay comfortably wrapped around the mallet, moving with the natural motion of the stroke.



Keyboards: Similar to the snares and tenors, your motion will come from a relaxed wrist motion. However, since keyboards don't have the rebound of a drum to bounce the stick or mallet back up, it is **absolutely critical** that your wrist motion does not stop once the mallet strikes the bar. After contact, your wrist must bring the mallet immediately back to where it came from, "simulating" the rebound of a drum head. While watching a keyboard player, it should look like the mallets are rebounding off the instrument the same way stick would rebound off a drum head. This will be discussed in detail, but it should always be on the mind of the keyboard players!

Stroke Types: There are **three** stroke types that every percussionist must master.

1. Rebound stroke – the stick starts at a given height and rebounds to the same height
2. Down stroke – the stick starts at a given height and rebounds to a lower height
3. Up stroke – the stick starts at a given height and rebounds to a higher height

You have most likely used these stroke types in a variety of settings without putting a name to them. It is important, however, to understand the mechanics and definitions behind each type so that you can make educated adjustments to each one in a variety of contexts. This sounds confusing, but it will be discussed in detail in person. Make sure you are ready to pay attention!

Heights/Dynamics: Due to the physical nature of our instruments, we can use a system of heights that relate to various dynamics. This is a way to ensure that we are all approaching different sections of music with the same level of playing, giving the ensemble a unified sound.

- 3" – piano
- 6" – mezzo piano
- 9" – mezzo forte
- 12" – forte
- 15" – fortissimo

