

# YSU Drumline Technique Packet 2020

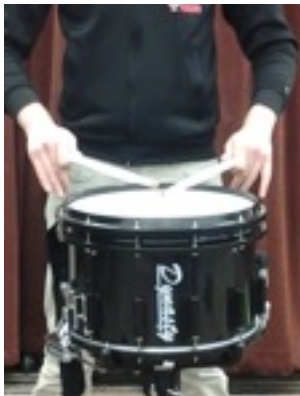


## YSU's Approach to Drumming

We work at YSU to play with a technique that is idiomatic to the marching activity but also selectively applicable to other genres of music and styles of playing. (Percussion studio members need not fear that their hands will be “ruined” by playing in the marching band.) It is important to recognize however that every technique has its pros and cons, especially when adapting to different contexts. Just like in any other ensemble, percussionists must be flexible when it comes to playing in the drumline, jazz ensemble, orchestra, concert band and wind ensemble, solo marimba, etc. Your career will depend on your ability to adapt to many different musical situations. Performing in the YSU drumline in conjunction with other ensembles will enhance your ability to do so. Please embrace this reality! This section will give a general overview of technique- we will deal with specifics at camp and throughout the season. We **MUST** be unified in our approach if we want any chance of playing together, so please take these notes to heart. Overall grasp of the concepts here will heavily influence audition placement.

**Listening/Ears-** It goes without saying that every facet of our technique is a means to an end. This end is the **sound** that we produce. The YSU drumline will always strive to create a warm, full sound at all dynamic levels. In most cases, listening to the sound you produce will enable you to make decisions about your technique before your instructors even address you. If your rolls sound choked or uneven, be sure to address any tension or hand to hand inconsistency. If 8's sound thin or weak, it is often a symptom of not using enough velocity in your stroke. As an obvious rule of thumb, if you are not playing together with your center neighbor, **listening** and adjusting will be your best tool to solve the problem. Snares and tenors will almost always listen towards center (solely the person next to them.) If drill formations have snares or tenors in a line front to back, then listening responsibilities shift to the person behind you (in this case, the back-most player is “center.” For basses and cymbals, listening responsibilities are more situational. Each player has to be responsible for their own individual parts and how they fit within the larger scheme of the music. After that is understood, all players have to begin to understand the parts of the players around them, much like in any large or chamber ensemble. **Listening** enables players to balance and blend with the full ensemble.

**Grip-** All sections use matched grip. In modern rudimental drumming the fulcrum (point on the stick where it will rebound most easily) is held primarily by the middle finger and thumb, with the rest of the fingers fully curled around the stick and facilitating its movement. There will be no “pinky trails” where the back fingers fly off the stick. In certain contexts it is ok if the back fingers come off slightly to allow for rebound during fast rolls, but this should not be overt or indicate tension. Unfortunately, this is far too common among young players and can cause injury if used excessively. Moving on, the butt of the stick will rest in the fleshy part of the hand. This runs contrary to more “refined” techniques for orchestral



Incorrect pinky grip. DON'T do this.



Fingers curled (relaxed) with the butt of the stick resting on the fleshy part of the hand. (correct)

playing where we generally want as little flesh on the stick as possible to allow for more head/implement resonance. However, in the marching world, the necessity for control, power and speed trumps those subtleties.

In terms of how the hands lay, we play with an “American” approach that lies between “German” grip (palms completely flat) and “French” grip (thumbnail facing up). Playing with this grip allows a compromise between the dichotomies of control vs. rebound and wrist vs. finger use. In addition, since the stick lies in the fleshy part of the hand, the slight turnover allows the stick to stay in line with the forearm, facilitating more efficient use of energy. (Science!) To be sure you are close to the turnover necessary, hold the stick in your hand with German grip and turn your thumb to a 45 degree angle- your nail should face approximately towards your neck/face/etc.

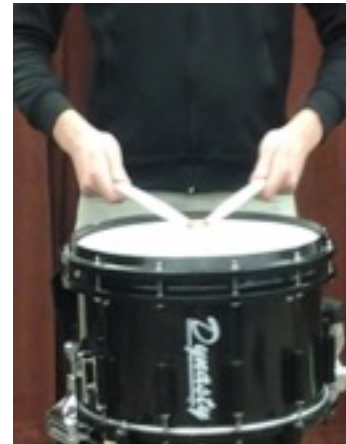
Regarding hand position, we will have individual comments and suggestions during camp, but the sticks’ angle should be matched to the center photo below.



German Grip (palms flat, not what we use)



American Grip (the grip we use throughout the season, thumbs at a 45 degree angle.)



French Grip (thumbnails facing up, not what we use)

**Rebound Stroke-** Our general “all-up” 8-on-a-hand stroke. Begin with the stick up, hit the drum, and have it return to the same position without stopping in between. The kinesthetic sensation you experience should be that of throwing the stick at the head with as much velocity as possible within the first inch of distance that the stick travels, then having it immediately return. To practice this concept, pretend you are holding a stick in your hand and quickly “flick” your hand down and back into its original position. If you want to see it in action, simply watch any DCI drumline play [legatos](#), etc.

**Down Stroke-** Similar to above, but the **weight** of your hand allows the stick to stop at a specified 3” to 6” height after striking the drum from a point above the rebounded height (usually a minimum of 9” in a marching context). There is no sensation of work or tension to accomplish this- no forceful motion is necessary. “Allow” the stick to stop and it will stop. The difference is how far the stick is allowed to rebound upwards before having to travel back down to hit the drum again. Please be sure to understand this **relaxed** concept before moving on. When playing accented down-strokes above 12”, we will embrace a modified moeller stroke that incorporates a slight “whip” motion initiated with the forearm, then followed by the wrist and stick. More will be explained in rehearsal, but it is primarily a minimized version of the moeller technique that Jojo Mayer demonstrates on his “[Secret Weapons for the Modern Drummer](#)” DVD. It is not necessarily the “best” or only technique for playing drums, but it IS often generalizable to drum set playing, older rudimental contexts, and a myriad of additional circumstances in ensemble or solo performance. Watch the linked video above but keep in mind that our approach to this technique will be streamlined with less “whip” and less “out” motion for our own purposes. Please keep this in mind while preparing your audition and be ready to adapt to our specifications in rehearsal.

**Tap Stroke-** Essentially rebound strokes at 3” to 6” tap height, whatever is designated for the music at hand. Again, these are primarily REBOUND strokes, simply beginning and ending at a lower height, so don’t approach the stroke any differently at 3” than you would at 12”. The important thing to remember is that power and clarity at 3” are still extremely important. Striving for a “beefy” tap sound while playing at a true 3” is something that we will no doubt address frequently, so put the time in now to lessen how much it will need to be discussed. Here’s a [link](#) to what Mike McIntosh refers to as Bruce Lee’s one-inch “tap stroke.” Just remember to **rebound** (not demonstrated in the video).

**Muscle groups-** This section doesn’t list anatomically exact muscle groups, but is more about approximating the general usage of shoulders, upper arm, forearm, wrist and fingers in the context of executing singles, double, and triples.

**8-on-a-hand-** 80-90% wrist with 10-20% forearm at generic tempos from approximately 80-140 bpm. This facilitates an “all up” approach without forcing the wrist to do all of the work. Forearm lends power and helps absorb the shock of high tension kevlar heads. It is very helpful, but overdoing it can cause tension in the shoulders/elbows, less rebound

in context of height, etc. Use wisely, not blindly, like anything else in life. In addition, our technique for 8's will shift to include more wrist and fingers (with less arm) as the tempo increases.

**Doubles/Triples-** About the same amount of wrist and forearm used in 8-on-a-hand, but with a healthy additional dose of back-finger control. Practice this control by playing double beat on a pillow and forcing your middle/back fingers to develop dexterity. If you use too much wrist or arm without utilizing fingers, tension will set in and your 2nd and 3rd notes will weaken while the tempo fluctuates. This technique is also applicable to slow and medium roll speeds.

**Rolls-** Roll technique, like anything, adjusts with tempo. Slow to medium triplet based rolls move on a continuum from mostly wrist/slight forearm to wrist/slight forearm plus fingers. Once you get to triplet rolls at about 170+ bpm, the fulcrum has transitioned to the front of the hand (pointer finger, thumb, slight middle finger), less wrist, and primarily forearm with the back fingers lightly **relaxing** contact off of the stick to allow for rebound and sustained doubles. The same techniques mentioned above are also obviously applied to 16th note, quintuplet, etc. based rolls at varied tempi.

**Playing Area-** Snares and basses will by default play in the dead center of the head. There will be times when we ask to play off center or on the edge for color changes, but we will specify when necessary. Tenors will play about 1 to 2 inches from the rim to ensure maximum volume and resonance from all drums. On the low 3 drum (right-most drum) the right hand and left hand will be set with the right forming the cap and the left forming the stem of an offset "T" shape. Same goes for the left-most 4 drum, but the hands switch. The left hand forms the cap and the right hand is the stem.



Tenor set position and general playing area



Left-most 4 drum "offset-T" playing area and hand position



Right-most 3 drum  
"offset-T" playing area  
and hand position



High spock drum = dead center.  
Low spock drum = slightly off  
center

**Stick Heights-** We use an approximated ppp=1," pp=4," mp=6," mf=9," f=12," ff=15," and fff=24" stick height system to help unify dynamics and heighten visual appeal. There are few things more incredible than seeing a battery play the same height from person to person, especially during larger-than-life "impact" moments. **Remember** that physically, heights have little to do with dynamics apart from the distance you have to manipulate the stick's velocity. **Velocity** is what truly alters dynamic levels. In our context, since we work to drum with a high amount of velocity in all strokes be they 3" or 12", the dynamic-height association works and gets us "in the ballpark" with uniformity. There will be instances when we will ask for nuances outside of the codified heights above, so please be flexible. In addition, please don't let a dogmatic adherence to heights bleed into your musical lives outside the marching arena.

**Specific Instruments-** Everything written above is applicable to snare drum and tenors. Pay attention to playing areas for tenors to understand movement around the drums. An approach to sound production that produces a full, balanced sound carries across all instruments.

### **Bass Drum**

Many thanks to Keith Bailey (Capital Regiment 2009, Glassmen 2010 and Glassmen 2011 Bass drum section leader) for assisting me with some of the bass drum techniques and concepts below.

**Set Position-** Hold the mallets vertically against the section of the bass drum hoop closest to the player.

**Grip and Technique-** Bass mallets are held roughly the same way as snare and tenor players. (Handles rest in the "cushy" part of the hand with fingers wrapped around and in contact with the mallet, still relaxed.) The differences that result are an

accommodation of the drum being turned sideways. In playing position, the forearms will always be parallel to the ground and the mallets will be held at a 45 degree angle to the forearm, mallet-heads directly in the center of the drum, with the handles roughly parallel to the head. Elbows will be held away from the body (just enough to allow the mallet to strike the drumhead without cracking against the hoop.)

We approach playing similarly to what we would do on snare drum or tenors- a “playing from the bead” sensation of rebound coming from the beater of the mallet. The stroke is a combination of both wrist-turn (knocking on a door) and forearm rotation, (turning a door-knob) where the upstroke away from the drumhead should form a quarter-circle outline, visible from the hand and diminishing at the elbow. The mallet should be parallel to the ground at full-extension before coming back up to strike the drum, and the back-fingers should almost constantly support and be in contact with the mallet for power and control.

**Cymbal Set-Positions-** There are additional sounds that will be written and explained once the cymbal line is set, but for now, here are the essentials. Thanks to Dan Danch for his contribution here to the 2014 packet, now adapted separately for 2020.

**Set Position (Attention)-** Inside cymbal bells are centered at the hips with heels together and back straight.

**Standard (or default) playing position-** The top edges of the cymbals are at about the same height as the bridge of your nose, held opposite each other and forming an upside-down V shape (45 degree angle) with a minuscule gap at the corner. Do not allow the cymbals to rest against the body or arms- they should hang freely apart from contact with the hands/cymbal pads.

**Center (or mid-body) playing position-** Left cymbal is below, right cymbal above, centered directly to the lower sternum, and forming a parallel 45 degree angle to the ground.

### **Crash Types**

Please note that in most cases, you will either return to the playing position that each crash begins with or get set for the next specific crash type, generally within the next count or two (depending on tempo.)

**Standard Crash-**standard playing position- (cymbals should already be in an upside-down V shape at a 45 degree angle) bring the top of the cymbals apart, making the cymbals vertical and parallel. Following that, crash the bottom edges of the cymbals first, following through with the top edges. These separate actions should all be executed very quickly to create one seamless motion.

**Tap Crash**-standard playing position- The top inside edge of the right cymbal very quickly strikes the “very” edge of the left cymbal, using only the wrist. Allow resonance until the music requires you to dampen with your forearms.

**Straight (or Forward) Crash**-center playing position- Pull the right cymbal back and directly across the bottom part of your neck, still parallel with the opposite plate. Drive the right cymbal across and crash immediately after the bell of the right has crossed the left cymbal bell.

**Angle Crash**-center playing position- Same concept as the straight crash, except the right cymbal will be raised diagonally up and to the left (straight arm) at approximately a 45 degree angle before crashing.

**Liberty Crash**- center playing position- Similar to the two previous crash types, the key differences being: raise the right cymbal up, keeping it vertical/creating a straight line with the arm up and down. Allow your hand to drop/push but keep the cymbal vertical and allow the crash itself to “align” the right cymbal back to being parallel as it continues down and to the right, passing the hip.

### **Final Thoughts**

**Metronome Use**- ALL individual practice MUST be done with a metronome. In the smart phone era, there is little reason not to have one. Additionally, there is a highly functional online metronome [here](#).

If you are practicing drumline music or exercises without a click, you are missing out on benefits easily gained through pressing the metronome’s “start” button. While I am not saying that all practice should be done with a metronome, or that good cannot result in practicing without one, I hear far too many students practicing charts just to learn the notes when they should be learning AND cleaning in the process (this saves EVERYBODY’s time!). Not cleaning during individual practice time effectively wastes our sectional blocks as we are forced to repeatedly clean the simplest of passages. The best scenario is to set a metronome onto the subdivision of the notes you happen to be playing. This way, your playing can become “mathematically perfect” or at least as close as you can reasonably expect yourself to play **as long as** you hold yourself to that standard. With limited rehearsal time, efficiency is extremely important. If you want me to write the most exciting parts possible, your commitment to practicing with a click will play a large part in allowing me to write challenging music.

**Performance Intensity**- One of our primary goals as musicians is to communicate a feeling or mood. If we are executing the music at a high level, obviously we are communicating via sound, but we cannot forget the importance of communicating visually through presence in our posture, competence in marching, and even facial expression.. A drumline that looks boring, sounds boring.. while a drumline that is committed to the present moment communicates passion and creates a **vibe**, or presence, to be reckoned with. A great example of this can be seen [here](#), particularly on



the impacts shortly after the timestamp. Check out a [DCI](#) show this summer, there are several that happen in the Pittsburgh, Akron, and Canton areas relatively near Youngstown, and seeing a “lot” performance up close will really help you experience lines with **presence**. Live shows provide some of the most inspiring opportunities to learn.. thus I encourage you to attend as many as you can!