

The Commodore Cadets 2012 Snare Handbook

by Phillip Ginn

Introduction

WELCOME

You've joined the drumline. Congratulations.

This booklet is meant to concisely present some basic concepts of technique and philosophy. It is not an in-depth examination. You will learn more and more during your time in the drumline.

By choosing to join the drumline, you've chosen to work longer and harder than any other section. Class, respect, discipline, and responsibility are as much high priorities as learning, practicing, and rehearsing in order to be excellent drummers. And excellent drummers you will be, so long as you put in the work. This is not an activity for the weak, the lazy, or the cowardly. If this does not appeal to you, you can close this booklet. Maybe pass it on to someone you think might be interested.

If this sounds like your cup of tea, then read on, fearless drummer.

REQUIREMENTS

To every rehearsal, you should bring the following:

- A binder with blank paper and clear, plastic sheets for music
- A writing implement, preferably a pencil
- Any music you've been given
- Sticks
- A drum pad, if you have one... and you should
- Ear plugs
- This packet
- A bottle of water
- A hat and sunglasses
- Sunblock
- A great attitude

If you are a drummer, you should own your own sticks. If you own drum set sticks, that's fine, but for drumline you will need marching sticks. Vic Firth MS2s are good, general sticks, though you can buy something comparable.

At some point, a specific model of snare sticks and tenor mallets will be decided upon for everyone in their respective sections to use. As a snare player, be prepared to buy your own sticks if the corps does not provide them.

It is a good idea to bring your drum pad for down times or times when you are not able to play on a drum.

Ear plugs are recommended for times when we use a metronome that is stationed directly behind you and the volume is cranked up, or during times when the ensemble is inside a room that amplifies the sound to an unhealthy level. We will not be using ear plugs on the field or in under normal inside conditions.

DRESS

It is important that you dress appropriately. It doesn't matter if it's field season or indoor percussion season. If it's hot, dress lightly. If it's cool, dress in layers.

Jeans are not recommended, as they are restrictive and can get very hot. Shorts or lightweight sweatpants or workout pants are recommended for hot weather. Sweatpants are recommended for cold weather. Sunglasses, a hat, and sunblock will help protect you against the sun. You will be spending a lot of time outdoors, so be prepared. The weather can change at any time, so it's always a good idea to bring extra clothing, just in case.

If you have long hair, you must tie it back, clip it back, wear a hat, or get a haircut. We do not want your hair in your eyes, and you will not be allowed to fix it when standing at attention. You will not be allowed to wear a hat during a performance, unless you are a marching member in which case you will be wearing a shako or some other headpiece. No hair coloring except natural colors, as odd hair colors (ie. blue) are distractions to the audience.

There is no "sagging". We should not be able to see another pair of pants, shorts, or your underwear because your pants are too low. This is not only unprofessional-looking, but it is also not conducive to the athletics of this activity.

SIMPLE RULES

You will be expected to follow some very basic rules, most of which you will learn during your participation. You will find that many are based on common courtesy. That said, certain rules should be explained now:

1. No cell phones are allowed during rehearsal. They are a distraction. Turn them off or set them to silent. You will not be allowed to answer your phone during rehearsal *unless you are expecting an important call and you let the instructional staff know this*. You will be given breaks, during which you can check your cell phones.
 - a. You should give an instructor's or the director's phone number to a parent in case of an emergency. This way, should an emergency arise, someone will know about it during rehearsal.
2. No eating or drinking during class, except on breaks. Food and drink are also distractions. Be prepared for rehearsal: be sure you eat and drink before rehearsal, and/or bring food and drink for your breaks.
3. Be on time for rehearsal. Members that are late are a distraction. Furthermore, members that are late miss out on lessons and rehearsal accomplishments, causing them to be behind the rest of the group. Members that are late have the responsibility to catch up.
4. If you know you are going to be absent or late, *call an instructor or the director*.

Technique

GRIPS

No matter what instrument or grip you'll be using, we follow these principals of good technique: simplicity, efficiency, balance, and harmony. We will concentrate on efficient energy and motion with relaxation and harmonious use of all employed parts of the body.

Take note of where the fulcrum control will be for each grip. The fulcrum of the stick is approximately 1/3 up from the butt end.

Snare Drum: Traditional Grip



We will be using the traditional grip for snare drum.

Left Hand:



- The forearm should be parallel to the ground and perpendicular to the plane of the body.
- The hand is in a “handshake” position before the stick enters the hand. The stick lays on the “webby” part between the thumb and index finger at about a 45 degree angle to the body. This is the fulcrum.
- The fingers come to the stick while the hand stays in place. The fingers will naturally curve, which will also naturally shape the hand.
- The index finger rests on top of the stick, and the thumb naturally rests on top of the forefinger, ideally near the first knuckle (by the tip).



- The middle finger rests against the outside of the stick and acts as a guide. The stick rests on top of the ring finger at the fingernail.
- The pinky is slightly curved back against the ring finger in order to provide an arch of support, strengthening that area of the hand and the use of the ring finger.

- Spaces between the fingers should be minimal, which is accomplished so long as the fingers curve naturally to the stick; there should be no gaping holes in between the fingers, nor should the fingers squeeze together to close any spaces.
- Placing another stick atop the circle created by the index finger and thumb – the fulcrum – should form an airplane banking left.



Right Hand:

- The stick is held with all fingers gently wrapped around the stick, forming a “cup”, and the thumb is placed on the side, with the thumb pad on the stick.
- The “mouth” formed by the index finger and thumb should not be too wide open, nor should it be tightly closed. Let the mouth “breathe”.
- The fulcrum is formed by the thumb and index finger, as this is the pivot point at all times, no matter how loose or “tight” the index finger is in different applications.
- All fingers stay in contact with the stick, and all fingers are used as equally as possible in order to avoid stressing out any one part of the hand.



- The fingers work in conjunction with the wrist, which is the main point of action.



- The hands are rotated outwards to approximately a 45 degree angle.
 - Placing another stick atop the one in playing position at the fulcrum, so that it touches the tip of the thumb and the knuckle of the index finger, should form an airplane banking left (for the left hand) or right (for the right hand) with the stick in playing position.



- The wrists are flush with the forearms.
- A straight line should form from the head to the elbow.
- The arm and stick should be positioned downwards from the shoulder to the head.



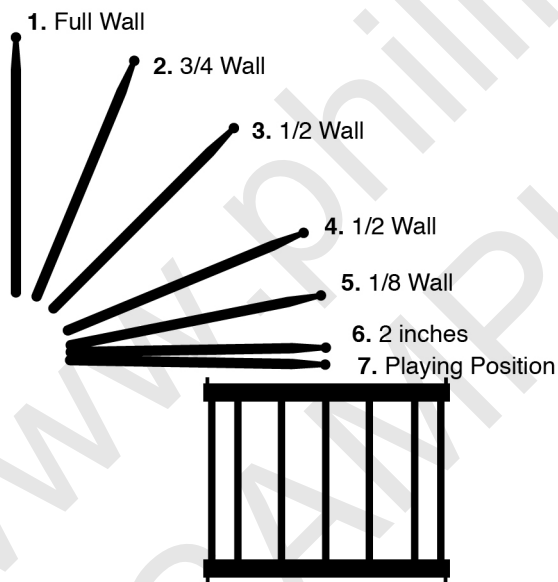
- Due to the position of the left arm being parallel to the ground and the height of the drum to accommodating the left hand position, the right elbow is raised slightly so that it is away from the body in a comfortable manner, but the wrist is still flush with the forearm.
- Together with the left hand, the sticks form a 90 degree angle. Beads are 1 inch apart and 1 inch off the surface
- The arm and stick should be positioned downwards from the shoulder to the bead.

STICK HEIGHTS AND DYNAMICS

For general purposes, dynamics will be determined by stick heights. We will not use the inch system used by so many drumlines, with the exception of tap heights. Using inches to determine stick height is inaccurate and difficult to estimate from the player's perspective (from the top down).

Easier to assess is the wall system. The "wall" is the position of the sticks when they are raised to the completely vertical plane. This system should prove easier to estimate both physically and visually.

The exception to the wall system will be tap heights. The beads of the stick should hover 1 inch above the head when resting in playing position. Since taps require a very small lift to execute the downstroke, and therefore don't stray too much from playing position, we will use inches to determine our tap heights... 2 inches, to be exact. Twice as high as the sticks at rest.



1. Full wall: ***ff***
2. 3/4 wall: ***f***
3. 1/2 wall: ***mf***
4. 1/4 wall: ***mp***
5. 1/8 wall: ***p***
6. 2 inches - taps: ***pp***
7. Playing position, 1 inch above the surface at rest

Ultimately, however, the music and tempo will dictate how we interpret dynamics and how high our sticks will raise.

SOUND

We will play through the drum. This does not mean mashing our sticks and mallets into the surface, nor does it mean playing hard. To play through the drum means to allow the force of the stick or mallet to travel through the top head, through the body of the instrument, and out the bottom head, taking full advantage of the whole drum.

We will not lift our sticks away from the head in an effort to “pull out the sound”. This ensures that we have a nice, full attack while still allowing the drum to resonate. It also ensures that we have full impact, rather than cutting off the impact from a premature lift of the stick.

MOTION AND STROKES

The order of motion initiates from the wrist and fingers, then the elbow, then the upper arm. Essentially, motion initiates from the outside in, towards the body.

When we play the drum, we *do not let the rebound do the work for us!* Rather, we allow the rebound to assist us. Letting the rebound do the work for us implies that we relinquish control to the rebound. This will not give us precision or the desired quality of sound. Rather, we play every single beat while learning how to utilize and manipulate the rebound to relieve the amount of work we have to do – how much muscle and energy we have to exert.

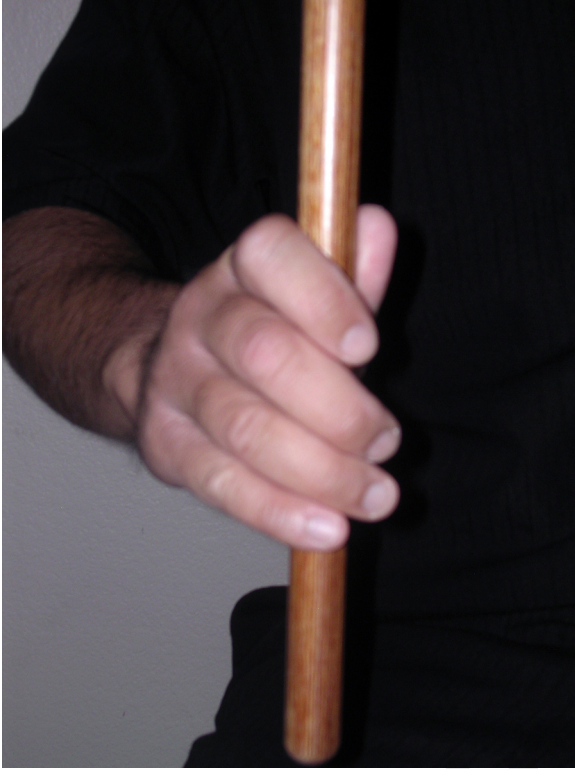
The idea of playing every single beat does not mean we should “muscle” out every beat. Stay relaxed at all times, making sure to not over-grip your sticks; do not tense your trapezius muscles (the ones that extend from the back of your neck to your shoulders) or your arms; do not forget to breathe. Breathing allows you to relax both your body and your mind.

What follows are brief explanations of the three basic strokes. The complexities of each stroke will be discussed throughout the season.

LEGATO STROKE

The term “Legato” means “smooth and without breaks.” Therefore, the Legato Stroke is a smooth stroke used when playing a series of notes that should not be played with any interruption in the flow of the stroke.

The legato stroke is the basis for all other strokes!



Examples of a fully extended legato stroke using match grip



Examples of a fully extended legato stroke using traditional grip.

As a general rule, we lead with the bead during the legato stroke, which forms an arc during the upstroke.

The legato stroke is initiated by the wrist and allows the fingers to open up – to come away from the palm – while remaining on the stick at all times. As the fingers open, the stick will slide towards the fingertips, and as they close the stick will slide back into the cup. The amount of open finger depends on the tempo and the desired stick heights. The fingers may not open very much during taps, but they should never choke off the stick.

For traditional grip, the motion of the stroke will, of course, create momentum for the stick. The ring finger is *not* married to the stick, and most often the stick will come off the finger in varying degrees. Depending on what is being played and the speed, the stick may also move the forefinger out of the way, allowing the thumb to flex along with the movement of the stick without creating a wide space between it and the index finger (example: a succession of beats all played at the same height, such as fast eighth notes). For rolls, the index finger may need to stay in place for added security of the grip. For tap-to-accent patterns, the stick may move the index finger out of the way but the finger should return to position in order to aid in freezing the stick (see: Staccato Stroke).

No matter how the stick and the fingers interact in the traditional grip, the fingers it must remain in the same relative position as when in playing position in order to efficiently act as needed, such as stopping the stick or supporting the stick on the next upstroke. In other words, the fingers should stay close to the stick, even when moving away. This also aids in the conservation of energy and muscle use.

STACCATO STROKE

The term “staccato” means “short, disconnected parts or sounds.” In drumming, the term “staccato” is used to explain the stopping or freezing of the stick upon impact, thus disrupting rebound and disconnecting itself from any subsequent note being played.

This stroke is distinct from the legato stroke in that the fingers must lightly close around the stick in order to stop the rounding stick from coming back up into the air above playing position (1 inch above the surface), thus freezing the stick immediately after impact. This “squeeze” or “tug” should be quick – almost instantaneous – and then immediately relieved so that the hand can revert back to its relaxed state. It should *not* be an intense squeeze at all.

As a result of freezing, the staccato stroke, in combination with low legato strokes – taps – give us our tap-to-accent relationship. Since the taps are played low, any high notes played in the pattern are then perceived to be accents. The staccato stroke is also used for the “release”, or final note, played in a passage.

Remember: the freezing of the stick is the only adjustment made to the legato stroke to give us the staccato stroke. Outside of this freezing of the stick, the legato stroke is the basis for the staccato stroke.

ROLL MOTION STROKE

This stroke is used for diddle patterns:

- Rolls, both short (ie. 5-stroke) and long
- High diddles
- “Accented” diddles, such as stutters

Roll motion is a subset of the legato stroke in that the motion of the wrists and fingers are the same as legato. However, with every initial attack of each double-beat (and, in *some* cases, triple-beat), the arm slightly moves up with the wrist’s upstroke and back down to playing position with the downstroke of the first beat. To compensate for the additional height offered by use of the arm, we use a little less wrist in the stroke. The second beat is played normally with enough wrist and finger to play it at the same volume as the first.

The arm used in roll motion is not used to create a more forceful sound, but to aid in the fluidity of playing sequential diddles. The arm lift should not be extreme, but slight.

For training purposes, we will often use the stroke without actually playing any diddles. Thus, to control the stick better, a closed-legato – a legato stroke very little, if any, opening of the fingers despite the height – would be used with the arm lift. Once diddles are added, we allow the fingers to open in order to play the diddles.

It is very important that, even though arm is being used for every initial double-stroke, wrist is used. Using wrist will help us to continue to lead with the beat. Without the wrist, the stick is raised flat with the arm which will result in bad-sounding, closed, “squishy,” uneven diddles.

Exercises

Please note that the exercises in this booklet are designed to work on and demonstrate your fundamental skills. Other exercises, and variations on the ones included in this booklet, may be given to you during the course of the season. It is your responsibility to learn all exercises and any music given to you, regardless of how often we play them.

As your skills improve, the exercises – and the music – you are given will be more difficult.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

It is recommended that the exercises be played in the order in which they are presented here, as each one becomes more complex and builds upon concepts worked in the previous exercise.

1. **Basics:** A legato stroke exercise. There are no breaks during multiple repetitions; the exercise loops without breaks and any tempo changes are made at the top of each repetition.
2. **Two-Height Mini:** A tap-to-accent exercise for single and alternating hands. It begins with legato strokes, utilizing two dynamic levels to work on two heights without any actual freezing, thus working on relaxation. The tap-to-accent passages should be played as relaxed as the introduction while incorporating the staccato stroke.
3. **Double U:** A multiple-stroke exercise that works low multi-strokes using only wrist and fingers, high multi-strokes using roll motion, paradiddles, and power diddles.
4. **Flegos:** A flam exercise designed to help build flam accent coordination. Incorporates everything exercised in *Two-Height Mini* and *Double U*. Bases concentrate on providing a groovy feel to help the uppers think musically, syncopations, and developing the coordination needed to play flams in the future.
5. **Golf Swing:** A triplet roll exercise designed to work roll motion. This exercise starts with buzz rolls to work the arms and moves into long rolls. The exercise works backwards, moving from rolls towards diddle rudiments such as 5s, drags, stutters, etc. There is a variation for the uppers that employs accents. Bases concentrate on using the downbeat and the triplet feel to play splits based on triplet partials.

Be sure to read any and all instructions included with each exercise, otherwise you may play them incorrectly, defeating the purpose of each.