

# Simple Tips to Improve Your Contest Concert Percussion Section

## “It’s the Little Things that Count”



Midwest Band Clinic  
December 19, 2002



presented by  
Dr. Larry Snider, The University of Akron  
(based on years of listening  
to percussion sections at contest)

### I. When using more than one snare drummer on a piece:

- A. Make sure drums are tuned alike.
- B. Metrics of rolls must be the same.
- C. Lower all dynamics one volume.

### II. When using suspended cymbals:

- A. Always “warm-up” cymbal for exact response.
- B. Always use marimba or vibe mallets – never use timpani mallets.
- C. Roll slow for no articulation sound.
- D. Never use brushes when they are called for – use thick wire for brush sound.
- E. Use opposite side of cymbal for best control.
- F. Dampen with body as well as with hands.

### III. When using crash cymbals:

- A. Do not overplay – use more angle for increased crash volume.
- B. For best sound, never use pads.
- C. Remember: crash cymbals always sound late! Play slightly early.  
Think of cymbals as a solo instrument – the sound comes late to a conductor  
so anticipate by performing at the top of the beat.

### IV. When using a bass drum:

- A. Tune drum to lowest possible note that does not sound “flappy” or false.
- B. Tune playing head 1/2 step higher than vibrating head.
- C. Articulation of commercial stick cannot be heard in a hall or gym. Use muffling cloth on drums for articulation; place 3 to 4 inches from rim.

**V. When using chimes:**

- A. Always overplay up one volume (f from mf, etc.). This instrument does not project.
- B. This is the only percussion instrument that sounds different everywhere it is placed in the section. The best place is usually to the side and front of the band.
- C. Use glancing blow and moleskin on hammer.
- D. The most common problem is fast passages because of muddy sound and clicking—glance the blow and half pedal.

**VI. When using vibraphones:**

- A. As with chimes, always overplay. Like chimes, this instrument does not project.
- B. Use vibraphone or light green rubber mallets (not marimba mallets) for performance.

**VII. When using triangle:**

- A. Whenever possible, hold triangle high in performance. This maintains a less-muffled sound. Cloths, music stands, etc. can cause triangle to lose beauty.
- B. On short notes never grab triangle with all fingers. Quickly add dampening fingers one-by-one.

**VIII. When using fast change of mallets:**

- A. Be careful of stick “clicks.” These are avoided by not picking up two sticks with one hand. Pick up one stick per hand.
- B. Use a tray cloth. A bath towel over a music stand will avoid organizational problems.

**IX. When using timpani:**

- A. Always sit on a stool. With all of the quick tuning changes in contemporary band literature, it is impossible to tune unless you have two feet available.
- B. Do not play rolls too fast for the drum. The lower the drum, the slower the roll. This avoids articulations in rolls.
- C. Use muffles in gyms and halls when articulations are needed.

**X. When using marimba:**

- A. The marimba can be especially effective in bands when you don't have full instrumentation.
- B. Using the marimba can double the inner voices of your band.
- C. Using the marimba can strengthen the weak sections of your band.

## Snare Drum Technique Check-List for Band Directors

# “Streamlining Your Technique Teaching”

**YAMAHA**



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### The Snare Drum

- Is the snare drum or practice pad flat and parallel to the ground?
- Is the “on and off” switch directly in front of the player?
- Is the snare drum stand at a height that makes the snare drum approximately waist-high?  
(This height depends on the length of the student’s arms.)
- Are the snares in “off” position so that the teacher can hear the stroke more effectively?

### Gripping the Stick

- Do the left and right hands mirror each other AT ALL TIMES?
- Is the thumb parallel to the stick?
- Is the second joint of the index finger and the thumb the only thing gripping the stick?  
It should be!
- Are the back three fingers close to the stick but not touching the stick?  
Watch the little finger. It should never straighten.
- Is all of the pressure on the thumb and index finger? The amount of pressure should only approximate the pressure needed to pick up a piece of candy with the thumb and index finger.
- Does the back of the hand stay parallel to the floor? While playing, the student should be able to balance a quarter on the back of the hand.
- When gripping the stick, does the student place his or her thumb or back of hand on the appropriate part of the stick logo?

## **During Performance**

- Does the student keep an even stroke while playing by having the sticks mirror each other with a stick height of 3, 6, or 9 inches (depending on dynamics of soft, moderate, or loud)?  
The sticks should never be any higher than 9 inches at this early age of playing the snare drum,
- Does the student keep the wrist almost exclusively in a “bouncing-the-basketball” style while playing?
- Does the head of the stick come down on the drum head in approximately the same place – no more than 1/2 inch away from the opposite stick?
- Do the sticks form a 90-degree angle with each other during performance?
- Is the stroke path of the stick always at a 90-degree angle to the drum head? (Something other than a 90-degree angle will exist if the student is turning his or her wrist as if to turn a door knob.)
- Is the student using the dynamic areas of the drum?
- Is the student using the appropriate stick height with BOTH sticks when using the drum’s dynamic areas?

## **The Arms**

- From a side view, do the student’s forearm and elbow form an “L” to the snare drum?  
This should vary only slightly according to the height of the student, the snare drum, and the length of the student’s arms.
- Are the elbows 3 to 6 inches from the body?

## **The Feet**

- Is the student standing on the balls of both feet in a "linebacker" football style?
- Are the feet placed only as wide as the width of the shoulders?

## **Tension and Posture**

- Is the student not gritting his or her teeth?
- Are the shoulders not raised or forced forward?
- Is the neck not forced forward?
- Is the back straight?