

Mountain Ridge Technique Booklet

By Jared O'Leary

~ All technique will be elaborated on and demonstrated over the course of the clinics ~

Grip

Match Grip

The match grip technique we use can best be described as a triangle fulcrum between the thumb, index, and middle finger. Traditionally the fulcrum is between the thumb and index finger and the rest of the fingers provide support or speed; however, **shifting the main fulcrum point between the thumb and the middle finger while using the index as a support finger allows you to play more relaxed and with better sound quality.** To practice this technique play through 16th note pyramid with the index finger on top of the stick for a few reps, after a while slide the index finger to the outside of the stick and let it hang there. When done correctly, the technique looks a lot like how you hold the inside mallet of Steven's 4 mallet grip or **it can also be described as forming a capital "T" between the thumb and index finger.** The remaining two fingers provide support for the stick much like you would hold an egg in your hand; if it's too relaxed you drop the egg, if it's too tight you break the egg in your hand and limit the sound quality (thank you Dustin Schletzer for that great analogy). When you are squeezing the stick too hard you get what looks like "white knuckles" and it results in a lot of tension and slows down your playing so watch out for that bad habit. The wrist position follows the line of the forearm with the top of the hand sloping slightly down and away from the body.

Note to tenors: the thumb always stays on the side of the stick, never switch over to French grip when playing on drums 3 and 4 or when doing crossovers or sweeps as this changes your stroke and thus changes your sound quality.

Note to basses: Your wrist motion is exactly like the snares and tenors only applied to a vertical surface; meaning you will not rotate your wrist/forearm to play the stroke as this creates a loss of control and sound quality.

Traditional Grip:

Line up your thumb straight down your forearm to your elbow and **place the thumb on top of the index finger creating a lower case "t."** Rest the stick on the cuticle of your ring finger and have the pinky hug the lower 3/4^{ths} of your ring finger as these two fingers work in unison with each other. The middle finger curves around the top of the stick and is never sticking out straight as that's rude to the audience ;) and causes unnecessary tension. **If your thumb is getting sore while you are playing you are probably squeezing too hard,** simply let the thumb rest on the index finger without causing "white knuckles" All fingers are naturally curved (except the thumb depending on your anatomy), and relaxed. **Yes we play with a slight tilt on the snares and no there isn't a set degree for it.** Go with what is comfortable with you and we will refine it as the season progresses.

The Stroke and the Motion

Match Grip

The general motion of our match grip technique is much like knocking on a door as it is all initiated in the wrist and not in the fingers to provide more relaxed power and resonant sound quality. You can practice this motion simply by laying your forearm on a flat surface and knocking your knuckles on it like you would knocking on a door. If you lift your forearm off the surface and continue to knock you should notice your wrist bending up and down, this is a good thing. **Every stroke you make with match grip should include a bend of the wrist.** A little amount of forearm motion is applied to our match grip stroke only on 9 inches and above to provide a little extra weight to our sound and to prevent restricted wrists. **Never use forearm or finger motion on taps.** Yes you can

play faster using fingers and we may apply some finger motion only at the fastest tempi; however, it severely limits your potential sound quality and we will show you exercises to build up wrist speed so you can limit the amount of finger needed when playing. **Always approach the head at a perpendicular angle so all of the sound is put directly into the head.** In general the sticks should never stop moving especially on exercises like stick control. **Practice at slow tempi to make sure you hands are in a continual state of fluid motion** as this will allow you to play faster with greater ease and less energy.

Traditional Grip:

Traditional motion is much like turning a doorknob as it is a perfect rotation from the center of the palm of your hand through your forearm all the way to your elbow. **Notice the thumb stays in alignment with the forearm through the entire motion;** if you bend your wrist out of alignment it slows down your rotation and it causes unnecessary tension on your wrist and the back part of your forearm. I recommend getting a small round doorknob to practice this motion and to build up your endurance (make sure there is resistance to it and it doesn't just spin forever without fighting back)

Chops vs. Sound Quality

Although chops and general endurance are necessary to make it through a camp weekend, **the most important thing to focus on is good sound quality through relaxed technique and not how many notes you can fit into any given second.** When you are playing the correct way it is possible to hear your sticks vibrate even at tap height, this idea is coined by Jeff Queen as "tap hum". When your sticks are vibrating in your hands that means you are not squeezing the stick too hard and you are allowing the physics behind the transfer of energy to occur from the stick into the drum rather than into your hand, thus giving a fuller and deeper sound quality to your playing. **Good sound quality must be achievable at all tempi** so practice slowly as much as you do fast to achieve complete control over any given tempo.

Posture

Lower Body:

Weight should be distributed between the four corners of the feet with slightly more weight towards the platform of the foot rather than towards the heel. This gives the appearance of forward momentum and allows you to march without a height change when switching between marching on your heels and marching on your platform. Heels should be together and feet at a 45 degree angle. **Knees should be slightly bent** to prevent you from passing out when standing for a long time.

Upper Body:

Your core muscles should be engaged to separate your lower body from your upper body at all times to prevent swaying when marking time or marching. **Arms should be relaxed with low shoulders and elbows should be hanging by your side.** Again fingers should be relaxed and curved. If you notice your upper body getting tense while playing, shift your focus to your breathing while playing or take a moment to stretch out your arms and shoulders.

Head:

Your forehead should point slightly below the horizon while eyes point slightly above the horizon at the drum major podium/tower. When standing and playing eyes are fixed on one position; however when marching, eyes move from side to side and back to the drum major for quick guiding. **Do not get into the habit of looking down at your drums as this takes your focus away from effective audience communication;** instead, learn to rely on your kinesthetic and aural senses to determine if you are playing in the correct playing zone on the drum.