

Mountain Ridge Percussion Technique Booklet

By Jared O'Leary

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

Grip/Hold

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, or a scale exercise, with the index finger on top of the stick/mallet for a few reps, after a while slide the index finger to the outside of the stick/mallet 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/mallet 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/mallet too hard you get what looks like "white knuckles" and it results in a lot of potentially harmful tension, slows down your playing, and "chokes off" the sound quality 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; **the hand is not flat.**

Note to Mallets: Everything about the grip/hold described above applies to every single mallet instrument when performing with two mallets; the only difference is the mallet shaft is thinner than a stick so there is even less contact with the hand.

Note to Timpanists: Timpani players will perform with thumb up technique and can either apply finger motion for a softer sound or rotary motion for a louder sound. I personally play with rotary French grip (thumb up) every time I play timpani; however, for different sounds I apply different techniques.

Note to Tenors: Never initiate motion from French grip (thumbs up) when playing on drums 3 and 4 or when doing crossovers or sweeps as this changes your stroke and thus changes your sound quality and consistency.

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

The Stroke and the Motion

The primary 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 knock 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 should include a bend of the wrist.** In addition to playing with an up and down wrist motion, **there is a slight rotation of the hand right before each impact.** When knocking on a surface, as your index finger goes down your thumb rotates almost on top of the stick right before impact. A little amount of forearm motion is applied to our stroke only on 9 inches and above to provide a little extra weight to our sound and to prevent restricted wrists. Yes you can play faster using fingers and we may apply some finger motion only at the fastest tempi (*FYI tempi is plural for tempo*); 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 instrument at a perpendicular angle so all of the sound is put directly into the instrument.** In general the sticks/mallets should never stop moving especially on exercises like stick control or scales. **Practice at slow tempi to make sure your hands are in a continual state of fluid motion** as this will allow you to play faster, with greater ease, and less energy.

Chops vs. Sound Quality

Although chops and general endurance are necessary, **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/mallets vibrate, this idea is coined by Jeff Queen as “tap hum”. When your sticks/mallets are vibrating in your hands that means you are not squeezing the stick/mallet too hard and you are allowing the physics behind the transfer of energy to occur from the stick/mallet into the instrument 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. **We will slow everything down to 40 bpm** so start practicing slow now as we will have to earn playing at faster tempi.

Posture for the Non-Marching Percussionists:

Weight should be distributed between the four corners of the feet. Knees should be slightly bent to prevent you from passing out when standing for a long time. Feet should be shoulder length and you will move them without crossing one leg over another when traveling into the upper and lower registers of your instrument so your body stays centered with your playing area without losing balance. **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. **Do not hunch over the instrument as it narrows your peripheral vision and makes note accuracy harder. Do not get into the habit of looking down at your instrument as this takes your focus away from effective ensemble and 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 instrument.

Posture for the Marching Percussionists

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. 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. **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.