

Wills Point High School Drumline

2010 Percussion Handbook

Home
of the
TIGERS



Philosophy Statement

The marching percussion program at Wills Point High School believes in educational and personal growth through experience and musical interpretation while teaching technical precision and consistency. The group is designed to create a learning environment that is conducive to a high level of musical performance, while upholding the tradition of the Tiger Marching Band and the high school in the most dignified manner.

Rehearsal Expectations

Given the time constraints of a normal Tiger Band performance season, every effort must be made to maximize the amount of quality, on-task rehearsal time within each rehearsal. As a result, the rehearsal environment must be completely free of extraneous noise, talking, or disruptive behavior. Our work ethic is absolutely vital to our success.

Performance

Every effort must be taken to ensure that all aspects of the Tiger Marching Band presence exude the highest levels of professionalism, musicianship, and maturity. Any public performance, regardless of length or scope, will be approached in complete and total seriousness. As a member of the Tiger Drumline, you will be expected to be alert, focused, on-task at all times during performance, whether that is on the field, in the stands or in parade. Remember, someone is always watching. Assume that every impression is the first.

Posture

Before you even play a note, there are a number of things you must do to set yourself up for the success you are about to achieve. First, let's discuss posture. As you may already know, it is important for all players to practice correct posture to not only define the uniformity of the line, but to maintain a healthy spine. Head is up, shoulders are in line with the hips, and weight is 70% on the front of your feet (balls of your feet) and 30% on your heels so you have a very slight forward lean. Check to make sure that there is no unwanted tension in your shoulders. Finally, make sure that the drum is set at the correct height (stand or carrier height must be the same).

Always keep the big picture in mind while marching and playing. That is whatever you are doing with our lower body is to create the best situation for our upper body to play music and project a certain emotion to the audience.

Sticks Out/ Sticks In

Both, sticks out and sticks in should be staccato in motion. In order to achieve this, start the initiation of motion as late as possible. Therefore, sticks out should hit exactly on count 7 before you begin playing. Sticks in should create an aggressive sound on the count after the last beat is played. Even though this is a staccato motion in and out, make sure you stay relaxed and don't tense up before you start playing. Also, there should be no fidgeting or readjusting right after the sticks come out or in. Make them quick and confident motions. Do not underestimate the importance of sticks out and sticks in. They serve a large role in the quality of the music you are playing, and the aggressive uniformity of technique we are striving for.

Stroke Types

In rudimental playing, there are four basic types of strokes. These are defined by the position of the stick before and after a note is played. The first three utilize the wrist for the primary pivot point and the fourth involves the fulcrum.

The Full Stroke: Basically the bead (or mallet head) starts and ends in the same position as a result of rebound. This stroke can begin any distance from the head, but you need to allow the stick to rebound off the head and have it return to the point where the stick began. The full stroke should have a pretty good amount of energy behind it to get a maximum amount of rebound, and sound. As always, this motion should be relaxed and smooth also. The wrist should simply follow the stick back to its original position. This stroke can be played at any height including 3 inches; so it can also be called a tap.

The Down Stroke: Starts higher and ends lower. This stroke should initially feel exactly the same as a full stroke all the way until the stick/mallet strikes the drum. Once the rebound starts happening, your hand just stays down and the weight of your hand will keep the stick/mallet where it needs to be for your next stroke. **THIS DOES NOT REQUIRE AND MORE PRESSURE ON THE STICK OR THE SHAPE OF YOUR HAND TO CHANGE IN ANY WAY!**

The Up Stroke: Starts lower and ends higher. This stroke happens by pulling the bead/mallet head away from the drumhead with the wrist in a completely relaxed motion after striking the drum. These strokes are most commonly found when going from a tap to an accented note.

For all of these three strokes, the shape of the hand never changes, the pressure should stay the same and the motion should be fluid but aggressive. We are always striving for a full mature sound and should not be “feather-tapping” the drum to hide or because of a lack of musical confidence. Every member needs to be contributing.

Multiple Bounce Strokes: This stroke includes double strokes (rolls), triple strokes (hugga-dits), and buzz strokes. Bouncing the stick requires a little more pressure focused in the front of the fulcrum, which is discussed under the middle fulcrum category in the next section. The most important thing to keep in mind when playing a bounce stroke is that the motion of the stick stays consistent to the base rhythm that you are actually playing in combination with the stroke. For instance: triplet rolls should have the same motion and feeling in the arms and wrist as just playing triplets. The only thing that changes is you apply slightly more pressure to the fulcrum and continue pushing the stick down a little bit longer (enough to get the second note out).

Shifting Fulcrum Concepts

In order to understand how to play music correctly the first time with regard to tempo, we must explore the shifting fulcrum concept. Everyone uses the shifting fulcrum when they play. It is just that most don't realize the importance of being aware of how to use it.

The concept of the shifting fulcrum is completely dependent on the tempo. There are three such fulcrums involved. They are the back fulcrum, middle fulcrum, and the front fulcrum.

Back Fulcrum: used for slow to moderate tempos. It consists of a conscious presence of the back fingers of the hand on the stick but not squeezing the stick or putting very much pressure on the stick at all creating a “chamber of resonance” for the stick to vibrate and produce the biggest sound possible. This creates maximum control of the stick. The wrist simply forms a relaxed hinge and performs the work most efficiently on its' own unless louder dynamics are needed in which case the arm may be needed to assist in higher heights/more volume. Again, just because we are holding on with the back fingers does not mean we are squeezing or creating pressure or tension while holding onto the stick. The majority of the full, down and up strokes that we will use in general playing use the back fulcrum.

Middle Fulcrum: used for moderate to quick tempos. Within the match grip, the middle and ring fingers are more prevalent in the control of the stroke when isolating the middle fulcrum. More pressure is needed between the thumb and the index and middle finger to create a more defined fulcrum/pivot point for the stick to react to. While performing such a stroke, the fingers are used more extensively than in the back fulcrum. This fulcrum is needed for double strokes and very fast single strokes. The ring and pinkie fingers

are still never to leave the stick with this fulcrum! They are simply “along for the ride.” This is used most commonly in double bounce rolls.

Front Fulcrum: used for quick tempos. The pivot point is very poignant; existing strictly between the index finger and thumb. For fast single strokes, there is actually not very much pressure between these two fingers, but they act together to create a very clear point for the stick to pivot on. All of the back fingers are to stay in contact with the stick and are used at the main propellant for the stick. These smaller muscles in the fingers are more easily maneuvered at fast tempos and should be used solely instead of the wrist or arm. For fast, tight buzzes or bounce strokes, more pressure is needed at this point but the back fingers still do not need to come out of contact with the stick. Wrists and fingers stay put and arm is needed.

Be aware and analyze the seamless transitions between the fulcrums. A complex understanding of this is helpful in the development of chops and control.

Smoothness

What is “Smoothness”? To me, it means a drummer has fluidity about their appearance when he/she plays. This fluidity comes from not over-restricting the rebound during any stroke that they play. Any such restriction can also be referred to as tension. Holding on to the stick tightly while you play should cause tension and restrict the rebound. As a result, you will lack flow. When you use all the concepts that have been discussed in this handbook, please focus on achieving and maintaining smoothness. Use your understanding of the playing area and the shifting fulcrums to do so. You can have that fluidity that is defined as smoothness, if you use these concepts correctly. The technique should be very relaxed. Strive to stay completely relaxed from the shoulder to the fingers and really all the way through the upper body.

The Height/ Dynamic System

pp- 1” grace notes

p- 3” taps

mf- 6” general playing, or *ff* taps

f- 9” typical accents

ff- 12” arm becomes involved with the stroke

fff- 15” mostly visual dynamic

A dynamic marking such as this: *f-p*, simply means that accents will be played at forte (9”) while taps will be at piano (3”).

10 Tips for Practicing Efficiently

1. Always practice performance.
2. Be a “patient perfectionist”.
3. Always play with proper technique and approach (minimize bad habits/maximize good habits).
4. When using a metronome, work exercises in two beat increments. This reduces extreme tempo fluctuations while performing due to the fact that you developed the understanding of such minimal changes in tempo.
5. Be aware of the idea/concept of space (i.e. – the “rests”) and understand its’ importance and role that it plays within your music.
6. Realize that a great drummer is not to be determined by how much they can play or how fast they can play; but, it *is* to be determined by how “**smart**” they truly are. Think about what that means and how it applies to you.
7. Do your best to not only understand the “correct” ways to execute with regards to interpretation, musicality, and technique, but understand the “incorrect” ways so that you know how to change your mistakes should they ever occur. And, do your best to not only assess **what** is incorrect but, importantly, **why** it is incorrect.
8. Know that you are different. Just because someone else does something a certain way doesn’t mean it may necessarily work for you. Be open to yourself. Learn at the pace in which you are satisfied with your own progression. Take your time.
9. When practicing music, be sure to take it within context. For example, if there is a phrase before “the snare break”, play that phrase and the break sequentially. The reason being that your hands will be able to gather the flow the music is to create, thus practicing performance.
10. Play in front of a mirror so that you do not have to look down to assesses your playing and technique. In addition, you will get used to keeping your eyes ahead and forward, just like the fearless, confident player that you want to be.

SNARE

Grip

Divide the stick into thirds and place your fulcrum (thumb and first-finger) on the division between the first and second sections. To create the fulcrum, place the thumb in line with the shaft of the stick and close any space between the thumb and first fingers wrapped comfortably around the stick.

Playing Position

Bring your hands/arms up from your sides and position both sticks one finger width above the rim. Be sure that the sticks point very slightly toward the surface of the head, and form a symmetrical “V” shape (slightly smaller than 90 degrees) with beads 1” apart and 1” from the playing surface.

The hand position should create a straight line between the forearm and the knuckle of the index finger and should be turned at a relaxed angle where your shoulders are relaxed and there is about one to two inches of space between your elbows and the side of your body.

The Stroke

All strokes are initiated from the head of the stick. To do this, you are tuning back at the wrist up to 9 inches. If you are going past 9 inches, you can incorporate the arm. As you come back down to hit the drum, use the exact opposite process moving the arm back to nine inches and wrist being the last thing to propel the stick toward the head.

QUADS

Grip

The tenor mallet is held comfortably between the thumb and first finger. The mallet follows the natural inside crease of the hand and the remaining fingers are wrapped comfortably around the stick. There should be no daylight visible between the thumb and first fingers, ever. Playing position for both hands should be as low to the drums as possible, so that when at rest the mallets are pointed slightly to the floor and the beads are one inch above the surface of the drums. When in playing position, the crease of the thumb and first finger should be at about a 40 degree in relationship to the playing surface. Arms should hang naturally down either side of your body. They should not be tight against the body, nor pushed out away from the body. Both of these scenarios create tension and thus reduce efficiency. Shoulders need to be low and relaxed at all times. Especially keep this in mind when doing crossovers.

Stroke

All strokes are initiated from the wrist. The wrist acts like a well-oiled hinge and through practice, coordinates the use of gravity and rebound to produce the dark, warm, full-bodied sound. This technique shifts towards the use of the fingers gradually as we increase speed. When playing a true ‘wrist legato’ stroke, the fulcrum (or point of rotation) is in the back of the hand. As tempos increase, the fulcrum moves to the front of the hand where the thumb and first finger contact the mallet. Emphasis should be on developing this shifting fulcrum as a gradual transition and at no time should go from all-wrist to all-finger.

The result would be a drastic reduction in sound quality and control. A great way to develop this transition is with rudiments rehearsed “Slow-Fast-Slow.”

Motion

All strokes are vertical. Basic strokes must be mastered on one drum before one is to move around the drums. The forearms provide lateral movement around the drums. When playing a grouping of two, three, or even four notes that move around the drums, all notes must be played vertically. We do this for a number of reasons. The first one is that the technique in the hands does not need to change to move around the drums. Everything should feel the same to your hands on one drum as it does around the drums. The second reason is that the sound will be different if the drum is hit at an angle. A slicing or sweeping motion will lessen both quality of sound and rebound of the drum. The last reason is that you are going to have less control of where the notes are being placed if the motion is not straight down into the drum. This causes bad playing areas as well as hitting lots of rims. To master this approach one must create a separation of vertical and lateral motion. To best achieve this, the forearms must glide on an imaginary “glass surface” which rests about one inch off the surface of the drum. This imaginary surface is called the “Playing Plane.” Forearms should carry the wrist from drum to drum while the upper arms rotate around creating a “windshield wiper” motion that will naturally place the beads in the correct playing areas on each drum. Moving the upper arm while playing around patterns is discouraged.

Playing Areas

Each mallet has its own zone on each drum; therefore there are two small zones on each drum. The zones are about an inch and a half from the rim of each drum. The path of the right hand is straight between drums 3, 1, and 2, and then comes in toward the body as it reaches drum 4. The left hand mirrors this path by traveling straight between drums 4, 2, and 1, and then in to reach drum 3. It is extremely important that you practice around patterns SLOWLY at first, striving for accuracy, and then gradually working up the speed.

BASS

Grip

The bass mallet is held comfortably between the thumb, middle finger, and ring finger. The index finger is resting on the stick with minimal pressure. The soft/fleshy part of the thumb should make contact with the mallet and should “point” to the head of the mallet (very similar to holding a golf club). There should be no visible daylight between the thumb and first finger, EVER! However, it is essential that no tension is created between the thumb and first-finger with the exception of high speed rolls and rudiments. Begin with both arms hanging down by your sides with the thumbs on the top of the mallets and your hands by your legs. The mallets should point forward and down at a 45-degree angle. Next, bring your arms up (bending at the elbows) until the forearms are parallel to the ground. The position of the hand, wrist, and mallet should not change. This playing position should feel very relaxed and natural. From this position, we will adjust the carrier and stand so the center of the bass head is lined up with the head of the mallet. It is important to adjust the drum to the player, not the player to the drum. Once the drum has been positioned to fit the player, bring your forearms in so they touch the bass drum rim. Memorize what part of your arm touches the rim so you will be able to always find the center of the bass head. The size of the drum will determine whether your forearm, wrist, or fingers make contact with the hoop. In playing position, the mallets should be pointed slightly in toward the drumhead so that your wrist/forearm/fingers do not rest on the hoop of the drum while you are not playing. Your arms should hang naturally on both sides of your

body. The amount of space between your elbows and ribs depends on the size of your body frame. Your upper body needs to remain relaxed and free of tension at all times.

Rotation

The bass drum stroke consists of a LEGATO rotation. All strokes are initiated from a simple rotation of the forearm. Let the weight of the mallet help with the rotation. The motion we use for bass drumming is almost always legato. However, there are instances in which the music calls for a different type of sound and, accordingly, a different stroke style. We have found that playing with a legato stroke style gives us the strongest, fullest sound with the clearest articulation and tone. Although some of the bass drum sound comes from muffling and tuning, there is no substitute for consistent technique from player to player. As a general rule, mallet height up to nine inches is achieved strictly by rotation. Be careful not to develop a very bent angle between your forearm and the mallet so you have a “caveman with a club” rotation toward the head. Keep a very obtuse angle between your forearm and the mallet and a relaxed rotation. If playing a dynamic past the 9 inches a slight wrists bend as well as added arm should be incorporated.

Timing

Good timing starts from the ground up. Quite literally, the feet are the most important asset to success in this activity (regardless of the instrument played). It is important that the feet are the source of pulse and the hands “line up” with the feet, not the other way around. Having a good, strong sense of time in the feet may be the deciding factor in the audition process. Always practice with a metronome and moving your feet. The evolution of tonal bass drums as an instrument and “split” parts require a new set of skills for the aspiring percussionist. Each player is responsible for his piece of the puzzle: lose a piece, and the puzzle makes no sense. Before this concept can be introduced, it is essential that all of the players in the bass line understand their individual part, how it relates to their feet, how their part relates to other parts, and have the same interpretation of the space between all the notes. Thus, grip, rotation, and timing are prerequisite skills to having a bass line that can “flow.” If you can’t count downbeats of the measures out loud as you play, you don’t know your music. Knowing where the downbeat is at all times is what it means to have a good pulse.

Smoothness

Smoothness is a crucial part of playing in the bass drum line. But, it cannot happen until everyone knows the notes on the page. Also, each player must have the same concept of time. Drumset players can change the feel of a tune by altering the placement of their notes from behind the beat, to right on the beat, to driving in front of the beat. Once everyone knows “the notes” and has committed to the same concept of tempo, then we can talk about developing consistent space between the notes. On bass drum, all split parts can be simplified to some sort of “check” pattern. Before we can play two’s, three’s, and four’s, we must be able to play the check pattern in time, with the feet. Once the check pattern is well established, any subsequent notes added must be evenly spaced (relative to the first note on each drum). It is imperative that bass drummers understand basic note groupings and are able to play any partial (with either hand) comfortably. Remember, music is neither hard, nor easy: it is either “familiar” or “not familiar.” If it is not familiar, work on it until it is familiar.