

Oconee County Percussion

Technique Packet

New logo coming soon!

We are so glad you are interested in auditioning for Oconee County Percussion! Below we have outlined our philosophy and approach to the activity. This is by no means the only way; but it is our way. This information has been compiled through many sources and the experiences of our very qualified staff.

We have put together an approach that we believe will set students up for success. Not only as marching percussionist; but as well rounded musicians and performers. I am aware there is a lot of content involved in this packet. But... READ IT! we have put a lot of thought and consideration into this and what we intend to teach you throughout the season. We as a staff are VERY excited to get started and we hope you are too!

Battery & Front Ensemble Technique

Principles of our Philosophy

- Our goal is to achieve **UNIFORMITY** in technique, touch, sound quality, rhythmic and dynamic clarity.
- We always strive for a **FULL** and **OPEN** quality of sound. Even at lower dynamics/heights.
- We always strive for a **RELAXED** physical sensation.
- We allow the stick/mallet to **RESONATE** naturally within the hand. You should feel it vibrate!
- We always strive for **ECONOMY OF MOTION**.
- We always create a **BIG** presence at the instrument. Commit to a good posture and fill up your space.
- We always **PERFORM**. Every rep is a performance and you must capture the audience's attention.

The Metronome

The metronome is an essential tool in our individual and ensemble practice. You must make consistent metronome work apart of your practice routine. However, the metronome should be used as a guide for playing in time and not as a crutch. Be sure to incorporate a variety of pulse types in your practice. This will help develop your tempo awareness. Most of our tempo responsibilities will include either playing with a metronome or playing with another person. We recommended you practice both!

Dynamics and Heights

Dynamics	Height	Comment
ppp - p	1"	Common grace note height
p - mf	3"	Common inner beat height
mp - f	6"	Height of a Coke can
mf - ff	9"	Common accent height
f - fff	12"	Maximum wrist height
ff - ffff	15" - 20"	Vertical, often used for visual/impact purposes

Battery

Set up and Stroke

- The fulcrum (pivot point) is created by making **soft** contact with the stick between the pad of your thumb and the first knuckle (closest to the tip of your finger) of your index finger.
- The fulcrum should remain relaxed at all times. This is the part of the grip that gives us control. But, if we over control (Squeeze) we will lose all of the advantages.
- The pad of your thumb should remain flat at all times.
- The stick should be an extension of the thumb (stick and thumb are parallel)
- The fulcrum is placed at the balance point of the stick. (roughly 2/3 of the way from the bead)
- The back three fingers will **Always** stay in contact with the stick. (“Meat on the stick”) This allows you to put more weight behind the stroke. It will also ensure your fingers are in the right place when they are needed to aid in the motion.
- The gap between your thumb and index finger should (naturally) stay closed.
- Motion will primarily come from the wrist. (rest your arm on a table and knock on it without picking up your arm; this is the primary motion of the stroke)
- Always lead the stroke from the bead of the stick.
- The stick should travel in a straight path over the arm to avoid “slicing.”
- We allow the wrist, fingers, and arms to work together to create a **full/relaxed** sound.
- When playing a relaxed stroke you should feel the weight of the stick in the middle/back of your hand. Having the weight further back in the hand enables us to achieve a fuller sound while focusing on the proper wrist rotation and fulcrum control. (Note: the sensation of weight should not alter the location or use of the fulcrum)
- Minimize the amount of “human interference,” allow each stroke to be as efficient as possible. Let the stick do the work!
- Let the stick breathe! If the stick is held tightly, the natural vibrations and resonance of the stick are “choked off,” resulting in a very thin quality of sound. Consequently, the shock of an improper stroke into the drum will be transferred directly into the player’s hands and forearms---potentially resulting in unnecessary injury

The above outlines what we like to call “The whole hand approach.” No one part of the hand should do most of the work. It is about finding the balance and letting all parts work together to create a **Full, Relaxed, and Efficient** stroke.

Playing position

- Roll your shoulders back and stand up straight. Your posture should be relaxed at all times (“soft shoulders”).
- The elbow should rest near the player’s body, but not touching. At no point should tension enter the arms, shoulder, neck, or face.
- Beads should stay together in the center of the head.
- The sticks should be at a slight angle down towards the head. The stick should be an extension of the arm. Follow its natural angle down.
- The sticks should make a “^” shape that is a little less than 90 degrees. This is our “Power Triangle.”
- Our hand position is a relaxed version of German grip (completely flat). Start with your hands in German and then turn the thumbs up slightly.
- Unless otherwise instructed your head should be directed up “to the box.”

Tenor Considerations

- Default playing position is over drum 1 & 2
- The hand position will split the difference between French and German (roughly a 45 degree angle)
- Maintain an arc when traveling from drum 4 to 3. Never pull the elbow back. The elbows will only pull back when playing the spock drum.
- The “T’ed” up approach will be used for the outer drums. The beads must be equidistant from the rim. (Refer to Bill Bachman’s *Quad Logic* if possible)



***** Parts should first be learned on one drum to ensure quality of sound, rhythmic accuracy, and muscle memory.*****

Bass Considerations

- The grip used is very similar to that of snare drum matched grip, except the hands are rotated so the wrists are vertical instead of horizontal. The thumb and index finger form a fulcrum on the mallet. This should not be a gap between the thumb and the third knuckle of the index. The rest of the fingers should be wrapped around the mallet very naturally.
- The bass mallet is designed to be held further back than a snare/tenor stick. There should be very little, if any, stick showing out of the back of your hand. (depends on hand size)

- The wrist turn is different on bass drum. The plane (straight line) made by the forearm and the back of the hand does not break as much as in horizontal playing. Instead, the entire forearm rotates on an imaginary axis. It is very similar to turning a doorknob. Swiveling, and making circles with the path of the mallet are not desired at all. The mallet needs to follow one arching path from point A to point B and back. The player should focus on letting the head do the work to rebound the mallet back to the desired height.

Interpreting 2's, 3's, and 4's (Bass Drums)

1. The first thing that must happen when approaching 2's, 3's, and 4's is that the figure is started in the precise point in time that it is written to begin sounding. If the figure starts on the "&" of the beat, then the player needs to make sure that this happens first. If he/she plays a "3" perfectly spaced, not too opened, or too closed, and it is balanced and blended perfectly with the other players, but the starting point of the figure is misplaced slightly in time, all chance of smoothness and continuity of the musical phrase are lost.
2. The next step is to make sure the rhythm played after the starting point is correct. The tendency that most players have is to play the rhythms too closed. Sometimes, if the player is playing their figure on the downbeat, it is more difficult to properly space out the rhythm than if it was started on the "&" because there is not as strong of a beat after it to play to. When starting on the "&" the figure usually continues up to the next downbeat, which is where the foot hits as well.
3. The next skill to master must be articulation. To get each note to speak clearly, the player must slightly crescendo each one. When a bass drum is struck it has a resonance that can last up to 1 ½ to 3 seconds until it completely dies away. If someone is playing a "4", the attack of the second, third, and fourth notes will be slightly covered up by the resonance of the note played before it. So, if the player plays all four notes at exactly the same volume the articulation will sound "muddier." From farther away it's almost completely unnoticeable. Using this technique allows each note to be clearly heard over the constantly resonating head and it helps smooth out the musical phrase. The worst habit many bass drummers acquire is accenting the first note of the figure because they are so focused on starting it at the correct point in time.
4. Once the bass drummer has mastered starting the rhythm in the correct place, spacing out the rhythm correctly, and articulating the right way, he/she can now notice how they are blending in with the bass line around them. One cannot really begin to analyze how they are playing with the other musicians until all 5 of them have mastered the first 3 steps. Balance and blend is not possible at the highest level unless the more basic skills are second nature to the players. If the first 3 steps are mastered, now we do small adjustments to certain phrases to make sure that each player is contributing musically to the entire ensemble.

Stroke Types

Rebound Stroke: The stroke starts at any given height, strikes the head, and returns to the starting point. There is no restriction on the way down or on the way back up. Because of this ability of the stick to move freely and smoothly, the stroke is often called “Legato Stroke”. The stroke should feel exactly like the two names imply: relaxed, smooth, and should be very much like bouncing a ball. When bouncing a ball, the only energy used is through sending the ball down toward the ground. The ball and the ground work together to send the ball back to the starting point. The same approach should be taken when playing a rebound stroke. Use energy to send the stick from the desired starting point down into the head, and allow the stick and the head to send back to the starting point. Velocity, the amount of speed used to initiate the motion, is the key having great sounding rebound strokes. The stick must have a great amount of velocity, from a quick wrist motion, to rebound fully. Please notice that the velocity comes from a “quick wrist motion”, not squeezing the stick into the palm. The sticks should always be able to vibrate and “breathe” fully in your hands. If the sticks are vibrating, the drum will vibrate and help get the fullest sound and best tone quality possible at any dynamic. Normally, the path of the stick is straight up and down.

That was the definition of a “pure” rebound stroke. It is strongly encouraged that the idea of “pure” rebound is explored by the player before continuing on to “controlled rebound”. Or as we will refer to it...

Tap Stroke: A rebound should be used at all dynamics and stick heights. However, at the “low end” (usually between 1 inch and 3 inches), a “pure” rebound is not enough to create the desired resonance and quality of sound. In order to achieve the **full sound** we desire for our taps; we must apply more velocity. This would send the stick higher than the original starting point on the way back up. Which means the stick will need to be “controlled”. This control happens by not allowing the wrist to continue to turn past the original starting point and not allowing the fingers to open up. The most important aspect to understand about the “controlled rebound” Or “tap stroke” is that you are not introducing tension into the hand by “squeezing” the stick. Instead, they are just not allowing the stick to turn up past the desired ending point. Relaxation is still the key to getting a great sound.

Down Strokes: Down Strokes are most commonly found as an accented note followed immediately by an unaccented note. However, there are many other places in the music where one would find a down stroke to be appropriate. Naturally, if you play a note at forte, the stick will want to rebound back up to the original starting point. If we are playing a forte accent followed by a piano tap, then we need to control the stick on the rebound. This is a down stroke. This control happens after the bead of the stick strikes the head. On the way back up, the stick is simply stopped at the new height. The stick is stopped by not allowing the wrist to turn past the new, lower height and the fingers may slightly cushion the stick from extra motion. It is critical that the stick is not “squeezed” into a stopping position. Tension should be almost nonexistent in the hand. Often, because the stick wants to naturally return to the starting position, which is farther from the playing surface than the lower height, the lower note has a tendency to be played “early”. This is a very common mistake. If we are playing eighth notes, the stick must travel a smaller distance for the tap in the same amount of time that it traveled for the accented note. This is what causes the tap to be early. One must pay very close attention to deliberately place the

tap after an accent perfectly in time. Again, it should be understood that relaxation is the most important aspect of getting a great sound.

Up Strokes: Up Strokes are usually found as an unaccented note followed immediately by an accented note. However, there are many other places in the music where one would find an up stroke to be appropriate. If the stick is turned up to 3 inches to play a tap, the stick naturally will only rebound to the original height of 3 inches. If the next note played is an accent, then a significant amount of velocity needs to be used in the up motion and back down into the drum. The new velocity is applied after the tap first strikes the drum. The accent, after a tap, must be approached with a high amount of energy to make sure that it “sounds” in time. Many of the unwanted rhythmic tendencies are more likely in up strokes as compared to down strokes. If starting with a tap, many players may accidentally let the first attack “fall in” early, or “stab” it in from the tacet position. The wrist should always turn up, no matter what height, to ensure the accurate placement of the tap. Another major tendency is that the first accent after a tap might be “late”. The reason for this is that the stick only wants to return to the original, low starting height. Most players that have this specific problem are not adding enough velocity to the accented note on the way up from the tap. Once again, it is important to remember to approach up strokes with relaxation in mind.

***** Front ensemble note:** We refer to the second half of our piston stroke as an upstroke due to the lack of rebound provided by the mallet instruments. In your case, it is not dictated by passage played before or after. All of our strokes (unless noted for visual purposes) will end in an up stroke. ***

Visual

We will stand with our feet at a “60-degree” angle. (A good unit of measure is a fists width!) When marking time, the entire foot must leave the ground (about 1/2 an inch) into a parallel position. The close or end of the mark time will place back into the 60-degree beginning angle. The basis of all movement will come from the platform of the foot. We will use a toe down technique for forward/backward motion and a crab-step for side to side motion.

Dance

Core should always be engaged to establish a firm foundation of movement.

Dance positions: first- heels together toes apart/60 degrees, second- feet turned out, shoulder width apart; third- both feet turned out, heel placed next to the arch of the foot; fourth- both feet turned out, space between feet shoulder width apart; fifth- both feet turned out, heel to toe.

Plie: demi- knees go outward over toes, heels stay on the ground; grande- knees go outward over toes, working through demi plie to find a deeper plie. Heels come off the ground in every position except for second. Body should stay centered between feet when working through plies, keeping posture in line from the top of the head through the tail bone as knees work through the bend of the plie.

Tendue- begin in turned out first position, center of body weight should stay grounded on the standing leg, working through the forward, side, and back, the foot moves from the leg in one motion to find a full extension through the foot, keeping the extension when the foot is returning to neutral first *when working in the back plane, be careful to go to the actual back rather than the 45 with the foot (the 45 is more “natural” but not correct).

Rond de Jambe- begin in turned out first position, center of body weight should stay grounded on the standing leg, the foot extends out to front tendue then travels through side tendue, through back tendue and finding its way back to the neutral first. Standing leg can either stay strong and straight, or can founde (bend in plie) as the rond de jambe occurs. * can also occur in a backwards motion starting in back tendue, through side tendue, and finishing in front tendue.

Releve- can be done in all dance positions, like tendues, the legs engage the motion of the feet, pushing into the ground and lifting the heels upward, center of body weight should be evenly distributed on all toes.

Front Ensemble

Two mallets:

Set up and Stroke

- The fulcrum (pivot point) is created by making **soft** contact with the mallet between the pad of your thumb and the first knuckle (closest to the tip of your finger) of your index finger.
- The fulcrum should be placed about two thirds away down from the top of the mallet.
- Wrap the remaining three fingers around the mallet. These finger will **always** stay in contact with the mallet. You will often hear us say “keep the meat on the mallet.” There should never be an open pocket in the back of your hand.
- The gap between your thumb and index finger should (naturally) stay closed.
- Motion will come from the wrist. (rest your arm on a table and knock on it without picking up your arm; this is the primary motion of the stroke)
- Always lead the stroke from the mallet head.
- The mallet should travel in a straight path over the arm to avoid “slicing.”
- We will primarily use the “**Piston Stroke**” when striking the instrument. With this stroke, the mallets start in the up position, strike the bars, and then return to the up position. The mallets are propelled completely by the wrist, and there is no prep stroke. When changing notes, the piston stroke is modified so that it starts above the first note and ends above the second note, ready to strike.
- When using the piston stroke, the weight of the mallet should be felt in the back of the hand. Be sure the fulcrum does not become a “barrier.” If you put too much pressure in your fulcrum the weight will stop there and not actually make it to the back of the hand. This weight distribution enables us to achieve a fuller sound while focusing on the proper wrist rotation and fulcrum control. This allows you to **use** the weight of the mallet; not **fight** against it.

Playing Position

- Feet are shoulder width apart.
- Roll your shoulders back and stand up straight. Your posture should be relaxed at all times (“soft shoulders”).
- Your mallets will start in an “up” position.
- They will make a “**Λ**” shape that is a little less than 90 degrees wide. This is our “Power Triangle!”
- Our hand position is a relaxed version of German grip (completely flat). Start with your hands in German and then turn the thumbs up slightly.
- Unless otherwise instructed your head should be directed up “to the box.”

Four mallets: We will use the “Stevens Grip” for all mallet instruments. The Steven’s grip is outlined in great detail by Leigh Howard Stevens in his book *Method of Movement for Marimba*. If you do not already own this book, I highly recommend you acquire it and read it! many additional exercises can also be found in this book to help improve your four mallet technique.

Set up and Stroke

Start with your arm hanging at your side. Raise your forearm from the elbow until it is parallel with the floor. Turn your hand so it is straight up and down and your palm is facing in towards your body.

Outside mallet:

- Place the mallet between your 2nd and 3rd finger.
- Rest the mallet on the joint of your third finger
- Wrap your 2nd and 3rd finger around the mallet until the tips touch the palm of your hand.
- Be sure the end of the mallet does not exceed the shape of your hand.

Inside mallet:

- Lightly place the end of the mallet in the palm of your hand
- Allow the mallet to slide up to the “fatty” part of your hand at the base of your thumb. It should act as a counter weight.
- Curl your first finger under the mallet and “perch” the mallet on the first knuckle.
- lightly place the pad of your thumb down on the mallet.

All parts of your hand must stay relaxed in order for the mallets to stay level.

*** Much more detailed instruction will be given at auditions. ***

Playing Position

- Feet are shoulder width apart.
- Roll your shoulders back and stand up straight. Your posture should be relaxed at all times (“soft shoulders”).
- Your mallets will start in an “up” position.
- All four mallets should be level.
- Keep your wrist low to the board.
- Unless otherwise instructed your head should be directed up “to the box.”