Iowa State University
Drumline Packet
2018
FOREWORD

OUR MISSION
Individual improvement is the key to our success as an ensemble. One person does not make our drumline great; everyone must work to achieve greatness. As members of this organization, we obligate and challenge ourselves to improve our abilities as players. By striving to achieve nothing less than personal excellence, we ensure the quality of our ensemble.

OUR PHILOSOPHY
The Iowa State Drumline has the crucial role of providing a solid rhythm and tempo to an ensemble in excess of 340 members. To do this, drumline members must individually play accurate rhythms and parts. There is no “hiding” one’s playing in the line. Each member is expected to equally contribute to the overall sound of the line. Thus, the line is able to produce a full quality sound with the volume to project into a full stadium.

HOW TO USE THIS PACKET
It is unadvisable to attempt to learn everything in this packet in one sitting. The packet is generally set up in the order of the learning process, so it is logical to start at the beginning and work through the packet. All the advanced concepts are fundamentally based upon the previous concepts, so an understanding of the core concepts in this packet is necessary for progression onto advanced drumming.

Practice with a metronome is required; this will promote accurate rhythms and the ability to play much more consistently as an individual. Also, play in front of a mirror and observe how your hands move. Make sure you flow when you play and avoid awkward, jagged motions that look or feel uncomfortable. Feel the rebound and use it to your advantage. Keep your hands relaxed and fingers on the stick, turn your wrists, and hit the drum with sufficient velocity. Play with confidence and don’t be afraid to ask questions.

Throughout the summer, the Iowa State Drumline will be hosting several clinics to facilitate improvement among its current members and potential new members. The dates and times can be located on the drumline page of the website. These camps are valuable sources of information and instruction regarding technique. It is highly recommended to attend some of these camps to get a hands-on look at technique. Technique is not something that can be learned overnight - it is a long process. With enough time and practice, the concepts covered in this book will become a fundamental part of your drumming.

Good luck and happy drumming!

The first draft of this packet was written and compiled by Brett Ebert, Kelsey Knief, Luke Sesker, Dave Reid, and Scott Szurek in 2011. The current version was updated and compiled by Luke Sesker and Travis Hattery in 2018. Our mission is to educate as many students as possible and to be transparent with our technique and approach. The information is not proprietary; please feel free to distribute this packet.
The Iowa State Approach

APPROACHING THE DRUM
One good analogy of this motion is the “police knock”. The motion of striking the drum is the same as a heavy knock on a door. In this motion, the wrist turns to knock on the door, but the weight of the arm is used to apply more energy to the door and create a louder and more powerful knock. Using this analogy, place a drumstick in your hand and replace the door with a drumhead. Maintain relaxation in the hand while playing to promote better resonance and more comfortable playing.

The stroke is a wrist-initiated movement; the wrist turn drives the motion of the stick. When turning the wrist and striking the drum, keep your hand and arm relaxed. Although the striking of the drum is a wrist movement, the arm should be allowed to move naturally. The weight of the arm is used to drive the stick into the head, creating a fuller sound.

Once the drum has been struck, do not stop the motion of the stick. Stay relaxed and allow the natural rebound of the stick to drive it up to the height of the next note. In effect, you are only driving the stick down and the rebound from the head drives it back up. Your hand does not pull the stick up, but merely follows the movement of the stick and directs its upward motion in the proper direction. Depending on heights and tempos, it may seem as though the stick spends the majority of its time in the up position as the stick goes down fast, comes up fast, and then waits in the up position until the next stoke. This is because volume comes from velocity.

REBOUNDED STROKES
Rebounded strokes (regardless of height) should be the most fluid, relaxed, and comfortable notes to play. The stick is driven down by the wrist, strikes the head, and then the natural rebound of the stick drives the stick back up to the height of the next note. The hand stays relaxed throughout the entire motion. The “police knock” concept applies to rebounded strokes at any height.

Depending on whether the next stroke is another accent or a tap, the stick is either allowed to rebound fully or is stopped at a lower height to allow for a tap. If the stick is kept down after the accent, make sure not to squeeze the implement to force a lower height; actively stay relaxed in the hand at all times.

Do not assume playing lower means playing weakly. When playing taps, still play with a full and powerful sound, just from a lower initial height. The weight of the arm is used to give the tap added power and fullness of sound. While the arm is used to give a full sound, ensure that the movement of the stick is motivated from the wrist.

DOUBLE STROKES
Double strokes require a slightly different approach depending on tempo. At slow tempos, a double stroke consists of two individual wrist turns, one for each hit of the drum. As the tempo increases, gradually apply more pressure to the stick with your back fingers. This small application of pressure will allow the stick to play two notes from only one wrist motion. The transition from individual wrist turns to a more singular stroke is a gradual one, not a transition at a specific tempo. Playing doubles with wrist turn is a more accurate and powerful way of playing, so this method should be used as much as possible. However, every player will reach a point where it is no longer possible to play every note from an individual wrist turn. Practice will allow you to increase the tempo at which accurate wrist turns are playable and improve your ability to play full and powerful rolls.
It is important to maintain consistency among the two individual notes in the double stroke. Each drum strike in the double stroke should sound equal. Do everything you can to minimize placing an emphasis on the first note in the double. With a few rare exceptions, the height of doubles and rolls should be low enough to ensure the first and second impact of the double is of equal height, volume, and fullness.

POSTURE AND MARK TIME
An often-overlooked element in drumming is one’s posture. Good posture has two important benefits: it promotes better playing and marching, and it is aesthetically pleasing to the audience. Think of your body as a series of pivot points: ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, and head. All these points should be stacked vertically.

When standing, your weight should be evenly distributed throughout the bottom of your foot. Be sure to keep your chin up and keep your eyes focused forwards. This promotes a confident, strong appearance. While maintaining good posture, actively stay relaxed in your shoulders, arms, and hands. Avoiding excessive tension in the arms, shoulders, and back will allow you to play better and more comfortably for longer periods of time.

Accurate internalization of tempo is critical to a drumline’s success. The whole bottom of the foot leaves the ground together, and then returns to the ground together. The foot strikes the ground on the downbeat. In standard 4/4 time signatures, the left foot strikes the ground on beats 1 and 3, while the right foot strikes the ground on beats 2 and 4.

DYNAMICS
At Iowa State, we use the classic 3”-interval stick height system to define dynamics. It is important that everyone without exception approaches these dynamic levels the same way. If everyone is not playing with the same velocity at the written dynamic level, the balance and blend from player to player will suffer along with clarity. Essentially all strokes have the same intensity, while increasing and decreasing the distance and speed at which the mallet strikes.

Our dynamic levels are defined as follows:

- **pp** pianissimo  ½ inches  grace notes
- **p** piano  3 inches  flat to the drum surface
- **mp** mezzo piano  6 inches  mid-way between flat and 45 degrees
- **mf** mezzo forte  9 inches  45 degree angle with the drum surface
- **f** forte  12 inches  mid-way between 45 degrees and 90 degrees
- **ff** fortissimo  15 inches  90 degree angle with the drum surface
Tenor Drum Playing Technique

GENERAL APPROACH
The general theory of how to strike a drum may seem complex, but once understood, it will come naturally. Our technique is designed to produce a smooth, resonant sound; relaxation is a critical concept of our technique – at no time should you feel yourself purposely squeezing an implement or tensing any muscles. The key to our technique is to maintain a high level of control over the implement while being as relaxed as possible.

Any of the strokes we play should be a “bead first” motion, meaning a good, strong wrist turn and not leading with the arm. As higher heights are played, more arm will be incorporated naturally into the stroke, but the wrist motion must be maintained.

MATCHED GRIP
When grasping the stick, turn your wrists so that the top of your hand is approximately parallel to the drum head. This allows your wrist to rotate and bend in a more natural motion. Grasp the stick firmly within your hand, but loose enough that someone could grab the stick out of your hand with minimal effort. The stick should be free to move loosely within your hand. The pads of all fingers should be in contact with the implement. The back end of the stick stays close to the palm during the motion as the wrist does the work to drive the stick, not the fingers.

While playing, actively keep the arms and shoulders as relaxed as possible. The angle of your elbows will vary depending on what drums are being played, but in general, prevent your elbows from sticking out while maintaining relaxation and a tension-free upper body. The wrists should be angled so there is a smooth transition from forearm to hand, avoiding an awkward angle in the wrist. There should be a slight downward angle of the stick when playing.
SET POSITION
When standing at set, you will have the sticks in and they should be held the same way as the normal grip. The right stick will be furthest from your body. This way, when the sticks are brought out (to tacet position), nothing in the grip changes. At set, the sticks should be parallel to the drums. If fully extended downward, your fingers should be able to touch the top head of the drum.

TACET POSITION
This position is how you stand with the sticks out. The best way to start is with sticks in your hands and let your arms hang by your sides, relaxed. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed and down with no tension. Now bring the sticks up to the drums: the bead of the right stick should be resting over the Drum 1 playing zone; the bead of the left stick should be resting over the Drum 2 playing zone. The beads of both sticks should rest at ½” above the drum head. When you hold your sticks out, they should be angled slightly downward, with about two fingers worth of space between your stick and the rim.
**PLAYING ZONES**
The spock drum/drums should be played in the center of the head. The playing zones for drums 1, 2, 3, and 4 are approximately 1 ½” from the rim, directly in the position which provides the best combination of resonance and contact sound. Both beads should always play an equal distance from the rim.

**AROUND PATTERNS**
Tenor drums utilize two types of movements: VERTICAL movements, and LATERAL movements. When playing around patterns, you must not change your stroke technique from the previously discussed technique. As you move from drum to drum (Lateral movement), the technique and stroke should not be affected (Vertical movement).

The term “sweep” is used when playing a double stroke (two notes from one wrist motion), but when each individual note is on a different drum. A quality double stroke must be maintained during a sweep pattern. During this double stroke, the arm is moved to allow striking of a different drum. In theory, the double stroke and the arm motion are two independent functions, and they are aligned at the same time to produce a sweep.

Due to the variation in drum size across the drums, when changing drums, one must apply more or less energy to maintain a consistent sound. For example, when moving from Drum 2 to Drum 4, one must apply more energy to the stick to produce a full sound out of the bigger 4 drum. Do not confuse this with playing higher, louder, or faster. Because there is less tension on the larger drums, it is necessary to apply more power to a rebounded stroke.
**8816** is meant to be a “stock” exercise that has the option of applying the hand-to-hand pattern to many different rudiments, rhythms and stickings. While 10 variations are included, many more will be taught throughout the season, and applied to the same pattern of 8/8/16. You can even get creative and come up with your own variations!

All variations should be played at all heights and a wide variety of tempos. Play this exercise VERY SLOW, as well as very fast. This will help develop control. A great practice method is to play one beat by itself and master the timing, and then apply the 8816 pattern to gain a greater amount of consistency in approach through repetition.

Utilizing a metronome for tempo control and a mirror for self-critique of hand motion and flow are absolutely critical. Individual rhythmic integrity and tempo maintenance are essential for the success of the drumline.

Bass drums should be prepared to isolate any rhythmic partials of any variation. (i.e. only play on the “and of 1” or “play on the up-beats”)

Additional around patterns for Tenors and splits for Basses will be created and taught throughout the season. Come to camps prepared to learn!

Cymbals will find a guide to the standard notation utilized by Iowa State in this exercise as well. Timing and consistency are crucial to develop as you isolate each sound.

Happy Drumming!
Homey the Jam

Quint Toms

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