

# Habits of a Successful Percussion Section: *Middle School and Beyond*

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# Our Goal: To Building Musicians Who Play Percussion

## The First Year

### Establish a Common Language

- A Consistent Counting System (*Habits Universal Online Rhythm Sheets, Teaching Rhythm Logically- Darcy Williams, etc...*)
- Solfege and Lettering System
- Rhythmic and Melodic Dictation (literacy)
- Improvisation (also literacy)

### The Fitting Process

- Teachable attitude
- Responsible and Respectful
- Good grades? Maybe... *Work Ethic is more important than grades.*
- Natural Grip (same as embouchure)
- Listening and Echoing skills
- Aural and Visual Coordination (practice pad and keyboard)
- Consider Ensemble size, amount of equipment, number of spots available on keyboards

### The Beginner's Equipment

#### Purchased:

- Heavy Hitter Stock Pad or Reel Feel 12" pad, (no drum)
- Innovative Percussion FP-2 stick/mallet bag pack (or equivalent that contains the following:
  - o Concert Sticks
  - o Yarn Mallets marimba or vibes
  - o Plastic Mallets for xylophone or bells
  - o Timpani Mallets
- Band Books (*Habits of a Successful Beginner Band Musician*)
- 3-Ring Binder

#### Rented, Recommended, but not "Required"

- Portable Mallet Instrument (Mapex, Ludwig, etc) (stays home)
- Do what works for your families' financial abilities
- **\*NOT Bell Kits.**
  - Good for note recognition
  - Too small for technique

**\*We Start on Practice Pads, so we focus on fundamental movements that  
TRANSFER to Keyboard, Timpani, Etc.**

### **The “Total Percussion” Approach**

- Gradually introduce as many percussion instruments as you can
- Use a method book that incorporates this philosophy
- Percussion builds off itself
- Playing “Percussion” implies many instruments!

### **The Two Sides of Percussion Teaching**

- *Physical Skills*- tone, technique, finesse, chops
- *Literacy Skills*- identifying correct rhythm and pitch on paper
- Devote time to BOTH every day!
- BOTH are built from the Ears to the Hands:)

### **Fundamentals of Playing on Practice Pad**

- Correct posture
- Correct Grip (Matched only)
- The foundation of all Percussion Playing
- 4 basic strokes for beginners
  - o Rebound Stroke/Piston Stroke
  - o Controlled Stroke (down-stroke)
  - o Up-Stroke
  - o Multiple-Bounce Stroke (buzz, triple, double)
- Teach them, then play within a musical context (book recordings, garage band, etc)
- Building toward the Rudiments



\*No Gap

## Keyboard Basics

- Grip modifications
  - Mallets are longer, made for 4-mallet playing
  - Mallets are Front-heavy
  - Same Grip and Fulcrum as snare drum
  - Move the Grip further up the mallet
- Movement:
  - Up & Down (Piston stroke, mallet heads Start and End higher than the wrist)
  - Left and Right (naturals)
  - Forward and Back (accidentals)
- Playing Area
  - Center of the Bars
  - Over the Resonators
- Rolls
  - Alternated (RLRL...)
  - Start slowly
  - As muscles build, roll speed will increase
  - Lead to the next note with the closest hand
- Scales and dexterity
  - Play all scales with different sticking patterns
  - Right Hand only
  - Left Hand only
  - R-L alternated
  - L-R alternated
  - Double-stops in octaves

Figure C. Correct Keyboard Grip and Playing Position



\*Mallet heads Start and End higher than the Wrist

## **Timpani**

- Playing Areas- about 1/3 the way between the Rim and Center
- Grip and Stroke are the same (French or German grip later...)
- Rolls like Keyboards- alternated
- Sneak it into your daily warm-up (pre-tune, teach tuning process later, DON'T FORGET)

## **Accessory Percussion**

- Teach with what you have!
- Introduce them through your Rhythm exercises
- *Sustaining instruments (metals)* – match the winds (half notes, whole notes...)
- *Non-sustaining instruments (membranes, woods)*- add rolls when proficient
- Hold correctly, strike correctly (Dots)
- Prepared for the future
- Don't TELL them how to play it, SHOW them how to play it:)

## **Classroom Environment and Director Expectations**

- Informal vs. Formal Instruction
- *Informal*- Modeling, hands-on, more showing, less explaining, **most effective...**
- *Formal*- lecture-style, more explaining, less showing, **least effective...**

*(Does this affect your Virtual teaching approach? Face-to-Face approach?)*

- Percussionists work best with Informal Instruction:
  - They are the only section that can SEE how the tone is produced while playing
  - Modeling engages more senses: Sight, Sound, Touch, Attitude
  - They are usually in the back of the room.
  - Gives positive interaction vs negative behavior comments
- Treat your students how you want them to be :)
- Be aware of your verbiage, tone, and amount of time you spend with your percussionists
- Build those positive relationships

**Discuss Less, DEMONSTRATE MORE.**

# STICKING!

- o Why does Sticking matter?
  - It helps with evenness, control, and timing
  - Sticking is our articulation
  - We need to practice different sticking options so we are prepared for anything
  - Needs to be defined/taught in all music
  
- o What determines sticking?
  - Rhythmic Make-up
  - Tempo
  - Direction on the instrument (mallets, timpani, toms)
  - Style/Flow

## How to Determine Sticking

1. It would be better if we could play percussion with one hand
  1. Fewer variables
  2. Quarters/eighth notes
2. If you can't use one hand, take the rhythm out of that sticking (constant hand motion, timing exercises)

## Rules for Timpani/Mallets

- Try to keep you RH on your right side, and your LH on your left side
- Avoid crossing, double when you can
  - o The sound quality of double-strokes is easier to fix than a cross-over
  - o Find the Constant Hand/Hand-Lead (RH lead, LH lead)
  - o Which sticking has the least amount of hand-lead changes?
  - o Do you have time to practice both?

## Exercises to build sticking understanding

- Stick Control by George Stone
- 16th 1-note, 2-note, and 3-note Timing
- Triplet 1-note and 2-note Timing

"Even Rhythm" or "Same Hand"  
Applies to Duple Meter Rhythms

Same-Handed Downbeat

R R R R R L R L R L R L

RH stays on the same counts

Same concept, but on the next level of subdivision

R R R R R L R L R R R L R R R R L R L

"Odd Rhythm" or "Alternate Hands"  
Applies to Triple Meter Rhythms

Alternated Downbeat

R L R L R L R L R L R L

Alternated Odd-numbered subdivision

Same Concept in Duple Meter with Triple Subdivision

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

Same Concept, but on the next level of subdivision

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L





**LOOKS DIFFERENT, SOUNDS THE SAME**

How to grow coordination and timing from MS through HS

16th One-Note Timing  
HS Version




RLRLRLRLR R R R RLRLRLRL L L L L RLRLRLRLR R R R



RLRLRLRL L L L L RLRLRRRLRL L L RLRLRRRLRL L L R

Middle School Version



R L R L R L R L R R R R R L R L R L R L L L L



R L R L R L R L R R R R R L R L R L R L L L L



R L R L R R R L R L L L R L R L R R R L R L L L R



16th One-Note Timing Keyboards

R L R L R L R L R R R R R R L R L R L R L L L L L R L R L R L R L R R R R

R L R L R L R L L L L L R L R L R R R L R L L L R L R L R R R L R L L L

R L R L R R R L R L L L R L R L R R R L R L L L R

Triplet One-Note Timing Keyboards

Key signature: one sharp (F#). The first line contains a triplet of eighth notes, followed by quarter notes, and ends with a quarter rest.

Key signature: one sharp (F#). The second line continues the sequence with a triplet of eighth notes, quarter notes, and ends with a quarter rest.

Key signature: one sharp (F#). The third line continues the sequence with a triplet of eighth notes, quarter notes, and ends with a quarter rest.

# Roll Skeleton Rhythms



Slow Tempo



R L R L R L R L R



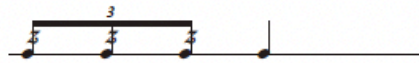
R L R L R L R



R L R L R L



R L R L R



R L R L

Fast Tempo



R L R



Example 2

24. Lamb Chops

Musical notation for 'Lamb Chops' in G minor, common time. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The rhythm is indicated by the letters R L R L R L R R L R L R L R L R L R R L R R.

24. Lamb Chops

a. Snare Drum

Snare drum notation for 'Lamb Chops' in common time. The rhythm is indicated by the letters R L R L R R L L R R L L R L R L R R L L R R L L R L R L R L R L R R L L R R L L R R L L R R.

b. Tambourine

Tambourine notation for 'Lamb Chops' in common time, represented by 'x' marks on a staff.

Example 3

31. I Like It

Musical notation for 'I Like It' in G minor, common time. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The rhythm is indicated by the letters L L L R R L R L R L L L L R R L R R L.

Example 4

53. Down to the Bottom - Playing Test #5

Musical notation for 'Down to the Bottom - Playing Test #5' in G minor, common time. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The rhythm is indicated by the letters R L L R L R R L R L L L R. The second measure of the melody is highlighted in green.

**53. Down to the Bottom - Playing Test #5** (See Page 2d for Performance Practices on *Bass Drum*)

**a.** Snare Drum

**b.** Bass Drum

*Example 5*

58.

**a.**

**b.**

R L R L R L R L R R R R L L R R R R L L R R

58.

**b1.** Suspended Cymbal with One Hand

**b2.** Triangle with the Other Hand

## The Second Year and Beyond

### Aligning Percussion and Winds Fundamentals

- Improves ensemble understanding and cohesion
- Take it as far as you need to in your situation (i.e. percussion director, solo band director)
- Process begins in Spring of the first year

<b>Long Tones/Interval Studies</b>	<b>Rebound Strokes &amp; Stick Control</b>
<b>Whole Tone Scale</b>	<b>Double-Stroke Roll and Timing</b>
<b>Lip Slurs</b>	<b>Downstroke &amp; Up-Stroke Combos</b>
<b>Major Scale Patterns</b>	<b>Rudiments with Logical set-ups</b>
<b>Articulation and Chorales</b>	<b>Timpani exercises</b>

- The fundamentals don't change, they just get faster or look different on paper

**The Following Examples are Multi-Use. They align with Various Interval Studies (Remington's), AND Various Lip Slur Patterns.  
Write what YOUR students need at any given time!**

### Rebound Strokes Exercise

The exercise consists of six numbered examples of rhythmic patterns on a single staff in 4/4 time. Each example is a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes, often grouped in pairs or fours. Example 1 includes stick control labels: R, B, L, B, L, B, R, B. Examples 2 through 6 show variations in the rhythmic patterns and groupings.



# Buzz Roll Exercise

①

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

②

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

③

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

# Accents and Taps

①

②

③

④

⑤

⑥

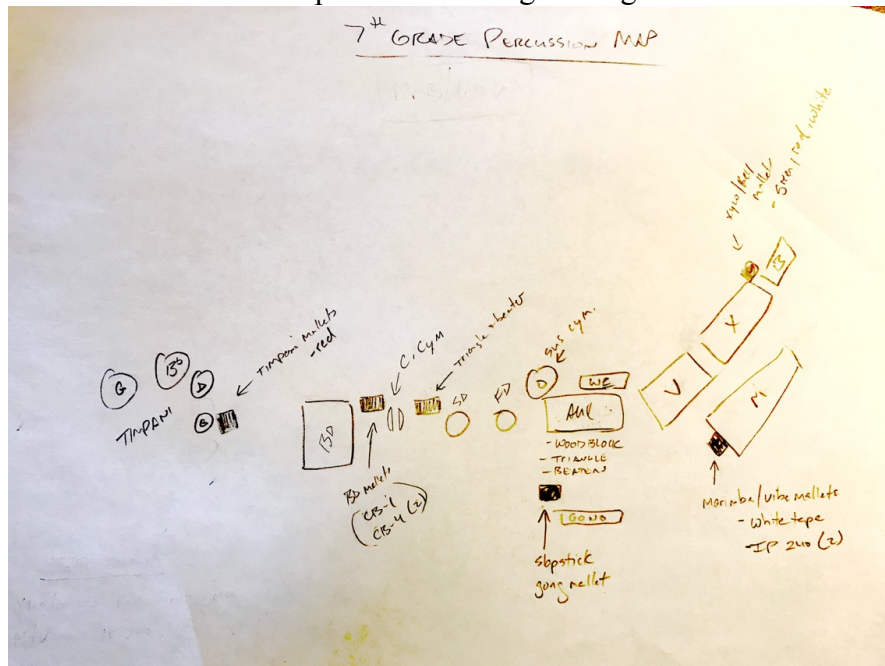
RH \_\_\_\_\_  
LH \_\_\_\_\_  
BH \_\_\_\_\_

## Part Assignments for Band and Percussion Ensemble

- Each percussionist should get a copy of every part to every song. (drums, keyboard, etc)
- Rotate through parts daily or every other day
  - o Observe what they are drawn to
  - o The teacher should know where each student ranks
  - o Make Assignment Sheets for each concert
  - o Make Percussion Maps for each concert
  - o Assign parts so that students change instruments often
  - o Special consideration for Timpani, SD, and BD (one per part, timekeepers)
  - o Fill-up the keyboards. Write more parts.
  - o Keep track of assignments for the next concert, to give more opportunities to perform on more instruments

## Percussion Maps for Concerts

- Part of the Percussionist's Life!
- Each student gets a copy
- Defines WHERE everything goes
- Practice setting-up/breaking-down SEVERAL TIMES
- Have the students "Walk their paths" from song to song



**This simplifies the concert process for both you and the students. Fewer questions, more engagement and reasonable responsibilities for the students**

## Percussion Ensemble

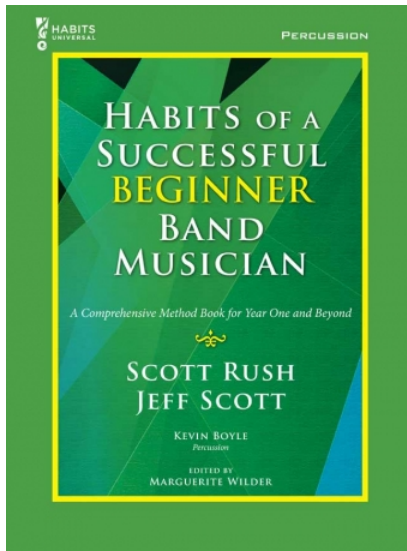
- Just do it!
- Reinforce Fundamentals
- Delve into percussion-specific subjects
  - o Timpani tuning process,
  - o Timpani Rolls (*fp*, crescendos, etc)
  - o Drum Tuning
  - o Instrument maintenance
  - o Master classes with a guest teacher
  - o Chop-building
  - o Ethnic Percussion
- Add Speed to fundamentals
- Perform at one or more concerts
- Great Literature at: Row-Loff, C-Alan Publications, Tapspace
- Keep it simple and build. Technique should lead to musicianship.



“A great band with an okay drummer will sound okay. An okay band with a GREAT drummer will sound GREAT.”  
-Buddy Rich

## CLINIC RESOURCES

- The use of the “enharmonic ladder” and the “call-and-response game” to learn enharmonic notes



### What makes *Habits of a Successful Beginner Band Musician* unique? Features include:

- Teacher tips for each exercise in the book.
- Diatonic solfege that begins on the first day of instruction.
- Initial exercises on the mouthpiece, mouthpiece and barrel, reed, bocal and reed, or headjoint prior to playing the first notes in the book.
- Sequential rhythm charts embedded in the book. These same rhythms are then presented with pitches for a seamless transfer to the music students are performing.
- Technique and skill-building exercises embedded
- The introduction of the key of Concert C, which results in students playing the pitches B, E, and A more often (as opposed to the typical emphasis on B-flat, E-flat, and A-flat)
- The introduction of five keys: Concert B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, C, and F. The Concert G scale is also provided in the back of the book.
- Left (L) and right (R) indicators for woodwinds along with appropriate chromatic alternate fingering indicators.
- A thorough explanation of (T:1) for trombones and rules for when to use it.
- **The sequential introduction of the one-handed breakdown of a percussion rudiment before introducing the rudiment itself.**
- A thorough explanation of and markings for the “F dilemma” on oboe.

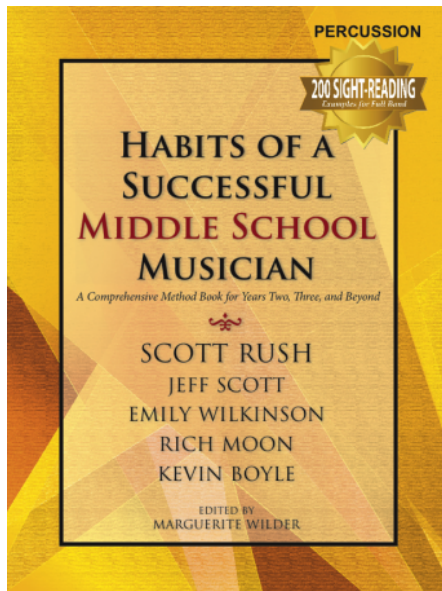
***Habits of a Successful Beginner Band Musician*** is a field-tested, vital, and—most important—musical collection of 225 sequenced exercises for the beginning band student.

The book’s cutting-edge online component, *Habits Universal*, features a backend gradebook that allows students to submit video recordings of their performances as a primary source of assessment. This gradebook is compatible with PowerSchool, Canvas, Google Classroom, Brightspace, Edmodo, Schoology, and many other platforms!

In addition, *Habits Universal* features supplemental rhythm vocabulary sheets, accompaniment tracks, video start-up clinics, as well as a professional video coach for each exercise in the book.

- An explanation of appropriate flicking on bassoon.
- Two pages of slow “clarinets only” work that focuses on going over the break and throat tones.

**Habits of a Successful Middle School Musician** is a field-tested, vital, and—most importantly—musical collection of more than 300 sequenced exercises for building fundamental.



Perfect for use by an entire band or solo player for years two, three, and beyond, this series contains carefully sequenced warm-ups, chorales, sight-reading etudes, rhythm vocabulary exercises, and much more.

In one place, this series presents everything an aspiring player needs to build fundamental musicianship skills and then be able to transfer those skills directly into the performance of great literature

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### Clinician Bio

Mr. Kevin Boyle is in his nineteenth year of teaching instrumental music and his second year as the Director of Bands at J.J Daniell Middle School in Marietta, GA. Prior to arriving at Daniell, he taught middle school band and high school percussion in both Georgia and South Carolina.

Mr. Boyle's ensembles have received consistent Superior ratings at Georgia's annual Large Group Performance Evaluation. His band students participate in All-District and All-State Bands each year, and his middle school percussion ensembles have performed at the Lassiter Percussion Symposium.

He is a co-author of the *Habits of a Successful Middle School Musician* book series with Scott Rush and Jeff Scott and he has over 20 years of educational experience in concert and marching percussion.

An active clinician, Mr. Boyle has presented at The Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra Conference, as well as multiple in-service conferences in New York, Connecticut, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

Mr. Boyle earned his bachelor's degree in Music Education from the University of Georgia in 2005, and his master's degree in Music Education from the University of North Texas in 2019.

Professional affiliations include Phi Beta Mu, the National Association for Music Education, the Georgia Music Educators Association, the National Band Association, and the Percussive Arts Society.

Kevin Boyle proudly represents Innovative Percussion sticks and mallets, Dynasty drums, and Sabian Cymbals. He currently resides in Kennesaw, GA with his wife Allison.