

Basic Playing Techniques every percussionist should acquire

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All percussionists should acquire this repertoire of basic techniques on the following instruments:

Snare drum and tom toms:

- NO rhythms should be a surprise! If there are any, there should be no problem solving them.
- smooth, even rolls at all dynamic levels
- the ability and musical taste to use the variety of timbres the snare drum can produce

Bass Drum:

- good tone production, using proper playing areas and techniques
- rolls with two mallets only
- know when to let the drum ring, and when to dampen (with the hand, knee, or a towel)

Cymbals:

- rolls with yarn mallets at all dynamic levels
- rolls with snare drum sticks: single and double strokes
- brush rolls
- "swishing sounds" with a triangle beater
- quality crashes with pairs of cymbals at all dynamic levels
- crash sounds on a suspended cymbal with snare sticks

Timpani:

- good tone production using proper stroke and proper playing areas
- basic tuning techniques
- rolls at all dynamic levels (single strokes, of course)
- dampening

Keyboard Mallet Instruments:

- a familiarity with the different playing techniques required for the marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, bells (glockenspiel), and chimes
- basic two-mallet technique, including major and minor scales
- knowledge of four-mallet technique on marimba and vibraphone, including the variety of mallet grips

Tambourine:

- proper striking techniques for soft and loud playing of single notes and rhythms
- thumb rolls
- shake rolls

Triangle:

- knowledge of good basic equipment
- knowledge of good and bad striking areas (find them!! each triangle is different)
- rolls in both corners of the instrument
- techniques for playing a hand-held triangle vs. one suspended from a stand

Tam Tam or Gong:

- good tone production at all dynamics
- knowledge of both good and bad mallets
- warming up the instrument

Ethnic percussion instruments:

- proper playing techniques on a variety of ethnic instruments, including bongos, congas, timbales, maracas, cowbell, claves, guiro, cabasa, etc.
- knowledge of primary rhythmic patterns commonly used in the performance of music characteristic to those instruments

General rules for a mallet/stick set-up:

Always place sticks on a flat stand or tray, with a towel or carpet remnant underneath to cushion the sticks and eliminate extraneous sounds.

Place the tray within your peripheral vision as you look at your music on the stand (in other words, within easy reach).

Have a variety of sticks and mallets available in order to experiment with different sounds that fit the music--**DON'T JUST SETTLE FOR YOUR FIRST CHOICE!**

This list is intended to act as a primer--every instrument has its own techniques to produce the best sounds possible. Strive to make every sound the best it can be to fit the music. Use your musical taste and imagination--a percussionist has the greatest advantage of all musicians in that there are hundreds(!) of sounds at his/her disposal. **Always** use your ears as well as your hands.