

# AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO RUDIMENTS

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As my students hear on a regular basis, the study of [rudiments](#) is crucial for developing a solid technical foundation as a percussionist. I think of rudiments as a percussionists' basics and essentials, but not because they are easy or meant only for beginners. The 40 Percussive Arts Society International Drum Rudiments encompass a huge variety of combinations of different **stickings** and **types of strokes** that, when mastered at a variety of tempi and dynamics, leave the player well-prepared to tackle most technical challenges on the snare drum.

Let me explain more of what I mean by **stickings** and **types of strokes**.

The term "**stickings**" simply refers to playing each note with either the Right or Left hand. Many players, especially beginners, have a strong predisposed preference for one hand, and the ideal is to become equally competent and comfortable with both hands, and with any combination of stickings that the music may demand. To tackle this skill, I recommend starting with the four Diddle Rudiments in group II. of the [PAS International Drum Rudiments](#) and the Single Beat Combinations that begin on page 5 of [G. L. Stone's Stick Control](#).

**Types of strokes** are differentiated primarily by the position of the sticking before and after the attack. I conceptualize all snare drumming (excluding multiple-bounce and double-stroke rolls) to be made up of four basic types of strokes:

- Full stroke: the stick starts high, rebounds, and ends in the starting position. (Full stroke *can* occur at any dynamic, with starting stick height to be adjusted to facilitate desired dynamic.)
- Down stroke: the stick starts high, the rebound is controlled, and the stick ends low (very close to the drum head).
- Up stroke: the stick starts low, the rebound is assisted by the player's wrist and arm, and the stick ends high.
- Tap: the stick starts low, and ends low, in starting position.

The type of stroke for any note depends on two main factors: the volume of the note in context of the rudiment or musical passage, and the height of the note that follows. In other words, every stroke consists of two parts: the "pre-stroke" prepares to strike the drum and

the "post-stroke" serves to set up the proper stick height for the following note.

As a performer and instructor, I often find it enormously helpful to diagnose technical or musical problems by isolating what one hand must play from the other hand. In the following examples, I will break down several rudiments to show the strokes and rhythm that each individual hand must perform to play the rudiments cleanly and accurately.

I use the following abbreviations to denote stroke types:

- F = full stroke
- T = tap
- D = down stroke
- U = up stroke

The stem lengths in the following examples are meant to represent three different stick heights:

- The longest stem represents an accented high stick height.
- The medium stem represents an unaccented high stick height.
- The shortest stem represents a low stick height.

The Flam Rudiments, part III. of the [Percussive Arts Society International Rudiments](#), can serve as a prime example of application of the Four Basic Types of Strokes to rudimental snare drumming.

Let's first apply the four basic types of strokes to the flam. A flam is simply a note with a single grace note. A flam serves an ornamental purpose, widening the attack of a note to create variety in articulation. To play a flam, a percussionist sets up with one stick low (perhaps 1-2 inches from the head) and the other stick high (specific height

depends on dynamic) and brings the sticks down at the same time. Since the low stick, or grace note, is set up closer to the drum head, it attacks just before the high stick, or main note. The effect should be a slightly fatter attack; I often tell students to consider the two strokes of the flam to be one event: a "flam" rather than a "fa - lam." If the left stick is set up low and right stick high, we refer to this as a right flam, since the right stick is the main note. Conversely, a left flam is set up with the left stick high and right stick low.

## 20. Flam

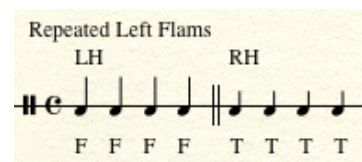


A series of flams can be played as repeated right or left flams, or alternating flams.

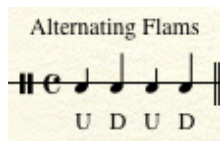
To play repeated right flams, the right hand plays only full strokes, while the left hand plays only taps, placed just before the right hand attack. Each hand separately would look like this:



For repeated left flams, the reverse is true: full strokes in the left hand, and taps in the right.



To play alternating flams, the right and left hands utilize alternating up and down strokes to set up for the opposite flam. For example, after playing a right flam, the right stick must be set low to prepare to be the grace note in the upcoming left flam. After playing the grace note, the right stick must be raised to prepare for the upcoming right flam. When playing alternating flams, each hand individually plays the following pattern: up-down-up-down-etc.



Whether playing all right, all left, or alternating flams, a common problem with flams for students is that the stick playing the grace note comes too high, resulting in a sloppy flam, or a flat flam (when both sticks are at equal heights).

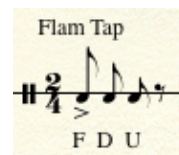
In the case of the repeated rights or lefts, this can be corrected by ensuring that the hand playing the grace notes maintains the tap stroke and is never raised higher than necessary.

When playing alternating flams, the issue most commonly lies in the down stroke. Students should ensure that the stick playing a down stroke only rebounds to a low stick height rather than allowing a full rebound.

## 22. Flam Tap

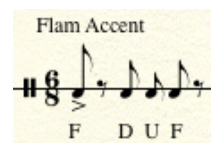


The flam tap is slightly more complicated than individual flams. Since flam taps alternate in succession, each hand repeats the same stroke pattern of full-down-up, with an accent on the full stroke:



While some issues with stick heights may arise, the stroke pattern for flam taps tends to flow naturally for many students, as it is natural for consecutive strokes to lose height and emphasis in succession.

## 23. Flam Accent



The stroke pattern for flam accents is technically a bit trickier than that for flam accents, because of the grace note sandwiched between regular notes. The most common difficulty that I see lies in executing the up stroke that is required to play the second eighth note in each group of three.

## Conclusion

Isolating each hand can make it much easier to diagnose and correct issues in rudiments (and really, in any musical passage). I find that if each hand can perform the rhythms and strokes demanded by the rudiments cleanly and accurately, success in

performing the composite rudiment is much more likely. This strategy can also help students begin to develop a targeted and detail-orientated approach to practicing, which will certainly be useful in their continued musical studies.

As an educator, one of my primary goals is always to equip students with the basic musical and technical skills they'll need for a variety of musical situations and challenges that they may encounter. For percussion students, this means studying and mastering the basics, including types of strokes, stickings, and rudiments.

Praised by the South Florida Classical Review for her “dazzling” and “incisive” performance, **Dr. Karlyn Viña** is a dynamic and creative percussionist based in South Florida. In addition to an active freelance performing career, Dr. Viña serves on the faculty of Florida International University, New World School of the Arts, Broward College, and Miami Music Project. She also maintains a busy private studio in South Florida, teaching concert percussion, keyboard percussion, timpani, and drum set.

Karlyn serves on the Percussive Arts Society’s Education Committee, and can be heard as a co-host on the @Percussion Podcast. Karlyn is proud to be a Marimba One Educational Artist and Artist Endorser for Grover Pro Percussion.

