

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION OF THE SNARE DRUM FULCRUM

by Dr. Dave Gerhart

"YOU CAN'T BUILD A GREAT BUILDING ON A WEAK FOUNDATION" – GORDON HINCKLEY

I think about this quote often when I am teaching a new student. I also stress this point when I teach percussion methods to non-percussion educators. A strong foundation is key in learning any new technique or method. In this article, I will offer a step-by-step guide to teaching the beginning snare drum technique. I teach matched grip to all beginning students because it translates to every percussion instrument. The accompanying video will help illustrate the process. (The timecode appears in the parenthesis).

STEP ONE – HEIGHT OF THE SNARE DRUM (2:10)

Once the student has drumsticks and a drum, it is important that it is set at the correct height. I have found that some students just walk up to the drum and start playing before they adjust the height. To find the proper height I suggest stepping back from the drum. Let your arms hang on the side of your body. Rotating from the elbow, slowly pick up your arm and let them come to a point that is comfortable. The angle of your arm will be approximately 110 degrees. The elbow should stay even with the body and there should be space in between your body and the elbow. Everything should be relaxed and without tension. Once this is established, you can adjust the drum to meet the end of the drumsticks. Remember that you should do this away from the drum.

STEP TWO – DRUM SET-UP (5:42)

The snare drum should be set-up so that the student is perpendicular to the snares (on the bottom of the drum) and the throw-off is closest to the player. When playing a snare drum, it is advisable to play over the snares to get the most snare response and characteristic sound of the snare drum.

STEP THREE – FIND THE FULCRUM ON THE DRUMSTICK (14:23)

Creating a good fulcrum on the drumstick is one of the most important things we can teach a student. Without a good fulcrum, it will be difficult to learn how to produce a good roll. Using the dominate hand, put the drumstick inside the first knuckle of your pointer finger. Position the drumstick so you have approximately two-thirds of the stick coming out the front of your hand. Let the drumstick drop and count how many bounces are created. Reposition the drumstick and try a different fulcrum. Again, count the number of bounces. If there are less bounces, try moving the drumstick the opposite way and see how many bounces are achieved. You have found the optimal fulcrum when you find the position on the drumstick where you achieve the most bounces. Take a black marker and draw a circle around the drumstick so that the student will know where to hold the drumstick.

STEP FOUR – TEACHING MATCHED GRIP (18:33)

As I said in the introduction, I teach all beginners matched grip. Matched grip is used on snare drum, marimba, xylophone, timpani, bells and most percussion instruments in a concert ensemble. Once you have marked the fulcrum on the drumstick, take your thumb and put it opposite the first knuckle. Make sure the thumb is parallel to the drumstick. Once you have the fulcrum, the back of the drumstick touches the love line as the drumstick goes out of your hand. Wrap the other fingers loosely around the drumstick. Do not squeeze or clench the drumstick. Your hand should be relaxed and there should be no tension in the hand or in the fingertips.

STEP FIVE – BRING THE DRUMSTICKS TO THE DRUM AND PLAY A FULL STROKE (23:10)

Once you have the height of the drum and fulcrum set, you bring the tips of the drumstick to the center of the drumhead. (Note, if you are playing on a snare drum, I would suggest that you play approximately one inch above the center of the drumhead). The drumsticks should create a V and the angle should be approximately 60 degrees. Using the wrist, bring the drumsticks up eight inches above the drum. Drop the drumstick and return it to the original starting point. This is a full stroke.

The accompanying video breaks down each of these steps and shows the correct arm positions and grip. At the beginning of every class, I would suggest going over this quick checklist:

- 1) Step Back from the drum. Bring up the hands to determine the height of the drum.
- 2) Step up to the drum and set the height.
- 3) Set the snare drum so the player is perpendicular to the snares and the throw-off is closest to the player.
- 4) Create a good fulcrum by finding the spot on the drumstick where you get the most bounces.
- 5) Mark the fulcrum with a black marker.
- 6) Place thumb on the drumstick opposite of the first knuckle. The thumb should be parallel to the drumstick. Do not squeeze.
- 7) Bring your drumsticks to the drum and create a V the with tips of the drumsticks.
- 8) Using your wrist, bring the tip of your drumstick eight inches above the drum.
Drop the drumstick and return it original starting point.

A strong foundation is key in learning any new technique or method. Take your time and go slow. Make sure you are deliberate about the small details. Reinforcing these small details will contribute to building a strong foundation. Please feel free to reach out to me via e-mail at drdavegerhart@gmail.com if you have any questions.

AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Dave Gerhart, Assistant Marketing Manager, Education for the Yamaha Corporation of America and Lecturer of Percussion at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at CSU, Long Beach, is a nationally recognized performer, composer, and educator. Dr. Gerhart holds a D.M.A. from the University of Southern California in Percussion Performance with a secondary emphasis in Music Education, Ethnomusicology, and Music Industry & Technology. He received a M.M. and a B.M. from California State University, Long Beach. Dave serves on the Board of Advisors and the World Percussion Committee for the Percussive Arts Society. In 2010, Dave co-founded DrumChattr.com and currently curates percussion related content for PercussionEducation.com. Dave's compositions and arrangements for triangle, timpani, percussion ensemble and steel drum orchestra are published by Bachovich Music Publications, Boxfish Music Publishing and Living Sounds Publications.

