

TEN TIPS FOR FABULOUS SNARE DRUM FUNDAMENTALS

by Emily Tannert Patterson

1. The stick should be held about 1/3 of the way up from the butt end, primarily between the thumb and forefinger; **the end joint of the thumb should align with the second joint on the forefinger, and the top of the thumb with the side of the first finger.** This forms the fulcrum. The remaining fingers (“back fingers”) should wrap gently around the stick.

***TIP:** Watch the thumb position - mistakes here can disrupt all aspects of playing.*

2. The hand can be in either an open-palm (“open”) or closed-palm (“closed”) position. In the former, the stick will touch the fulcrum and back fingers only; in the latter, the stick should touch the palm as well, along the ridge of the hand. **The position of the stick inside the palm should not change**, regardless of technique, stick height, volume, etc., and the fulcrum and back fingers should always touch the stick.

***TIP:** Students should never hold the stick so tightly that their knuckles turn white!*

3. The drum should be set at a height about 3-4”, or about a hand’s span, below a student’s belly button.

***TIP:** Have students put their hands flat on their stomachs, fingers together and thumb over the belly button, and walk up to the drum/pad to make sure it is the correct height – don’t let them ‘eyeball’ it.*

4. The elbows should be relaxed, creating about a 110 degree angle between the upper arm and forearm. This allows the wrist full extension without creating tension.

***TIP:** Tell students to make their forearms into “ski slopes!”*

5. Students’ wrists should be about 1” above the height of the drum, such that the sticks are parallel to the floor if the tips are 1” above the head; the sticks will have a very slight downward angle when the tip hits the drum.

***TIP:** Wrists that are too high will create too steep an angle when the stick hits the drum, leading to a loss in momentum, resulting in poor sound quality and reduced rebound.*

6. The student's body should be at least 6-12" away from the drum.

TIP: To judge a student's distance from the drum, have the student put the tip of the stick in the center of the drum, and the butt end at their body. This will generally place them the correct distance from the drum.

7. The shoulders should be relaxed, and **the elbows even with and about 3" away from the upper body**. The feet should be shoulder width apart and weight evenly distributed. Students may want to place one foot slightly forward in order to tap the beat; this is fine as long as the student is stable and standing up straight and centered behind the drum.

TIP: Look at the elbows - if they are ahead or behind the upper body, the student is the wrong distance from the drum.

8. When standing behind the drum, the palms should be nearly flat (parallel to the floor). **The tips of the sticks will form a 60-90 degree angle**. An angle that is too large or small indicates that the student's arms are too close or too far away from the body, which will create tension that hinders playing. Because bodies come in all shapes and sizes, look for relaxation as an indicator of correct position. **If something looks strange or unusual, it's probably incorrect.**

TIP: The elbows should be about a fist's length away from the body. An easy way to visualize this is that there should be room for an extra set of arms between the elbow and the body. Students love thinking about having 'alien arms'!

9. If a student is standing correctly (feet shoulder width apart, arms 2-3" away from the torso, about 12" away from the drum) and has the tips of the sticks in a correct position about 1" above the head (wrists and hands mostly flat, sticks at a 90 degree angle), the sticks and the student's arms and torso should form the shape of a baseball/softball home plate.

TIP: Have students bringing their sticks into "ready position" away from the drum or pad to help them learn to come to the right position, regardless of the height of the drum (which can be adjusted!). Be sure they're standing with their backs to the drum, or they'll subconsciously reference the drum/pad when practicing!

10. The stick should be primarily moved by the wrist. The wrist should move up and down in a manner similar to knocking on a door. While the arm and elbow may occasionally move as a result of a relaxed and natural stroke, in general the upper body and arm should be relaxed and still. The fingers will eventually assist in movement and rebound in quick passages, but should not be used to move the stick outside of quick rebound work.

TIP: Knocking on a table or drum pad without the sticks in hand can be a great way to show kids this motion!

AUTHOR BIO

Emily Tannert Patterson is a percussion educator, arranger, clinician, and consultant. She was previously the percussion director at the Rouse High School and Wiley Middle School, in Leander, TX, from 2015 till 2018, and was the percussion director at East View High School, Georgetown, TX from 2011 until 2015. Her ensembles have garnered numerous accolades including winning the 2016 PAS International Percussion Ensemble Contest, the 2014 TCGC Scholastic Concert Open championship, and the 2015 WGI Houston Regional Scholastic Concert World championship. While she was at Rouse, the marching band was a Texas State Finalist in 2017, and the wind ensemble performed at the Western International Band Conference in 2015.

Patterson holds a Master's degree in Percussion Performance from The University of Texas at Austin, where she studied with Thomas Burritt and Tony Edwards. Patterson earned her Bachelor's degree in Instrumental Music Studies, along with an undergraduate Performance Certificate in Percussion and her Texas teaching certificate, from UT in 2008, and received her Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Political Science from Northwestern University in 2004.

Patterson marched with the Glassmen Drum and Bugle Corps in 2003 and was a member of the 2004 Winter Guard International world champion indoor drumline Music City Mystique. She is the chief judge for the Texas Educational Colorguard Association, and judges actively around the country.

Patterson is an educational endorser for Innovative Percussion sticks and mallets, Remo drumheads, and Zildjian cymbals. She holds professional memberships in the Texas Music Educators Association and the Percussive Arts Society, is a member of the Texas Color Guard Circuit Percussion Advisory Task Force, and serves on the PAS Education Committee.