

# Worksheets for the Win: Building Efficient Practice Routines

By W. Lee Vinson

**R**outine-based practicing is one of the most effective ways to stay organized and intentional in the practice room. “Worksheets for the Win” will present a systematic approach that breaks down musical material into small, repeatable patterns, organized into structured routines. The goal in our time together at PASIC50 help students and teachers become more productive and efficient by learning how to create their own customized practice patterns and worksheets.

The worksheets we will cover consist of five, ten, or twenty numbered patterns that are to be repeated for one to five minutes each. These time-based routines can be revisited daily or as needed, helping players track how much time and attention is being spent on specific skills, techniques, or instruments. Not only does this method address technical challenges, but it also offers space to experiment with musical ideas. And by assigning specific time limits, we maximize our focus and productivity.

For many years I found it useful to direct this approach specifically towards orchestral excerpts for the purpose of audition preparation. Over time I have tried to adapt it to a broader range of material including technical development, etudes and solo repertoire. This PASIC session

will focus on three core areas where this method is especially useful:

1. General Technique – examples: soft snare drum ruffs, tambourine fundamentals.

2. Orchestral Excerpts – examples: “Colas Breugnon” (xylophone), Tchaikovsky 4 (cymbals).

3. Etudes and Solo Repertoire – example: “Étude No. 1” from J. Delecluse’s *Douze Etudes*.

Taking the accompanying soft snare drum ruff exercise worksheet as an example, let’s describe briefly how to use it. In addition to your instrument, you will need a mirror, music stand, metronome, and stopwatch or timer of some kind.

Position a full-length mirror where you have a full view of your hand and upper body. Place the music low enough to allow full visibility of your instrument. Turn on your metronome to the desired tempo and start your stopwatch. Timing out each pattern is especially helpful in that it eliminates the need to count repetitions, leaving more headspace to focus on what you are seeing, feeling, and hearing as you play. In this case, the first six patterns on the page can be somewhat improvisatory. Twenty minutes later, your soft snare drum ornament will be better, and you’ve gotten in your soft snare drum work for the day.

At PASIC, we are also going to discuss how to create your own worksheets, something I constantly encourage my students to do. Identify what you want to work on, and start sketching out short patterns. In the case of intricate rhythms, break them into smaller, less complex pieces before reassembling them in context.

In snare drum music, I find it helpful to try removing or replacing grace notes or



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rolls and to identify what exactly makes a passage difficult to execute. In the case of mallet percussion, reduce a figure into scale exercises that can be repeated and transposed. Multiple tempo stages can be helpful for building speed and improving

note accuracy. These are just a few ideas to you get started.

This clinic is designed for a wide range of educators and students, up to and including those preparing for orchestra auditions. Anyone can benefit from cre-

ating their own tailored routines. Whether you're building technical fluency or learning a new piece, these worksheets can help transform the way you practice.

Now it's your turn; go create your own worksheets!

## SOFT RUFF EXERCISES

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These exercises are somewhat improvisatory with the exception of the last line. The first pattern on each line is used more as a point of departure for the specified amount of time. Practice with a stopwatch and a metronome. This routine will take 20 minutes to complete.

♩ = 120  
(2 minutes)

*pp*

(2 minutes)

(4 minutes)

(2 minutes) (2 minutes)

(2 minutes) (2 minutes)

(2 minutes)

(30 seconds) (30 seconds) (1 minute)

*p*

**W. Lee Vinson** is a classical percussionist, music educator, and snare drum historian with an extensive background in symphony orchestra work. After serving for four years in the United States Navy Band in Washington, D.C., he was a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 2007-11. He has since appeared with the orchestras of Detroit, Toronto, Houston, Atlanta, Colorado, Oregon, Kansas City, Nashville, and Alabama. Vinson was a guest lecturer at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York during the 2014-15 academic year while also serving on the music faculty of the University of Kansas in an adjunct capacity. He was previously a faculty member at Boston University, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and the Interlochen Arts Camp, and since 2017 has served as Adjunct Associate Professor of Percussion at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music in Nashville, Tenn. **PN**