



**L'Anse Creuse North
Marching Percussion Handbook**

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Welcome

Welcome to the L'Anse Creuse North Marching Percussion sections! In this book, we will discuss several things that you will need to know for the upcoming season and your future as a musician. Many of the concepts discussed are non-instrument specific and applicable to many of the instruments you will play as a percussionist. Please take the time to read through all of the information in this book and make sure you have a mental understanding before attempting to have a technical understanding of it.

Necessary Materials

Please make sure you have the following at ALL rehearsals:

1. Dress in comfortable athletic wear. No jeans, no flip flops, no sandals, etc. Sneakers with socks are preferred for footwear. Even though you aren't marching, it's important to have proper footwear on since you are going to be standing for a long time.
2. 3 ring binder (1" or larger) to hold your handbook, warm ups and show music. All paper must be in page protectors. We would suggest getting frosted page protectors to help reduce the glare from the sun.
3. Clothespins or binder clips to have on hand in case it's windy.
4. Necessary sticks and mallets. Mallet players are provided mallets and a mallet bag. Aux percussionists/drum set players should have their own snare drum sticks to use. Battery members will purchase sticks to use through the duration of the season prior to band camp.
5. All instruments should have a tarp on hand in case of inclement weather, especially electronic instruments. Please make sure you never leave the band room without a tarp (unless we are indoors for rehearsals)

Sound Production

As percussionists, we spend a great deal of time honing our technical skills and rhythmic control. It is important to always remember that all of those components are merely means by which to create and control sound. Because of this, we must constantly not only be aware of the sound we produce, but must also work to refine our ability to identify nuances within this sound. Training our ears will in turn be our greatest tool in training our hands. As a percussionist we have a number of components of sound that we must consider:

- **Duration** – Is the sound we produce “**dry**” (a short sound) or “**wet**” (a longer sustained sound)? As a percussionist, much of this is affected by how open or closed we are in our grip. The tighter we grip the stick into the palm of our hand the drier the sound becomes. As the implement (stick or mallet) is allowed to resonate more freely, the duration of our sound will increase.
- **Timbre** – What is the tone color of the sound we produce? Is the sound “**bright**” or “**dark**”? In most cases we are looking for a dark timbre to our sound, however it is important to know how to create both. Much of this can be controlled by how we transfer weight to the instrument and the velocity the implement is traveling. The faster the implement travels to the surface of the instrument, the brighter and more articulate the sound becomes. Inversely, as we use more weight and less velocity, the sound will become proportionately darker. Within our playing we must be able to use different combinations of weight and velocity in order to control timbre and articulation.
- **Tone** – Tone should be one of our highest considerations regardless of playing a pitched or non-pitched instrument. In general, strive to produce a sound that is **characteristic** of the instrument you are playing. Keeping your ears open is key! We must first be aware of what a great characteristic sound is on our instrument to work to produce that sound at all times. The best way for us to be aware of this is to do a great deal of listening to other professional level musicians and listen with a great deal of

detail to the sound they produce...not just how they are producing it (Or how cool they look ☺). A small list of examples: Evelyn Glennie, Kevin Bobo, Keiko Abe, Nathan Daughtrey, Casey Cangelosi, Gordon Stout, Leigh Howard Stevens, Gary Burton, Ney Rosauero, Jeff Wooton, Saul Goodman.

- **Consistency** – Strive to maintain an unchanging sound, note to note (hand to hand). This incorporates all of the components above. Any change in duration, timbre, or tone should be a conscious decision and should be used as an expressive musical tool. This may be the single largest challenge a player faces. This also requires the most detailed listening. It is very important to not rely on “does it feel the same?” but really evaluate “does it sound the same?”

As you practice and perform, you must bring a constant awareness to these multiple components of sound you produce. One of the strongest elements of a mature performer is the ability to control slight nuances within their sound, and use those nuances as expressive tools within their playing.

Preparation and How to Practice...

As you prepare the information in this packet we encourage you to focus on smaller chunks first and then work to build that towards the whole. Isolate stroke types and focus on the details of that specific stroke type before working through an entire exercise. As you encounter new music or unfamiliar things, isolate the specific issue and work that issue until you feel completely comfortable with it. Many students will instantly try to attack an entire exercise or piece of music and become incredibly frustrated by their lack of success because they continue to fail at the same point, yet restart at the beginning instead of fixing that isolated issue. Once you overcome this and become comfortable with the isolated spot, begin to put it in context of a few measures to see if you can retain the detail within a larger piece of the music. Above all, remember that we are not sprinters – we are marathon runners. Do not try to rush to the finish line. Make sure you are considering all the elements of what we do: rhythm/pulse, dynamic levels, consistency of sound, grip, flow of the stroke and mental focus. Lastly, we will discuss the usage of a metronome. If you are practicing without a metronome, you are practicing incorrectly. We will use a metronome during rehearsal 95% of the time, with the other 5% being performance runs without a metronome. There is not a professional musician on this planet that practices without a metronome. This is the only way to achieve solid tempo and to check if your tempo wavers. If you need to purchase a metronome, we would suggest a Dr. Beat, Tama RhythmWatch, Korg BeatLab, or Yamaha Clickstation. These are physical metronomes and are on the more expensive side of the spectrum. Fortunately, with smartphones and other devices, metronome apps are considerably cheaper than these AND just as useful. For those devices, we would suggest FrozenApe’s Tempo or Dr. Bettote.

Dynamic Interpretation

Within the percussion ensemble each of the marked dynamic levels can be directly interpreted by a specific stroke height:

Wrist based stroke:

- ***p*** = 1 inch stroke
- ***mp*** = 3 inch stroke
- ***mf*** = 6 inch stroke
- ***f*** = 9 inch stroke
- ***ff*** = 12 inch stroke

Arm based stroke:

- ***fff*** = Stroke hinged from elbow (still contains wrist bend in addition to arm)

- *fff* = Stroke hinged from the shoulder (contains minimal wrist bend)

It is important to mention that we will mainly use wrist based strokes. The arm based strokes are reserved for playing the specified dynamic levels **in a football stadium**. This is to achieve the required volume of sound in these venues.

Keyboard Technique Guidelines

Posture

Great percussion performance begins with great posture. Before you play a note, members of your audience make conscious and unconscious judgements of you based on the way you look behind your instrument. Our goal is to convey a sense of maturity and the utmost level of professionalism. Performers should make a noticeable impression on the viewer/listener by projecting confidence, poise and dignity.



- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart
- Stand as tall as possible, imagining a string pulling you up from the top of your head.
- Imagine a straight line extending from your ears to your shoulders to your hips to your heels.
- Your upper body should be upright, rather than hunched over the instrument.
- Shoulders should be slightly back (although not tense) opening up the chest and creating a “big look” to your stance and body carriage.
- Keep your head up and look down at the keyboard by moving your eyes.
- Upper arms should stay relaxed and “hang down” from the shoulders without tension.
- Although the distance between your body and the keyboard will vary based on the musical passage, in general you should stand in such a way that moving between upper and lower manuals is easy and fluid.
- As you shift to various body positions while moving around the instrument, it is often helpful to place one foot slightly in front of the other and shift your weight as needed.

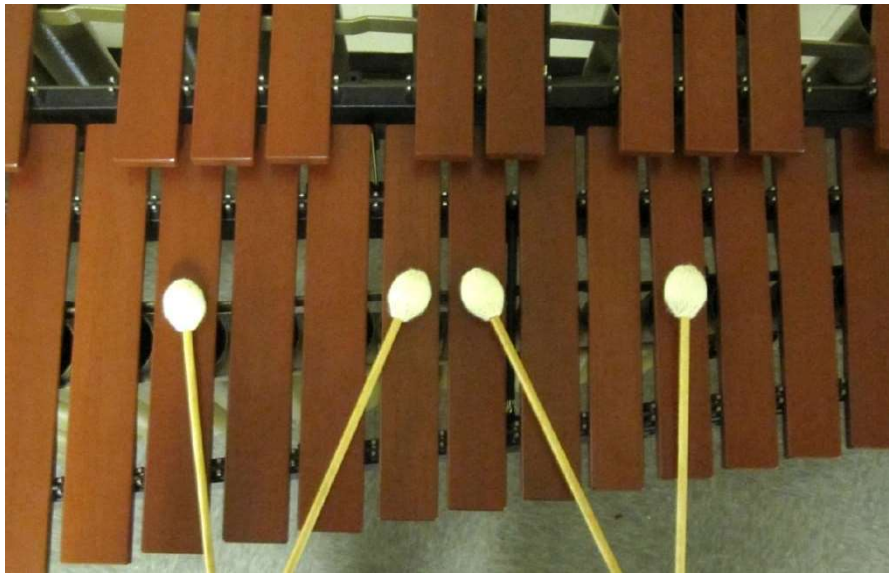
Instrument Height

We will set instrument heights for each individual player at the start of the season. At the proper height, your forearms should be angled down slightly. The closer your forearms are to being parallel to the ground, the more flexibility you will have in your wrists. If your instrument is too low, your forearm angle will be too steep, and you will likely find yourself unable to play at a strong outdoor volume without using arm. If your arms are

angled up, you will need to lower your instrument. Find the instrument height that gives you maximum range of motion in your wrist, where the mallet head will strike the bar flat rather than at an angle.

Playing Areas

In most cases, we strive to play in the “center” of the bars as much as possible. This will vary slightly due to a number of factors. You should **NEVER** play on the nodal points of the instrument, which is where the suspension cord passes through the bars. In the low end of the marimbas and vibraphones, you should play slightly off center. This is to avoid the nodal point that is created on the center of the lower bars due to their thinness. Throughout the majority of the instrument, we play just the slightest bit off-center (about a half an inch).



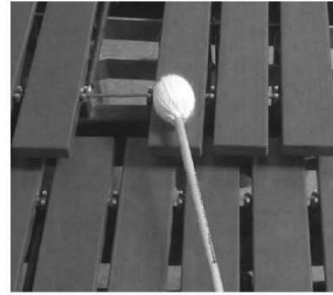
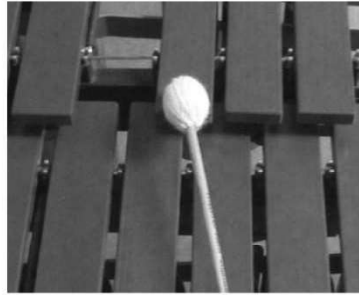
When we play on the upper manual, we play on both the center of the bar and the edge. Again, the center is the most desired area of the instrument to play on, but at faster tempos we will need to move to the edge to be able to facilitate playing the passages on the instrument. Watch the center marimba play to see when they make the switch to the edges of the bars and follow suit.



Correct: VERY edge of the bar



Incorrect: too close to the string



Two Mallet Technique

The two mallet technique establishes solid fundamentals and focus on the following concepts and values:

- Each performer produces a strong, full, individual sound quality that is balanced player-to-player across the entire ensemble. Side-to-side balance is achieved by visually matching mallet heights as well as the stroke velocity.
- Each performer commits to accurate individual rhythm that is vertically aligned side-to-side. Precise ensemble timing and rhythmic accuracy is achieved via listening towards the center as well as watching each other (“looking in”, see the picture to the right).
- Each performer exhibits a professional level of posture, presence, poise and confidence behind their instrument.



Stroke Types

Below are the two stroke types we will use at L'Anse Creuse North. Both of these strokes are used interchangeably depending on the situation in the music and are used for both the two mallet and four mallet grip.

Piston stroke: the type of vertical motion where the starting and stopping position are the same, no wasted or extra motion. The mallet starts in Set position, moves straight down into the bar, and then rebounds straight up to the next set position. The speed of the down stroke and up stroke should be the SAME.

Legato stroke: Another type of vertical motion. The difference between legato and piston is the legato stroke has a relaxed velocity and the mallet takes the full duration of the note to rebound. The mallet never stops moving. The speed of the down stroke and up stroke should be the SAME.

Two Mallet Grip

The two mallet grip adheres to the following guidelines:

- The front of the hand, which includes the index finger, is **RELAXED**. Notice in the pictures below the relaxed natural curve to the index finger and the space between the index finger around the middle finger.
- The back of the hand, which includes the pinky and ring fingers, is **FIRM**.
- About two inches of mallet shaft should stick out behind the hand. Find the best fulcrum spot for the mallets you are using and avoid choking up too much or too far back.
- With the exception of very fast two mallet playing, the mallet does not move within the hand during the stroke. In other words, there should be no opening and closing of the hand during the stroke – the hand stays closed. The back fingers stay firm and the mallet stays against the palm. The fingers do not generate the stroke – the wrist generates the stroke.
- This firmness in the back of the hand should enable you to feel like you are “transferring weight” into the bar. Think of a heaviness in the hands that enables you to produce a big, full dark sound.





- Wrists are positioned very low to the instrument and the mallet heads are high.
- Hands should angle in slightly. Make sure your hands are neither completely flat with your palms facing down (as in German grip), nor turned completely in with your thumbs facing up (as in the French grip).
- Our ideal stroke should be generated 90% by the wrist and 10% by the arm. This additional 10% of arm is added to help produce the volume levels needed for projection in football stadiums. As a guideline, use 100% of your wrist and then the staff will guide you when to add that 10% of arm in when needed.
- In the case of fast two mallet passages, the fulcrum switches to a traditional “front of the hand” fulcrum. This allows for the back of the mallet to breathe a little within the hand and provides space for the fingers to aid the stroke. At fast tempos, lower your mallet heights and eliminate the arm from the stroke.
- Each stroke begins and ends from a high set position. The first motion is down. The motion of each stroke should be down-up. Do not begin with a lift or “prep” stroke, as in up-down-up. The mallets should begin in the high set position, fire straight down, and return to the high set position.

Four Mallet Technique

Our four mallet technique should be approached with the same values as our two mallet technique. Remember to follow solid fundamentals.

- Strong, individual sound quality
- Side-to-side balance across the entire front ensemble
- A commitment to accurate individual rhythm
- Professional level posture, presence, poise and confidence



Four Mallet Grip

At L'Anse Creuse North, we utilize the Stevens grip defined and created by Leigh Howard Stevens.

Inside Mallet:

- The hand is in a “handshaking” position, with the thumb pointed up.
- The base of the inside mallet rests on the “lifeline” under the meaty base of the thumb
- The index finger creates a “table top”, where the inside mallet rests on the first knuckle
- The inside mallet is balanced between the base of the thumb (towards the center of the palm) and the curled-in index finger. This cantilever effect holds the mallet in place without tension
- With minimal tension, the middle finger secures the base of the inside mallet in the palm.
- The middle finger should not dig the mallet forcefully into the palm. Remember that the inside mallet “hangs” in the hand.
- The thumb rests lightly on top, keeping the mallet from rolling side to side.

Outside Mallet:

- The outside mallet is gripped with the ring finger and pinky – these fingers curl back into the palm of the hand.
- The back two fingers are kept firm enough so that the outside mallet does not droop down.
- No more than a half-inch of the outside mallet extends beyond the back of the pinky.







- The index finger has a relaxed, natural curve to it.
- Tips of the index fingers always point across the body, rather than back at the body.
- The thumb is relaxed and “lying” on top of the inside mallet.
- Only in certain situations (the hands are spread far apart or B-flat major chords) do the hands turn inward. In almost all other cases, the hand stays straight up and down. The thumb stays pointed up at the sky/ceiling.
- The ring finger and pinky finger rest under the other fingers, as in a relaxed fist. From a birdseye view, you should not see the ring and pinky fingers stretched to the outside.

Battery Technique

This information will apply to all the battery sections with some slight exceptions depending on the instrument. These images will detail the technique using a snare drum. At L'Anse Creuse North, we will be playing matched grip on snare, so techniques will be addressed with that grip in mind.

Left/right Arm:

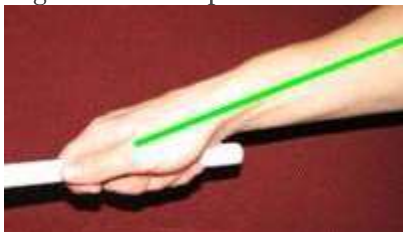
Both arms should be positioned as shown in the following image.



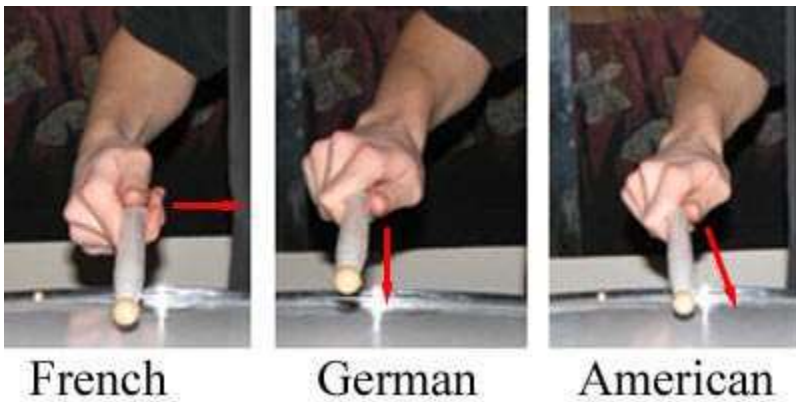
Some things to note: The right shoulder is held up, but not so high as to cause tension in the shoulder and neck muscles. The elbow is held away from the body, but not so far as to cause tension in the shoulder muscle. Some lines have their players crank their right elbows way out away from their bodies in what I like to call the 'chicken wing' style. I personally do not prefer this technique. Keeping the arm slightly away from the body will allow you to keep the wrist in a comfortable, mobile playing orientation.

Wrist/Hand:

While in the playing position (sticks out, not playing) the right hand should be in-line with the axis of the forearm, NOT angled down or up.



The palm of the right hand should be angled slightly in, perhaps at a 20-30 degree angle, which will produce the American grip. I find this slight rotation away from German grip allows a more natural wrist position while still allowing the wrist and fingers to do plenty of work.



Fingers:

The fingers should grip the stick such that the stick follows the pads of each finger. See the below image.



Torso positioning:

It is very important to have good posture when carrying a drum. This means keeping your back straight so that the weight of the drum is transferred safely through the spine. If you slouch, you are putting a lot of stress on your back which can lead to injury. Even though it might FEEL good to slouch, don't do it! If you practice correct posture all the time, your back muscles will develop and carrying the drum will become second nature. Keep your back aligned with the lower part of your body and shift your entire weight forward (picture a ski jumper). Start by leaning all the way back until you almost fall over. Then lean all the way forward until you almost fall over. Go about 1/3 of the way from falling forward towards falling backwards - this is your ideal amount of lean. I like this forward lean approach for a couple of reasons:

- 1) It looks aggressive and gives you stage presence.
- 2) It allows you to keep most of your weight over the balls of your feet which is very useful for direction changes while marching.

Stick Playing position:

The beads of the sticks should be centered in the middle of the head. The space between the left and right beads should be kept as small as possible, but not so small that you are constantly hitting your sticks together.

The beads should be held approximately one pointer finger thickness above the surface of the head. By keeping the beads very close to the head, we are always ready to play a note at any volume. We can play a grace note by starting at the playing position, or we can raise the bead in preparation to play a tap or an accent.



3) The sticks should be angled down slightly to form a wide 'v' shape when viewed from the front. This angle is very important for sound quality. With most sticks, as you increase the stick angle you will be playing with a smaller and smaller area of the bead. As you do this, you will hear that the sound quality continually gets thinner and thinner. An easy method for defining this angle is to place two fingers between the rim and the shoulder of each stick while maintaining the correct bead height. When viewed from above, the right stick should be between the 4 and 5 O'clock lugs and the left stick should be above the 8 O'clock lug. This is how I naturally position my sticks, but I know there will be some variation (especially in the left hand) in how a defines their 'correct' stick angles.

We will go over the details of stroke types and other technique for each instrument during rehearsals.