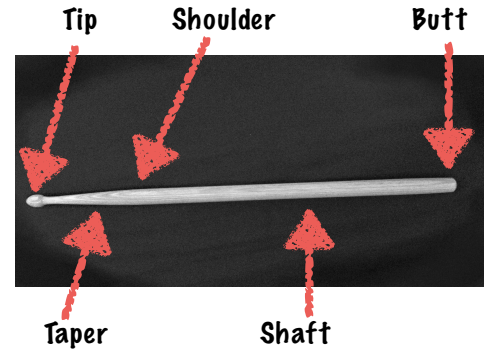


# The Basics

## The Drum Stick

There are several parts to the drum stick. The dimensions of a given part will change the balance and feel of any particular stick. It is important to take notice of each aspect when choosing a pair of sticks. Over-all weight, pitch, density, and straightness also play a huge roll in determining a good pair of sticks. If any one of these aspects aren't right, the pair is no good. A great pair of stick will have a natural balance of every aspect. It will feel "right" as soon as you pick it up. All of this will vary from person to person. What feels "right"; is completely up to you. This might also change from time to time. What felt "right" yesterday might not feel "right" today. It is important to pay attention to this. As I was always taught, work smarter not harder.



## The Basic Technique

It is extremely important to have a multitude of techniques in your figurative stick bag. However, I find that it would benefit any player to have one standard "go to" technique as a starting point. From here, other techniques can be added for desired sounds or effects. The technique that I use as my standard "go to" technique is described here.

Lets start by creating a good standing position directly in front of our playing surface. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart (note that a shoulder width is often less then you think) and your feet completely parallel. There should be a slight bend in your knee. Now, check that your hips, spine, and neck are also sitting inline with your legs. If you were to look at your profile, while standing correctly, you would see a perfect line starting at the base of the foot, up through the knee, hip, spine, all the way into the neck. Lastly, roll you shoulders back and down. They should sit naturally and slightly rounded forward. If you feel tension across the upper part of you chest, your shoulders are too far back. This position may seem very awkward at first. Many people have grown up learning to use their body incorrectly, often times in ways that are detrimental to your health - standing included. This inline posture is crucial to eliminating excess tension in our playing. It is also the foundation for every move we make. It is worth taking the time to get comfortable with this position. Remember - Keep every part of your body relaxed. It is extremely important. Even if you don't think you are using a particular part of your body while playing, I guarantee, you actually are - standing or sitting.

Take a moment to recognize any part of your body that may be holding unnecessary tension. Excess tension in any part of your body will create extra resistance in your playing, making it

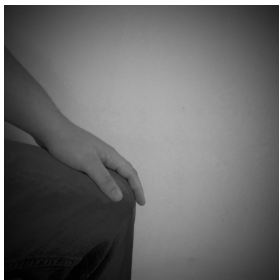
harder to execute the music. Quickly find and relieve this tension. Often just taking notice of an area of tension will be enough to get rid of it.

As I have already stated, we use our entire body while playing. It is important to be aware of this. The basis of this technique is utilizing bigger muscles to support smaller muscles. This works from your core muscles in an outward directions, all the way through your arms and legs, to your fingers and toes.

Now, lets get to the actual arm movement. A point I find myself always coming back to is that, no matter what type of stroke I am utilizing, the arm movement is always the same. Again, we will use larger muscles to support smaller muscles. There is a natural progression from our shoulder down though our hand, no matter what the stroke is. The range of motion may vary, but the motion is the same. An interesting point to note is that the bigger the muscle the smaller the motion. My shoulder will have a slight movement in it, while my upper arm moves a bit more, and my forearm even more. Obviously the hand will have the largest range of motion. I feel that this technique has a very natural motion to it.

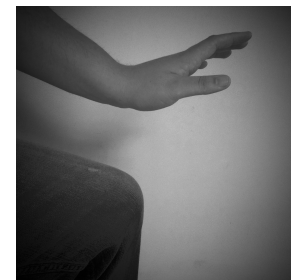
## The Basic Stroke

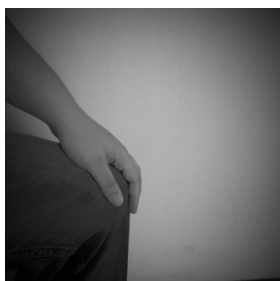
It is easier to realize this technique without the sticks in hand. (This method is also a great way to maintain good technique.) Lets start by finding a comfortable seated position. Much like standing, the particular position you are seated in is very important. Make sure you are sitting up straight creating a natural bend in the knee that allows the feet to sit flat on the floor. We will now work through a process the exactly mimics the motions that are utilized when holding and playing with a stick or mallet. The key difference here is we are eliminating several variables.



To start, place your palm over the top of your kneecap allowing the fingers to drape comfortably over the knee. This should feel fairly comfortable. Again, take a moment to note any excess tension. We only want to apply as much "tension" as needed to perform any given action.

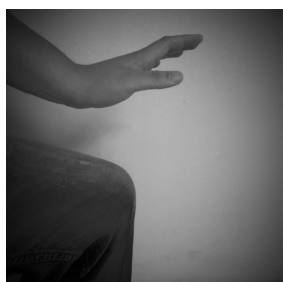
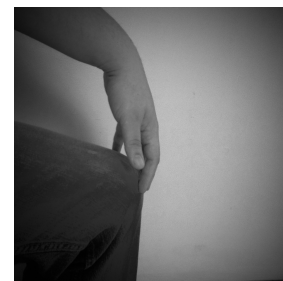
From this position, raise the arm directly up, and move the hand into a pseudo-high five position. Take this time to note your personal range of motion of your hand. We only want to utilize about 70% of our capable motion. If your hand can bend back to make a 90 degree angle with you arm, you will want your motion to stop at 63 degrees, or similar to the angle in this picture. This will be different for each person. If your hand motion maxes out at 80 degrees, then you will want your motion to stop at 56 degrees. This will allow for optimal motion in the wrist. Don't harp on the math too much. A quick way to approximate your 70 degrees is to slowly bend you hand back and stop once you feel a noticeable amount of tension. Anything more than that is too far. Please note that this range of motion will most likely increase the more you practice.





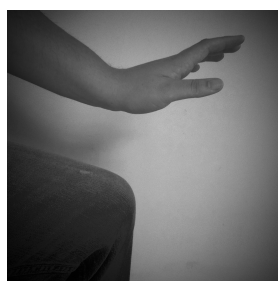
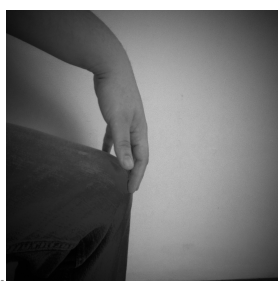
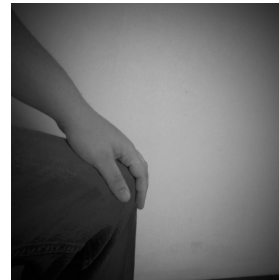
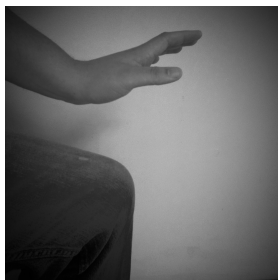
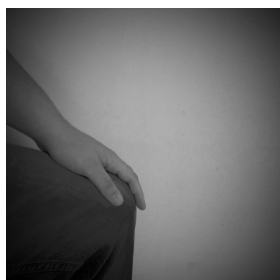
From here we will utilize gravity to bring our arm/hand back to our knee. By releasing all necessary tension from the "high five" position, we can allow our arm/hand to simply fall back to its resting place on the knee. This is a motion that is fairly simple and easy to execute. Please take notice of the slight "whipping" motion the hand takes to get back to the beginning position. As stated before, the hand will move significantly further in the same amount it takes the arm to move a much smaller distance. The lower arm has much less motion in its supporting role - the upper arm, even less.

We are now half way through our first stroke. The follow through is just as important, if not more important than the initiation of the stroke. With the palm resting briefly on the knee, we will now raise the arm back up. Leading with the palm, drag your hand up the front of the knee. There will be a bit of resistance between the fingers and the knee. This step is crucial to the development of the technique. When revisiting this exercise, feel free to add additional resistance to this step. It will help in building finger control and power.



Once the fingers leave the knee, the hand should flip back up into "high five" position. We are now back to our starting position. Take time everyday to practice some basic exercises using this method. You will be amazed how beneficial this will be to building your technique. It is also important to note that the limitations of your technique are not accurately reflected through this process. The technical demands of playing this method prove to be more challenging than playing with sticks. In short, don't be frustrated if you feel hindered by playing with out sticks - its on purpose.

## Review:



# Introducing The Grip

Now that we know how the arm and hand move, it is important to introduce the motion of the stick. To do this we need to understand how to hold the stick. This is called the grip. Like any other aspect of drumming, there are endless variations in approaching the grip. I will describe here a general approach that works best for me. Feel free to tweak this approach to fit the needs of your hands.

In a very general view of grip, there are two different styles to be aware of. The first is traditional grip where the left hand is held in a different manor than the right, or vise versa for left handed player. The second, which we will discuss here, is match grip where the hands hold the sticks in mirror image of each other.

The first aspect we will look at is called the fulcrum. A fulcrum is a point of support or pivot. In our grip the fulcrum is comprised of the first knuckle in the index finger and the meat of the thumb. This is the point where the stick actually pivots in our hand. Again, there should only be as much tension applied as needed to hold the stick. It is important to note that often times the second finger can play a role in the fulcrum as well. Let's shy away from that practice for now. This variation in fulcrum is one of those additional techniques we can keep in our box of tricks. If you pick up a drum stick using only your index finger and thumb, your hand will naturally create this fulcrum.

From here, hold your arm and hand at such an angle that the stick is parallel to the ground. Notice how the stick naturally rests against the palm of your hand. Remember we have not included the rest of the fingers yet. In this position, take your other hand and tap the bottom of the stick forcing it to pivot up and back down. This will test that you have the proper pressure in your fulcrum. If the stick doesn't move easily, there is too much tension. If the whole stick moves from the fulcrum there is not enough tension. Try this several times to make certain your fulcrum is functioning correct.

Now, we want to include the rest of your fingers. The other three fingers are used largely as a guide for the stick. They make sure the stick moves at the proper speed and direction. It is their job to make sure the stick hits when and where we want. For basic grip purposes, the fingers should wrap nicely around the stick keeping it in place against the meat of your palm.



Now place your stick above your playing surface. There should be a natural curvature from your shoulder down through the tip of your stick. Take time to be aware of how this feels. If there is an area of tension take note and release that tension. Now, follow these same steps for the other hand. When you are through with the second hand, pick up both sticks and compare. It is important to get each hand looking and functioning as close to identical as possible. This will alleviate many potential problems later on.

Your hands and sticks should rest comfortably about an inch above the playing surface. It is important that our playing surface is at a height that does not disturb our arm motion. Often times I find students try to walk right up to a drum and start playing, instead of taking a minute to adjust the drum height to fit their needs. Unless it is your personal drum, it is almost certain that the person who played the drum before you is not your exact height with your exact proportions. A drum that is even an inch higher or lower than you require will force your shoulders and arms into a position that will automatically create unnecessary tension. Thusly, making it more difficult for you to play. Creating a situation where you have ease of movement will benefit you endlessly. This comfortable position is called rest position - the sticks should rest comfortably just above the playing surface.

## Applying The Grip To The Stroke - The Full Stroke

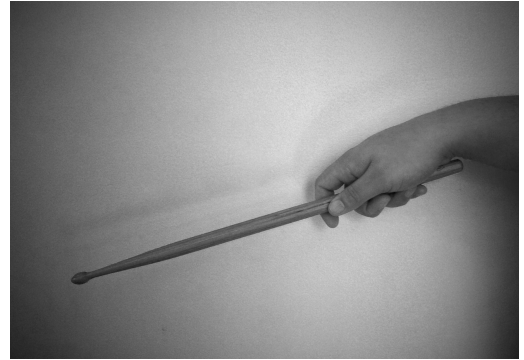
At this point we are ready to incorporate the grip to the stroke. Remember that "hand over the knee" exercise we spent some time with? This is why that was important. The feeling you have when playing with the stick should be the same as you had when going through that exercise. The motion and flow should be identical, only now you will play on a drum or pad rather than your knee.

From rest position, raise your arm directly up, and cock your stick and hand back - just as in the "high five" step of the first exercise. Remember the range of motion of your hand. This step should be identical to before. The fingers should be very relaxed allowing the stick to come away from your palm. Having the fingers apply pressure to the stick, holding it against your hand, will create extra tension in your hand and wrist. Remember, we want everything to stay as relaxed as possible. This is very important. Allow the fingers to extend as the hand is raised. These hand and finger motions should happen in proportion to each other. Over extending the fingers, just like with the hand, will create excess tension. Again, think of the feeling you had in your arm and hand when you did the original exercise. The overall motion should feel and look very natural and controlled. This step is the initiation of the first stroke. It is also the end point of the first stroke and beginning of the next. If someone was to take still frames of your playing, in between every stroke the picture should look like this.



Now, release all the tension in your arm, and let gravity bring your arm back to rest position. The stick will continue slightly past this position to make contact with the playing surface. At this point we want to allow the stick to rebound off of the drum head and travel back to its initial

point, as in the previous step. Just like our initial exercise, take notice of the slight "whipping" motion the hand takes to get back to the beginning position. The fingers also take the same journey as in our other exercise, only this time in a curved position. The fingers will contract as the hand falls, guiding the stick down. As the stick hits the surface and rebounds back, the fingers will relax and extend, allowing the stick to return to its upward position. There should not be a need to force or pull the stick back up. This should happen somewhat naturally, solely from momentum and rebound. Physics tells us that a falling object will never bounce as high as the point it was dropped from, so obviously there is some assistance in the process of bringing the stick back to the starting position. The objective is to do this as efficiently as possible, letting velocity do most of the work. The velocity of the stroke can be altered to achieve different sounds, volumes or effects. Again, these will be stored in your bag of tricks for later on. Right now, it is important to focus on perfecting this basic stroke.



Let's take a minute to talk a little more about the fingers and how they affect the stroke. So far, we have only dealt with what is more commonly known as a full or natural stroke - the stick ends in the same place it started. In this school of thinking, there are two other strokes besides the full stroke - the down stroke and the up stroke. These strokes are determined mostly by the follow through of the fingers. This is where the friction from our original "hand on knee" exercise comes into play. This step builds the control and strength to administer these strokes. We will discuss these specifics in further detail later. Just know that there are different stroke types, each with many minute variations. The type of stroke is based mainly on the follow through of the fingers.

We have now discussed the essential elements of realizing the full Stroke. Repeat this process many times until it becomes second nature. It is important to always closely monitor this motion during your daily practice routine. Consistency and control will allow you to create an easy, stress free, and fulfilling experience. Drumming should always be fun. I believe it was Goodman who said, "life is easy. It is us who make it difficult." Point being that, if we stick to the basics, we will never get caught up in the racket that a situation could otherwise seem to be.

**- Do not continue on until you are extremely comfortable with this step -**

Drumming is not a race. Great percussionists continue to work on their technique for their entire career.

## The Down Stroke

Where the full stroke is used for general playing, the down stroke is used in specific situations. Often, it is used where there are accented notes followed by quieter or non-accented notes. In this situation the stick needs to play a higher stroke for the loud note and a lower stroke for the

quiet note. The down stroke comes into play for the accented note. You will see why in a second.

*(Picture - Insert accent/tap example)*

A down stroke starts exactly like a full stroke. The picture is the same. The difference is in the fingers just after the stick makes contact with the drum head. Once the stick has made contact with the drum head, the fingers will snap closed around the stick stopping it in its tracks. The purpose of this is to keep the stick at this low level. An easy way to think of this stroke is in terms of the finger movement. The fingers start open and end closed. It is important to remember that, even though the fingers must snap closed, we do not want to employ any excess tension. It would be wise to only use as much force as necessary to effectively stop the stick motion.

In the accent/tap scenario that was just described, the down stroke keeps the stick close to the drum head in order to easily execute any proceeding quieter notes. The force of the fingers can also affect the sound of the initial stroke. A faster or harder snap will create a loud or harder stroke. Please note that, down strokes are almost always followed by a different type of stroke.

The follow through of the down stroke will depend on what is happening next in the music. This needs to be figured out on a case by case basis. However, no matter the scenario, the very next motion the hand and stick makes will be in preparation for the proceeding stroke. Looking at our accent/tap scenario again, which is most common, the very next motion would be minimal, since the stick is more or less already in place to play a very low full stroke for the "tap."

*(Picture - insert additional common accent tap scenarios, rudiments etc)*

## **The Up Stroke**

Similar to the down stroke, the up stroke is also used in very specific scenarios. Only, here the motion of this stroke is nearly opposite to that of a down stroke. An up stroke is most often used when a quiet note is quickly followed by a louder note. If we take the same accent/tap scenario from before but reverse it, we will be left with an ideal moment for an upstroke.

*(Picture - Insert reverse accent/tap example)*

We find a low height tap followed by a much higher accented stroke. Once we play the tap, the stick needs to travel to the height needed to execute the accent. This is where we execute an up stroke.

An up stroke starts similar to how a down stroke ends. The stick begins at a low height to the drum head. The fingers will then snap the stick downward with a velocity fast enough to force

the stick to rebound back past the initial point of rest to the required height of the following stroke. Like the down stroke, it is good to think in terms of finger movements. It is easiest to think of this stroke as closed, then open. The fingers start off by snapping closed and then flicking open. Again, it is wise to only use as much force as necessary to execute this stroke. This will vary based on the specific up stroke. The force that is put into the fingers will directly affect the sound produced. Force = velocity. The faster the stick moves, the "brighter," and often louder, the sound will be. A high velocity up stroke will most likely result in a louder sound than a stroke played with less velocity. Again, this is all dependent upon the specific up stroke scenario you may be facing. The general idea is to execute each scenario as easily as possible without getting in your own way. This often involves dissecting phrases note by note to understand which specific movement is necessary for moving from one single note to the next. It might be said that we can be more concerned with our movements between notes, rather than that of the note itself.

## Common Accent and Tap Scenarios That Utilize All Three Stroke

In the following section, we will break down some of the most common situations in which the previous three stroke (full stroke, down stroke and up stroke) are utilized together.

First, let's start with three of the most common and important accent/tap scenarios.

*(Picture - accent/tap; down up, up down, and down tap up)*

These three scenarios are, I feel, the most important of the accent/tap possibilities. These motions are used to create the majority of our rudiments. Understanding these motions will allow you excel in performing the rudiments; thus, performing anything.

***Revise and find evidence*** *As far as I know it to be true, it has been tested that there is nothing rhythmically possible outside of our 40 rudiments. Therefore, if you can play the 40 rudiments, you can play anything. That being said, these accent/tap scenarios are key in properly and easily executing the rudiments. Thus, if you can play accent/tap you can play anything*

*(Picture - accent/tap; down up)*

*Explain*

*(Picture - accent/tap; up down)*

*Explain*

*(Picture - accent/tap; down tap up)*



*Explain*

*(Picture - 4 accent/tap scenarios)*