

GVSU Drumline Handbook

2023 Edition



Foreword

Hello current and prospective members of the GVSU Drumline,

Thank you for your interest in being a part of one the most visible and exciting groups on campus! As the GVSU Drumline, it is our job to provide energy, excitement, and atmosphere, not just for the Laker Marching Band and our national champion Laker Football Team, but for the GVSU community and Western Michigan as a whole. With plenty of performance opportunities, traditions, and strong membership, you will find no lack of excitement, fun times, and great memories.

My time spent as a member is the backbone of my college experience, providing friendships, a sense of family, and a solid work ethic that I have carried forward ever since. The drumline - and the band as a whole - won't hesitate to back up that statement. I hope that after a season, you won't hesitate to say the same.

In this handbook, you will have a comprehensive discussion about our values, mechanics and technique, and the exercise packet with descriptions of the purpose and method behind each exercise. Take the time to understand everything that is discussed and learn the music.

I hope you are as excited as I am to begin this season and leave your mark on the next version of the GVSU Drumline.

Anchor Up!

Jaden McCallum
GVSU Drumline Coordinator

Introduction

For members of the GVSU Drumline, the standards that we set both in and outside of the ensemble are imperative to our success, image, and ability. This includes all facets of our preparation, as well as how we display ourselves at performances, games, and out in public.

First and foremost, we are a **family**. This dictates that we treat each other with respect and dignity, and are there for each other as much as possible. Plain and simple: disrespect, hazing, drama, and anything else that can hurt the relationship among the other members of the drumline will *not* be tolerated.

In addition, as a member of the GVSU Drumline, it is of most importance that you carry yourself every day as someone who **represents the organization**, whether you are wearing GVSU Drumline or marching band apparel or not. At this time in your lives, you are all adults able to make your own choices. Understand the responsibility that you carry as it pertains to our image.

Lastly, adequate **preparation** is necessary throughout the season. This includes physical, mental, and musical preparation. Marching band, drumline especially, can be a difficult and physical activity. We engage in long marches in the heat, lengthy rehearsals, and spend days outside in the middle of summer for band camp. Please make sure you are up to the task physically. It is also imperative to be properly prepared for rehearsal. This includes knowing your music, having your charts marked, as well as being on time and respectful of the staff and leadership during rehearsal. We march up to **seven different shows** each season, each with their own music that allows us one to three weeks at most to prepare for a game. On top of that, we have cadences, performance pieces, and a third quarter cheer. Learning and memorizing music will be mostly up to the individual, as we typically can't afford much time in rehearsal dedicated strictly to music.

As the GVSU drumline, make sure that we hold ourselves to high expectations and a high work ethic. That said, we all understand the difficulties that can arise when you add in life and school on top of all of this. Never be afraid to reach out. All that we can ask of ourselves if we or someone else has a bad week is to work to make the next one better for ourselves or others. If we can accomplish that, we will have a great season, and uphold the values for the next season and years to come.

Technique

PHILOSOPHY INTRODUCTION:

In the GVSU Drumline, we strive to create a warm, resonant sound across all dynamic levels. How do we achieve this?

- 1. Relax!** This is the first step to achieving a full sound. Keep your hands relaxed. If your grip is too tight, the stick will not resonate the way we need it to. Squeezing the stick too much leads to a thin and/or harsh sound. Our goal is to guide the stick without over-controlling. The appropriate amount of tension in the grip will allow us to be more efficient on each stroke. Excess tension is easier to hear than it is to see.
- 2. Use velocity in each stroke.** Similar to the way we need the sticks to fully resonate, we need air rapidly moving through the drum to maximize the resonance of the heads and shell. No matter the stroke type, velocity into the drumhead is a necessity. The sticks should be moving very quickly from the top of each stroke to the playing surface, regardless of height.
- 3. Strive for consistency in technique.** Commit to a strong set position with your grip intact* and beads securely in the correct playing zones. Consistent bead placement on every stroke is another integral part of sound production that is often overlooked. *The overall look of our technique should be unified regardless of what is being played.
- 4. Mental Approach.** Understand that your energy is a significant factor in the consistency and quality of the ensemble's sound. We must approach the smallest detail with the mental and physical energy that is required to achieve at the highest possible level.

INTENTIONAL PRACTICE:

Practice at the speed of no mistakes - train everything correctly from the beginning. Take the smallest chunk necessary to achieve correct repetition. Correct repetition includes rhythmic accuracy, technique, dynamics, playing zones, AND energy level.

- 1) note by note
- 2) beat by beat
- 3) measure by measure
- 4) phrase by phrase

A specific practice sequence, for example, would be to do a “5x5” – after completing 5 reps at a slower tempo, increase tempo by 5 clicks. The amount of reps vs clicks can be adjusted accordingly (i.e. 5x10, 10x5, etc.)

STROKE TYPES:

Full Stroke/High to High - The fingers are relaxed, but remain on the stick as your wrist initiates the motion. The grip serves as a guide to the stick as it rebounds.

Downstroke/High to Low - No tension when stopping the stick. The weight of your relaxed hand stops the stick from returning where it came from.

Upstroke/Low to High - Quick “up” motion with the wrist, typically following a 3-inch tap. The upstroke should not initiate until after the low note is played.

Tap Stroke/Low to Low - Still rebounds, just at a lower dynamic. Think of it as a tiny full stroke!!!

DYNAMICS:

p: 1 inch (slightly below parallel, grace notes), used when decrescendoing to nothing.

mp: 3 inches (parallel to the drum head)

mf: 6 inches (22.5 degrees)

f: 9 inches (45-degree angle from the head)

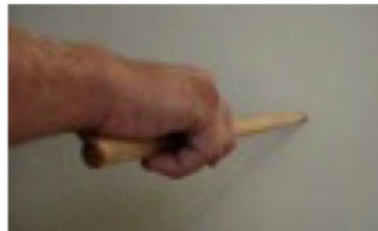
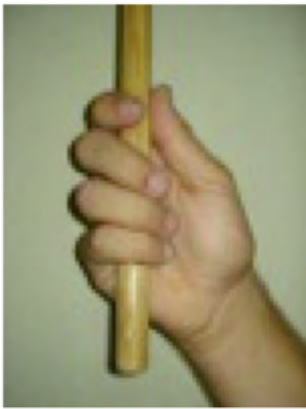
ff: 12 inches (just shy of vertical; no arm)

fff: 15 inches (vertical, 90 degrees, slight arm motivation)

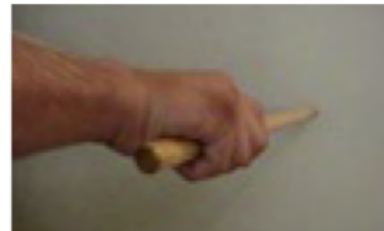
GENERAL IMPLEMENT GRIP:

Matched Grip / Right Hand (Snares)

- Thumb/Index finger connect approx. 1/3 from the bottom of the stick.
- Thumb is parallel with the stick (runs along the stick).
- Middle, ring, and pinky fingers are all wrapped naturally around the stick, while never completely leaving the stick when in motion!
- Allow for relaxation of the fingers in general, while maintaining a consistent grip. Avoid letting fingers remove from the stick, even when in a relaxed state in motion (full strokes for example).
- The butt of the stick should be slightly visible out the back of the hand. This enables your back fingers to have access and control over the stick as well.



NO



YES

Left Hand (Snares)

- Back of the stick should rest naturally in the “webby” connection between thumb/index fingers.
- Stick rests on the cuticle of the relaxed ring finger.
- Pinky rides relaxed underneath the ring finger, while following the shape of and supporting the ring finger.
- Thumb should connect on top of the index finger (connect roughly 1/3 up the stick).
- Avoid tension in index, middle finger and the thumb.
- Middle finger naturally curves along the stick---AVOID straightening the finger or creating space between the middle and index fingers.
- Allow for a natural curvature of the fingers (Hand creates a “C” position from a top angle), but do not condense your hand!! Continue the natural curvature of your fingers.
- Avoid straightening or opening any spaces between fingers!
- If it were to rain on the hand, water should be able to land in the palm and roll off, rather than A) collecting in the palm, or B) not being able to land in your palm at all.
- The back of the hand should create a slight outward slope leading to the formation of a straight line from the elbow to the tip of the thumb. The wrist should remain aligned the entire time.



NO



YES

Playing Position - Snares

- The left arm should be completely relaxed and should hang straight down along your side from the shoulder to the elbow. The bend at the elbow should create an angle with the forearm that is slightly wider than 90 degrees, stopping just shy of the forearm being parallel with the ground.
- The right arm should be positioned so that there is a straight line from the elbow through the tip of the stick in the center of the head. You may have to experiment with the distance your elbow is held away from your side. Keep the shoulder as relaxed as possible. At the point where the stick crosses the rim, there should be about one finger's width of space between the top of the rim and stick.
- The sticks should create a 90-degree angle with beads in the center of the head.
- Beads paired at all times.
- Drum height should be adjusted so that you can comfortably achieve all of these definitions relating to the grip and arm positions.

Playing Position - Quads

- Relax your arms and let them hang straight down from your shoulders. The rims should be at wrist height when in this relaxed stance
- While maintaining a straight line from your elbows through the bead of the stick, raise your sticks to drums 1 and 2. With the beads resting just above the heads, there should be a slight downward angle from your elbows to the bead of your stick - This should give you clearance above the rim AND allow you to make contact with the sweet spot of the implement you are playing with.
- Your hands should be rotated slightly outwards in relation to the drum. (The hand should not be completely flat to the drum [German Grip], nor rotated completely vertical [French Grip], as these tend to hinder the use of finger motion and wrist motion respectively). We will call our grip American Grip.
- Your shoulders should remain very relaxed to avoid translating unnecessary tension to the sticks, while still maintaining the correct posture ("soft shoulders").

Playing Zones - Quads

- Our “set” or “home” position is RH on drum 1, LH on drum 2.
- As a rule of thumb, play about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way into the center of the head from the bearing edge. Each drum will have its “sweet spot” that will be found by ear so minor adjustments may be made to produce the best sound possible..
- When playing with both hands on drums 3 or 4, the beads should be as close together as possible, and should NOT move apart - This will ensure that both hands produce the same sound.
- When moving around the drums, the straight line from elbow to bead should not change. To achieve this, we will pivot from the elbows side-to-side along the X-axis. Your Y-axis is controlled by turning your wrist and supporting the stroke with forearm when necessary. Although they need to be utilized in tandem with one another, the Y-axis should not interfere with the X, and vice versa. Doing this correctly will allow you to move around the drums as efficiently as possible.

HOME ZONE



PROPER STICK ALIGNMENT

VS

INCORRECT STICK ALIGNMENT



Scrape Zones - Quads

- When playing scrapes, shoot for the closest playing zones between drums to conserve energy - You should still be aiming to play roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the distance to the center of the head.
- When crossing over, avoid raising the wrist and poking down at the drumhead. Crossovers can either be stick on stick or wrist on wrist depending on how many drums the crossover covers. The space between the hand/stick on top and the one underneath should be as close together as possible.

Playing Position - Bass Drum

- The mallet should be held similarly to matched grip in the upper battery, with a few slight differences. Unlike an implement used on snares or quads, we hold bass mallets at the very bottom of the mallet shaft. The index finger and pad of your thumb should connect to form your fulcrum, with additional support from the contact of your middle finger. The back fingers should be relaxed around the mallet shaft so the bottom of the mallet is even with the base of your hand. No extra mallet should be visible under your hand.

- The bead of the mallet is set 1" away from the center of the playing zone, meaning that the mallet will be slightly turned in toward the head.
- The hand/wrist/arm (depending on drum size) should be held as close to the rim as possible without making contact.
- To achieve the appropriate wrist and hand angle, relax your arms by your side and lift your arm from your elbow to line up parallel to the ground.
- There should be no strain or added tension on the wrist to create any sort of unnatural angle!
- The elbow's relation to the side of the body will vary depending on body and drum size. Forward/backward adjustments will be made to allow for the mallet to sit in the center of the head while applying the desired technique.
- The arm should have a slight angle from the elbow through the bead of the mallet towards the drumhead (think "playing on a pad")
- No tension should be present in the upper arm from the large shoulder muscles down through the small finger muscles.



Cymbal Positions

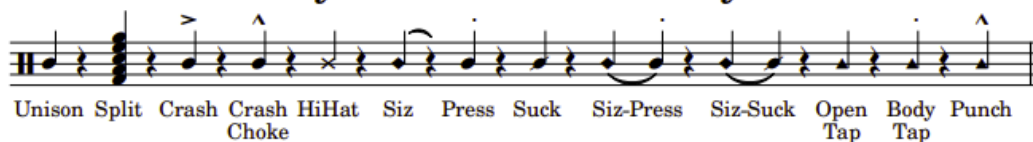
- Horizontal - the position that we generally spend the majority of our time using. It is not quite a true “horizontal” angle, but instead you want the cymbals to be in line with your body as if you were wearing a seat belt in a car. This angle should be just slightly more than a 45 degree angle, as well as maintaining a 2 fingers distance between the cymbals. Your cymbals will be in line with the center of your chest, and should be a nice comfortable distance away from your body (not too close, not fully extended). Much like all of our other positions, the goal is to look big and strong, while also staying as relaxed as possible.



- Vertical - our other most commonly used position; unlike horizontal, this position is much truer to its name. The knots of the cymbals should be in line with your eyes, whereas the common tendency is to hold this position slightly lower than necessary. Much like Horizontal, you want to be a comfortable distance away from your body. The cymbals should be 2 fingers distance apart all the way around at vertical as well.



Cymbal Notation Key



The Exercise Sequence

The purpose of this exercise packet is for it to serve as a comprehensive warmup and skill builder - one that will be done every day at the beginning of rehearsal. Each exercise is numbered 1-8, and occurs at the same tempo of 152BPM. The end goal is to rep each exercise twice, and immediately move on to the next without pause. All in all, this entire process from start to finish will take approximately 12-15 minutes. Each individual exercise is designed to be pulled out separately in order to work on important skill sets that are seen throughout the season. The order of exercises is built to provide the least friction jumping between one exercise and the next, often with the preceding exercise having a teaser of what is to come, leading to a holistic and evolving routine as the sequence goes. Be sure to digest each exercise section by section as you learn. Some of these exercises are long, but the individual sections are simple enough on their own and typically follow a clear pattern.

Exercise Breakdown

- **Hacking**

Preceding the first exercise will be a period of unstructured hacking. This period leaves the process of getting the hands ready to play entirely up to you, as you know best what you need. This could include stretching, excerpts from the exercises themselves, or any individual means of warming up, but will remain independent. Hacking will continue up to the downbeat of Flow. The process of transitioning will be discussed in person, but will likely end with a cutoff, which marks the first beat of the next exercise.

- 1. Flow**

The purpose of this exercise is multifaceted. Going with the name, one of the main purposes is to achieve a sense of flow and fluidity from hand to hand. This also allows us to focus on proper mechanics - primarily wrist turn. These ideas are explored by beginning with a triplet tap pyramid (letter A). This section also gives us a simple means of dialing in our ears and listening to subsections and the drumline as a whole. Letter B evolves this

concept, adding accents. From B up to the TAG, the music serves as a way to loosen up, while still engaging the multiple strokes that we built up in letter A. Any double accents are intended to be played all up, with a full rebound. Accents followed by tenutos are intended to be performed with a *natural decay*, meaning that the rebound isn't strictly controlled, so the sound *decays* instead of being two heights. There is a possibility that we could end the exercise at the TAG, and not play on. The TAG serves as a culmination of the skill sets in a stylized groove that is more reminiscent of music we would play, encouraging you to open up your ears and listen. Letter C in the TAG is a final recap of the entire exercise. For Bases, this exercise also doubles as a very simple exercise to get the brain thinking about splitting and timing.

- Focuses: flow, wrist turn, relaxation, natural decay, rebound, listening, groove.

2. Timing

This is a simple triplet timing exercise. It goes through the partials of a triplet, teaching the space involved between notes and with rests. It is good at working on managing spaces, especially in the last two bars. This exercise can be played all up, or at any height as it is called out. Rebounding all notes is imperative to good execution; this exercise should spend more time "up" than anything. There are only four downstrokes in the entire exercise: two in measure 8, and two on the last two notes of the exercise.

- Focuses: triplet timing, space management, rebound/upstrokes.

3. Double

This is a further evolution of the previous two exercises, since it deals both with double and triple strokes that we first explored a little in Flow, and triplet timing from Timing. The first four bars remind us what our spacing should be for the double strokes, so that they aren't too crushed or too open. This transitions us into letter A, which is double stroke focused. These notes should rebound entirely, producing two even sounds. Letter B introduces triple strokes. Note that these are all accented, so the natural decay we explored in Flow is not the goal here. Aim for even sound the entire time. Letter C then goes on to connect the hands together, drawing on the fluidity from Flow. Letter D is a more contextual recap of everything previous, and also introduces a triplet roll at the end, serving as both a means of connecting the double stroke mechanics to a roll, and as a sneak peak of the next exercise. Bases are introduced to more complicated splits that draw on the mechanics worked on earlier in the exercise. The fours should be played all up with the same technique as the double strokes.

- Focuses: double/triple strokes, full rebound, even sound, fluidity, triplet rolls.

4. Trip

This exercise is all about triplet rolls. Letter A has a focus on one count rolls, broken down by hand, with the evolution leading to a crescendo. This section also gives Bass 1 & 2 a moment to work on this skill set with the upper battery, one that is common enough for them to work on on their own. Letter B turns to two count rolls with the same breakdown, which now includes a tap roll and a decrescendo moment. This transitions the bases into a sextuplet split breakdown, coaching the spacing necessary for both twos and threes. Letter C is again a final recap of everything, with a focus on setting the hands into the roll, knowing the pressure/mechanics, and achieving it right away. It ends with cold attack triplet rolls at three to encourage this. Good wrist turn and a true three inches are

imperative for the exercise. It also allows us to train our ears to proper dynamic adjustments, giving us the means to listen and move together.

- Focuses: triplet rolls, wrist turn, crescendo/decrescendo, retention of skill sets.

5. 8-7-6

This is simply an eights exercise with a slight twist to keep it engaging. This follows Trip as a means to stretch out and relax the hands. Also, this transitions us into a duple 152BPM, different from the triple feel we had in the prior exercises. The layout of this exercises is 8-7-6-7-8 on a hand, so don't overthink it. For rep one, basses will play the unison snare part, and split the second rep as written.

- Focuses: get loose, mental engagement.

6. AT

"AT" stands for Accent-Tap, which is what this entire exercise is about. Opposite to Timing and Double, this exercises main priority is downstrokes. Aim for a consistent and well-executed two height system, likely 12" to 3". The greatest focus should be placed on any note following an accent, as this is one that is usually placed out of time, at an incorrect height, or with improper technique (typically an arm pump instead of a true wrist turn). This exercise also delves into each section playing a different part, so it empowers section independence. Each letter adds an accent to another, with B having two accents back to back, and C having three accents back to back. D gives more of a musical context that might be seen by filling in some of the eighth notes.

- Focuses: downstrokes, two heights.

7. Para

Calling on the accent taps from the previous exercise, and the doubles from Double, we reach the paradiddle exercise "Para". This exercise focuses on the skill sets that appear in paradiddle material, which our show music and other parts tend to use a lot. The first half is a simple paradiddle breakdown, focusing on the double after an accent, as well as the herta rudiment. This section culminates in a simple check into full paradiddles. Basses will use this section to develop proper 16th note spacing, which will be beneficial for the back half of the exercise. The TAG then expands these skill sets into a paradiddle etude which introduces paradiddlediddles and puhduhduhs. Again, proper wrist turn and effective two heights are pertinent in an exercise like this. Basses get some work with more complex 16th note splits in the TAG, as well.

- Focuses: paradiddles, 16th note doubles, puhduhduhs, two heights, wrist turn.

8. Flam

The final exercise in the packet serves to focus on the final main skill set: flams. Beginning with a standard flam accent breakdown, this exercise moves quickly into other flam rudiments like swisses and flam taps. Swisses should be played all up, whereas the flam taps can be allowed to flow a little more. Proper grace note placement is the goal here, which will be helped by proper technique and mechanics like the exercises before. This also serves as a pseudo-warmdown from the paradiddle exercise before, and the sequence as a whole. The top basses also get a moment to explore more complex splits before the sequence is done.

- Focuses: flam rudiments, grace note placement, wrist turn, two heights.