

Taming the Beast - Creating better percussionists through involvement and communication.

Important things to know about percussion and percussionists.

- Here are a few things about being a percussionist to be aware of if you haven't considered them. Being aware of this information, if you haven't considered it, will be very helpful as you try to communicate with and engage your percussion section. Again, please put yourself in their shoes from the perspective from the back of the room.
 - Percussion is the only section where some, or all, of the players might not play during a piece or on the majority of a piece.
 - Compare the percentage of time and the amount of music your flute players get to play to the percentage your percussion section gets. Percussionists also spend less time on mallets than non-melodic percussion by the nature of their parts, so that widens the gap even farther. That's why your percussionists don't read notes very well and are terrified of get a mallet part.
 - Unlike the wind players in your beginning band who have to learn how to put together their specific instrument, how to make a sound, fingerings, how to breathe and sustain a note. Your percussionists just have to walk up to the drum or bells with a stick or mallet and hit them. They go ding or whap and, TADA, they've made a sound! So, who are you obviously going to spend more time with and pay attention to when you start beginners on instruments?
 - Give them an essay assignment. Not joking. Have them hand it in at the end of class.
 - Short essay ideas:
 - Why do you want to play percussion?
 - What other kinds of other percussion instruments do you know of and explain what they are.
 - Name some famous musicians and the types of music they play.
 - What's your favorite kind of music and why?
 - Give them a beginning note-reading worksheet to do.
 - Make sure they always get to play sometime before the end of class, though.
 - You could have them play a buzz roll while the winds are holding a note and just trying to produce sound in the beginning. However, I feel buzz rolls are one of the hardest rudiments to play well. As beginners, just holding a buzz roll could also cause a plethora of technique problems for you to fix.
 - Wind players are physically connected to their instruments by their mouths and fingers.
 - Percussionists have to learn how to control implements in order to produce sound.
 - They are rarely physically connected to the instrument they play in order to produce sound. A lot can go wrong between your hand to the tip of the stick. The possible exceptions are tambourine, claves, shakers, and similar instruments.
 - Percussion has the widest range of techniques and implements to produce good sounds than any other instrument family.
 - Nearly every percussion instrument has multiple sounds that can be produced and as many different ways to do so, that includes found sound, known to the rest of the world as junk, and just about anything you can hit and make a sound. I spend a lot of time at thrift stores hitting pots, pans, glasses, you name it, looking for cool sounds.
 - While playing with the band, percussionist have three different visual elements to focus on: Their music, their instrument, and the conductor.
 - Wind players learn to use their fingers and not look at them when they play. They only have to look at the music and watch the conductor.

- Your percussionists have to watch where to play on their instruments for accuracy and good sound quality, especially playing mallet instruments or multi surfaces which, again, they are not physically connected to in most cases.
- Reading music and watching the conductor while playing mallets can be a nightmare for even some of the best players depending on the material. So, imagine what most of your mallet players are thinking and feeling when they're trying to do the same considering their level of experience.
 - Ways to help them be able to watch you better
 - Have their music stand high enough they can see you and you can see their face from the podium. Too often their stands are almost as low as they can go.
 - Explain how to use their peripheral vision. (Also see "Speedo" under exercises.)
 - Make sure their music stand is at the correct height.
 - Have them look directly at their music.
 - While still having them looking at the music and not looking down, ask if they can see whatever instrument they're playing.
 - While still looking at the music, conduct for them and ask if they can see your hands.
 - Now ask if they can see all three.
 - Note: they should be able to see all three, but their peripheral range will be limited by how well they know the instrument and their ability to read music. Their awareness will grow as you help them improve those skills.
 - Have them memorize the first few measures of a piece to lock in the tempo, sections of music with rallentandos and accelerandos, or a crucial passage where they have to look at you so they can watch you directly long enough to lock in the t
 - If your timpani are off center to one side of the band or the other, which they will most likely be, make sure they are set up so the middle two drums face you, not straight forward. The music stand should be placed between the two center drums and adjusted to the correct height.
 - I feel it's easier to watch the conductor and play timpani. However, in more intermediate and advanced pieces, the timpanist will have to change pitches and adjust pedals and we may have to look down sometimes to make that happen. The key as a timpanist is to know how much time you have to change pitches, count accurately, and listen to the ensemble.

Keeping your percussionists on the right track from square one.

- First and foremost, have the same standards and expectations for your percussionists as you do for your wind players from the very beginning!
 - There can't be a different standard for them in behavior, discipline, sound quality, musicality, technique, and so on.
 - If you don't lay out those expectations immediately and enforce them, you'll most likely lose some, or all, the ability to keep them engaged and on the right track. At the minimum, you'll make it extremely difficult for yourself to turn things around.
 - Here are a few of what I consider the Deadliest Sins.
 - Don't allow them to start with their sticks on the drumhead unless a piece of music requires it. (I call it the equivalent to picking your nose in public)
 - Flipping sticks and mallets, especially tossing them on the ground to try make them bounce. (Picking your nose and eating it.)

- Pecking while you're talking, whether you're addressing them, another section, or the whole ensemble. Basically, whenever you open your mouth and sound comes out. I don't have socially unacceptable equivalent for that except, "You know what one who pecks is called..." I don't suggest using that one. ☺
 - I ask them why they shouldn't peck or talk while I'm talking. Here's what I tell them.
 - "You're missing important information that will help you get better, faster."
 - "You're being distracting and hindering the students who are listening because they want to improve."
 - "You're wasting everyone's time, which isn't fair to the people who are paying attention."
 - "By missing the information, the people in your section and the other musicians who are paying attention are going to leave you in the dust."
 - And the number one answer is..." IT'S EXTREMELY RUDE!" This one usually gets to them.
 - Be aware, however, some of the students might be trying to figure out a mallet part because they don't want to play it badly and be embarrassed. If I'm not talking to them specifically, I let them work on it quietly with their fingers.
- Monitor and correct their grip and technique.
- Not having their music or losing their music on a regular basis should be totally unacceptable!!
- Under no circumstances should they be allowed to clown around in the back of the room. Especially, especially, ESPECIALLY, during a performance! Nip that in the bud asap. For one thing, aside from the distraction and annoyance they create, think about the liability if someone gets a drumstick in the eye or hit on the head with a cymbal.
- In beginning band, even middle school, I personally think it would be a good idea to move them closer to the front every so often when you're working on warm-ups.
- If you're a new band director or you've taken a job at a different school, those expectations may not be in place their band program. It may take a few years to set the new standards if there really aren't any. But, once your standards become assimilated into your program, new students who come in will either know the expectations beforehand or will learn them very quickly through the example of the older students.

Beginning Band - Starting your percussionist off right.

- The first and most important job of a percussionist is to keep solid time. Tell them that right away and keep reminding them of it.
- Call them percussionists and not drummers from day one. Set up the expectation that they'll be learning how to play more than just snare drum.
- Help them understand from the beginning why it's important for them to do warm-ups and scales with the band and learn both mallets and drums in order to become a good percussionist.
- Give them the same attention as the winds. Let's be real. Sometimes you may avoid addressing percussion technique, sound production, and sound quality because you feel you have limited knowledge about how to play those instruments, which I perfectly understand if you're a newer teacher. So, what can you do?
 - Get help from a percussion specialist
 - Bring them in to work with your percussion section
 - Set-up a zoom "masterclass" where they demonstrate techniques, etc.
 - Ask them work with you specifically. Take a long lesson on percussion technique and the basics to look and listen for.
 - Watch YouTube videos about technique. There are tons. Not all good, however.

- Check out educational videos and pdfs from percussion companies. The Vic Firth Percussion 101 series is excellent!
- Find articles and resources from professional percussionists, university instructors, and the Percussive Arts Society
- To play well on any instrument requires a high level of muscle memory. As a beginning percussionist, if their basic grip is wrong, almost everything they try to do from that point on will be wrong from sound production and quality to speed and accuracy. Good luck erasing that incorrect muscle memory. You can do it, but it usually takes a lot of time. The moral of the story? Teach them the correct grip immediately and help them maintain it!!
- I believe learning both mallets and drums simultaneously is extremely important and the way to go. Here are a few downfalls of starting them on bells (or a wind instrument, for God's sake) and waiting until the next year to let them play snare.
 - Other than the basic grip and some of the physical mechanics of technique, playing on bells with mallets is nothing like playing on a snare drum with sticks and vice versa.
 - The weight, length, diameter, and balance between sticks and mallets are very different
 - Drums have rebound, bells don't.
 - They have two completely different sounds, obviously, and several different ways of producing sound and quality of sound.
 - Rudiments like buzz rolls and flams aren't played on bells. (Except in music with grace notes later on.)
 - I also think you can discourage kids who choose percussion by requiring them to play only bells for a year before playing on a drum. The greatest majority of them chose the instrument because they want to drum! Find a way to utilize that desire to encourage them and get them interested in playing mallets... and timpani and bass drum and cymbals, ad nauseum.
- Have them spend relatively the same amount of time on the two instruments.
 - Split the section into two groups that alternate between snare and mallets each day.
 - Have the whole section alternate between mallets and snare each day
 - I don't feel that it's a good idea to have students go back and forth between mallets and snare during any given class period. It could cause confusion and chaos, especially if it's a big section.
- Communicating with your band is everything, whether it's visually while rehearsing music, giving them feedback about technique and dynamics, or even correcting behavior. Pay attention to your percussion section as you would any other section. It's incredibly important to communicate with them and give them constant feedback. A large percentage of the time they are the timekeepers. Your band relies on them to keep solid time and follow you in order to keep the ensemble together and set the appropriate intensity level for the piece they're playing, among other things. You have to stay in almost constant communication with them for that to happen. It's equally as important to communicate with them beyond band class and rehearsals, not only as their band director, but also as a regular human being.

Ways to get them, and keep them, interested in playing mallets and other percussion from the beginning.

- Don't kill yourself just trying to get them excited playing snare and mallets. Sometimes we have the mindset that percussion is just one or the other. Get them excited about playing percussion and music in general!
- Expose them to the world of percussion beyond just snare and mallets. When they start, some of them they may think snare, drumset and mallets are the only percussion instruments that exist.
- Play videos of top-level keyboard ensembles, percussion ensembles which use a wider range of instruments. You can easily involve your whole band by picking videos that contain wind and other instruments as well as percussion.
 - Pros like Gary Burton, Dave Samuels, Lionel Hampton.
 - Soloists like Michael Burritt, Leigh Howard Stevens, Evelyn Glennie, Bob Becker (Nexus)

- Professional and college percussion ensembles
- Drum corps and indoor drumline front ensembles
- Theater acts like Stomp, Blue Man Group, Blast
- World music ensembles.
- Play videos of top-level bands and keyboard ensembles, percussion ensembles which use a wider range of instruments, and world percussion ensembles.
- You'll have several students who will ask, "When do we get to play *those* instruments?!?!" Tell them that's why they have to work on the basics, and they'll be able to learn other percussion instruments faster and play them well if they practice.
- Show them virtuosos on any instrument in the world of percussion so they might begin to see the possibilities of what they can learn in the future. It will inspire them to practice and improve.
- Find video performances of good middle school and high school percussion ensembles, or even younger. Reinforce the fact that if those kids can play mallets and a wide range of other percussion instruments well so can they.

Involving the percussion section in warm-ups from beginning band to High School wind ensemble.

- Once you start working on full band pieces, it's easy to lose your percussion section in the cracks during warm-ups with the band. First, let them know from day one that they're expected to warm-up with the band, and they need to participate fully.
 - To make it easier for them, write the order of pieces on the board. That way they can set up for the first piece QUICKLY then join the warm-up. (There won't always be time, of course, but make it the expectation)
 - Learning, scales arpeggios, etc. along with the rest of the band should be an expectation.
 - They need to do scale tests just like the rest of the band.
 - You could also have them play some rudiments along with their scales.
 - If you do video scale tests that the band members turn in, let the percussion make their video at school or even have them do the test for you in person since they most likely don't have an instrument at home.
 - Having your percussionists play rolls, like long buzzes on drums and single stroke rolls on mallets, for long tone exercises is ok but it won't necessarily help them develop a strong sense of pulse and timing. As a beginner, playing long buzz rolls could actually be a detriment to developing good technique.
 - Start them alternating sticking asap on snare as well as mallet. I think single handed exercises are great, to a point. Doing single handed exercises is good for isolating each hand so they're only focusing on one at a time but, if they get used to using only one hand, they'll have a problem learning the coordination of alternating and using other stickings like paradiddles. When playing ascending and descending scales, make sure they use alternating sticking. They generally want to play the scale all or mostly with only their right hand. Students who also play piano are notorious for that.
 - If your players aren't beginners but don't have much or any mallet experience (talking mostly about middle school and high school level) consider having them warm up on keyboards most or all of the time.
 - If you play chorales, have them play the top line or melody, unless they're more advanced and can play two voices simultaneously.
 - When you play warm-ups and music, it's good to use a metronome in the back of the band at least some of the time. Again - The first and foremost job of any percussionist is to keep solid time! (It won't hurt your winds, either.)
 - There are several great band method books to use that integrate percussion. However, there may be some downfalls in the content when it comes to your particular situation.
 - Many times, books progress too fast for some percussionists. Most are definitely not written with the average Colorado percussion student in mind. Sometimes I think they assume you have a

percussion class or a percussion specialist working with your kids and showing them how to play buzz rolls, flams, and other rudiments and percussion specific techniques.

- Some go from some scales right to chorales. That assumes your students already know how to read notes, which a lot of percussionists don't.
- There's not much use of or focus on triple meters like 6/8 and 12/8 or enough focus on triplets.
- Most books don't address changes between subdivisions like 8ths to triplets or triplets to 16ths.
- If the method book you use has bass drum, cymbal, timpani, or auxiliary parts, avoid having your percussionists play them. The exception would be if those instruments are used in an actual short band piece like some books have.
 - Maaaaybe one of them can play a timpani part, but they'll get more out of playing the snare and mallet parts. Plus, you can only have one player at a time on a set of timpani.
 - If you have a player who may not be able to even come close to achieving a snare or mallet part, then you may want to consider having them play the written bass drum part.
 - A better option would be to have them play a simplified drum or mallet part.
- **Customizing percussion parts for band warm-ups**
- If you use a band method book that doesn't have percussion parts, if you don't use a book, or even if use a book and want your percussion section focus on a specific skill that isn't addressed in the written parts, here are some options and exercises you can use. Most of them are also progressive, so you can change them up if you tend to play the same warm-ups on a daily basis.
- Give them exercises that fit the band warmups. If you are doing 2 count or 4 count long tone scales, they can play a pattern on snare or mallets or roll on a mallet instrument instead of just playing "thunk". If they do play "thunk" make sure they at least play it in time.
- Have them play constant (and consistent) 8th notes, 16th notes, or triplets on snare or mallets.
- Mallets can play the scale along with the band.
- Drums can play different stickings or accent patterns depending on their level.
- Having the percussion play triplets may help your winds play triplets better in the context of their band music and in general.
- On snare or mallets, they can alternate between 8ths and 16ths, 8ths and triplets, or triplets and 16ths (more advanced) from bar to bar or phrase to phrase.
- Mallets can play 8th note double stops in octaves or other intervals like 3rds going up or down the scale. Depending on the tempo, they could play triplets or 16ths in octaves as well.
- **Timing Patterns**
 - Timing patterns are an incredible tool you can use with your whole band. Not only can they help your students with timing and rhythm reading, you can also work on articulations, tonguing, phrasing, accents, etc.
 - These basic rhythms are like the "words" we put together to create phrases, sentences, paragraphs and stories in music.
 - Give your winds and percussion timing pattern sheets or project them on a screen if you have a projector in your band room.
 - Choose a rhythm you'd like to work on and have them play it all on one note or in an ascending and/or descending scale.
 - Have everyone count the pattern out loud then play it.
 - Timing patterns are good for them to memorize.
 - You can use triple timing patterns to explain triple meters
 - You can also use timing patterns to help them understand spaces and how the rhythms interlock if played correctly. (There are no such things as rests, only spaces that should be played as accurately as any note value)
 - Split the class into 2 groups (or more).
 - Have Group A play the timing pattern, while Group B plays straight 8ths or 16ths, or triplets if you're working on triple timing, then switch the roles of each group on the next rep.

- Assign each group a pattern and play them together. Switch the A and B patterns on the next rep
- Duple patterns 5 & 6, duple 2 & 4, and triple 2 & 3 are great to layer together. They're also the easiest to layer. Having one group play duple 5 and the other play duple 6, for example, should produce continuous 8ths or 16ths when played together. Splitting up triple 2 & 3 would produce continuous triplets, if the students play them with accurate timing.
- There are a multitude of "games" or combinations to try.
- Regarding percussion specifically, once they can play each pattern accurately, you can take it up a level and have them add accents, flams, or ruffs to the first note of each rhythm. Have the keyboards play an accent or double-stop interval on the first note.

Assigning Parts - A crucial key for developing well rounded percussionists.

- The music you choose and how you assign percussion parts are extremely important in helping your percussionists become more diverse and proficient on other percussion instruments.
 - Pick music that will keep your players engaged and challenge them. Again, think of the ratio of time your percussionists get to play compared to your wind players.
 - Many classic, older band pieces, have percussion parts that are challenging and can keep the percussion section involved.
 - There are several contemporary composers who write excellent percussion parts that will keep them interested and on their toes.
 - Some great band literature doesn't have much percussion. I think it's important for your band to play and experience those pieces. You can double flute and oboe parts on mallets in order to include your percussion section in those pieces.
 - Marches
 - You can also double flute and oboe parts on marches.
 - I think it's safe to double the snare part if you help the snare players play the appropriate dynamics to balance with the band and with each other. Sometimes I'll have the second player use a snare deeper snare drum with or without the snares on to change the color.
 - Having a tight percussion section is key to playing a march. Let them know that.
 - The bass drum is the most important instrument in the band on a march.
 - Your percussionists will more than likely underestimate the importance of the cymbal part.
 - There is so much inflection that can be used on bass drum and cymbals in a march that is rarely written into the parts. Listen to recordings of a particular march or even marches in general in order to understand where unwritten accents can be placed.
 - They should also listen to a good recording of whatever march they might be playing.
 - Every piece you play doesn't have to be percussion heavy. However, your percussionists need some meat and desert along with their Brussel sprouts if you're going to keep them interested and get them excited about anything. Giving your players some cool, challenging parts along with the suspended cymbal and tri parts they might play in another piece will give them something to look forward to in class and it'll give you leverage to get them to play those less involved parts well.
 - Just playing triangle or a suspended cymbal on a piece is not my definition of a good time. You can talk to them until you're blue in the face about how important it is to play those instruments. If you've ever wondered why they're so gung-ho about marching band and indoor percussion and not so much concert band, go back there sometime and spend

a half hour or more playing one of their auxiliary parts on a piece without a lot of percussion involvement.

- I find that kids become more interested in playing other concert percussion instruments like triangle, tambourine, cymbals, bass drum, etc. when the time is taken to show them the correct techniques on those instruments and the different ways they can be played to get different sounds and textures. There is an art to playing and producing sound on EVERY instrument! Help them understand that.
 - As a composer, I tell my students that every part I write is important. If a composer wrote a finger cymbal part it's because it was important enough for them to put it there. Why would we waste our time writing parts just to write parts?
 - **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!** Avoid assigning the same kids the same parts on every song. There really shouldn't be a dedicated "Snare Guy", or a "Timpani Guy" or a "Mallet Player" or "The Default Suspended Cymbal Kid Who Can't Do Anything Else."
 - By giving your best players "easier" parts along with snare parts, etc., you're breaking up the hierarchy or "caste system" that can be created by giving the same players the same parts for every piece.
 - There are times when you definitely want your strongest players on the right parts, but that doesn't always mean snare drum. You better have a good bass drum player on a march.
 - Don't get into the mind set of, "Billy just won't be able to play that part." Give them the chance! It's not like your concert is tomorrow. Let him have some time.
 - I don't buy it when someone says, "They're just not talented". Give all of them a chance to prove you wrong before making a judgement like that. Yes, there are musicians who I might consider gifted, or savants, or prodigies, but most have gotten to where they are through hard work and guidance from the right people. I don't consider myself "talented" whatsoever. When a lot of "talented" people get to a level where they actually have to work to maintain and improve, they fold.
 - Sometimes I'll be doing a clinic for marching band or percussion ensemble and say, have that kid play that in octaves, or add this part in, or play a little louder, etc. and I get "Oh, he can't do that." mostly for fear something is going to sound bad. You generally have time to give them a chance and help them play the part well.
 - You do have to be careful that you don't give someone a part they just won't be able to achieve by performance time, or at all. Look into your crystal ball and "see" where they might be based on their current proficiency, the trajectory they're on, and the amount of time they have before you perform the piece. You don't want their experience in band to be embarrassment, ridicule, frustration, or failure.
 - If you give your weakest player a more interesting part or an instrument they've never played before, it may be the thing that inspires the kid to become a great musician. I've certainly had it happen before.
 - If you give a mallet part to someone without much experience on the instrument, let them write in the notes. It will ultimately help them with note identification in the long run as long as you ween them off of doing it.
 - Check to see if they've written in the correct notes. If not use, it as a teaching opportunity.
 - Even make writing the notes in an actual assignment.
 - Don't underestimate kids with challenges or disabilities. Learn their limits of what they're capable of and how far they can be pushed, however. I've had some amazing kids with disabilities who we're able to outplay the rest of the section.
 - There are times when kids aren't communicative or skilled enough to participate fully in the class to different degrees. Hopefully they have paras to help them.
- **Be sure to give your percussionists feedback in rehearsal on a regular basis, both positive and critical.**

- Correct them or praise them for basic things that may not seem important in the bigger picture like technique on triangle, bass drum, other auxiliary instruments, and even their set-up.
- “Monitor and correct their grip and technique!
- Pay attention to the auxiliary players. Make them feel important, too.
- Call out your younger students when they do a good job. It will motivate them as well as your older students because they don’t want to be shown up by a freshman.
- It’s easy to just say, "You're too loud, play softer!" and move on. What does that even mean?? Tell them when they’re the important voice and when they're accompaniment. It’s good to take time to explain the order of importance of the melody, harmony, and ostinato/rhythm to the whole band and which category their part falls in throughout a piece.
- Constantly reinforce WHY everything they do and everything they play is important.

King of the Beasts - Confronting the “Battery vs. Pit” Monster!

- I believe that utilizing the information I’ve presented on ways to involve your percussionists and keep them interested from the beginning will help keep them on track to becoming well-rounded percussionists going into high school and hopefully avoid the “Marching vs. Concert” issue, IF they’ve been on the right path from the beginning.
 - Every band director’s situation at the high school level is different when it comes to marching percussion. You may have a situation where you inherit, or already have, kids who only want to play snare drum or quads in marching band. You may also have the kids who’ve been relegated to the instruments of the lowest “caste” who’ve never played anything else but the lamest of accessory parts.
 - Keep in mind that a significant cause of the Mallets vs. Snare issue is that your drummers are intimidated and terrified of playing mallets and your mallet players are intimidated and terrified of playing drums!
 - Some kids are only interested in playing snare or quads and can’t read a note or play a lick on keyboards.
 - Some are just mallet players. Have you ever had a percussionist who only plays mallets play a buzz roll on snare for you? OMG!
 - There’s really no great mystery why your percussionists are so into marching band and indoor percussion and not so much concert band?
- **Marching band front ensemble - Destroying the stigma of being in the pit.**
 - First of all, don’t think of your pit and battery as 2 separate sections. Just that mindset can create problems They’re a marching percussion **ensemble!** Yes, they have Your front ensemble players need to know that every one of their parts are just as important as the battery, and equally as important within the structure of the pit, keyboards though auxiliary. Just as in any kind of percussion ensemble. If that balance doesn’t exist on the field, it’ll bleed over into your concert program, setting up and reinforcing that caste system.
 - Understand that most pit players feel they're inferior to the battery right off the bat because if they’re not good enough to make the battery they get cut and put into the pit, thus sending the message they are not as important. That will bleed over into your concert percussion section which sets up and reinforces the caste system there, too.
 - Be sure the pit gets equal attention and quality of information as the battery
 - What percentage of attention does your pit get compared to your battery?
 - Are you or your instructors glorifying the battery and downplaying the pit?
 - How many techs does your battery have? How many does your pit have and are they percussionists who can address all of the pit instruments?
 - There are 3-4 different battery instruments. Snare, Quads, Bass, and sometimes, cymbals. 3 of the 4 use very similar techniques.
 - How many different instruments do you have in the pit that use several different techniques?

- It doesn't matter half of your pit is made up of wind players. Treat them the same and treat them with the same as you would any of your non-wind player percussionists.
 - If your front ensemble and battery aren't treated the same and given the same kind of attention, it will ultimately send the message that keyboards and the other pit percussion aren't as cool. And, again, that will negatively affect your concert percussion section and your ability to develop well rounded percussionists.
- **Make Front Ensemble Warm-ups More Interesting**
 - Go beyond playing scales! Sure, they need to learn scales, but we don't do warm-ups just to do warm-ups. The ultimate goal is to apply the warm-ups to the music and stretch the technique of the players. Just playing scales really doesn't do that.
 - Give them cool exercises they like that are their own, make them feel special, give them their own identity, and have something they can hype on.
 - Have your pit learn exercises that make the battery players take notice and want to learn them. I write warm-ups for mallets, marching percussion or concert, that are based on rudiments. The battery players see a challenge in the warm-ups and want to learn them and the rudiments give keyboard players drumming chops and stamina.
 - I've included a Front Ensemble Exercises handout which has interesting pit warm-ups and pit + battery combined exercises.
 - **Include your auxiliary players in warm-ups - don't let them just sit there!**
 - Unfortunately, too many kids that "can't do anything else" get put into the pit and often are given lame parts that don't hold their interest or really challenge them. Those kids especially can't be pushed into the shadows or be ignored.
 - If they're the "dregs" of the band, it is your best interests and theirs to help them become "not-the-dregs" They might be the future of your percussion section. So many of those kids quit because they don't get much attention and are sometimes looked down upon and hey end up not having a good experience because of that. If treated and taught well, they may become invaluable players and leaders.
 - Rack, concert bass, and other auxiliary percussion can make or break your band. They can be an important benefit or a time bomb. It all depends on your approach to teaching them.
 - Not keeping your non-keyboard players involved could set you up for discipline issues, to name one. Plus, it's also not fair to them.
 - There are ALWAYS ways to involve EVERYONE in warmups and music rehearsal!
 - I have all of my pit kids learn mallet warm-ups.
 - If you don't have enough keyboards to do that, double up on them depending on the range of the exercise.
 - You can also have a few of them rotate in and out between each rep.
 - If you don't feel that some of your players are skilled enough to learn keyboard exercises or harder warm-ups yet, come up with a simplified part.
 - Simplified parts could be an outline of the exercise, a harmonic ostinato, or just a rhythmic pattern they can handle but still help them improve.
 - They can also play the rhythm and sticking of the melody or the sticking variations from the material I've included to fit concert band warm-ups.
 - If you have an experienced rack player, have them take your accessory people and work with them on whatever they need help on. Warm-ups, rhythms in the music, etc.
 - At the very least they can follow along in their music.

I think the ultimate solution to avoid at least most of the issues stemming from marching band or indoor drumline that can keep your student become diverse percussionists comes back to setting and enforcing your standards and expectations. What is YOUR vision of what a percussionist should be in your

program? Don't allow your marching percussion section, or any percussion section, become a "caste system" as I mentioned earlier. The snares aren't the Brahman and the pit auxiliary players the Untouchables. You or your percussion instructor may unknowingly be setting it up that way by giving more attention and praise to the battery and not enough, or none at all, to the pit.

- **Combined pit and battery warm-ups**

- I believe it's crucial for your pit and battery play together before a performance unless it's just not logistically possible for some reason. It gets the pit's ears in tune to what they be listening for during the show.
- Warming up on common material can also help form a better connection between your pit and battery on other levels. They're one family.
- At most marching band competitions here in Colorado, there is only one warm-up area per percussion sections during their designated warm-up time. I've included a few warm-ups in the Front Ensemble Exercises handout that I have my pit and battery play together in those situations as well as rehearsals when there's only one of me, which is usually quite a bit of the time.
- The pit players have to set up, which better be fast, safe, and efficient, so I have the battery start warm-ups. Once the pit is set up I have them join in if there's still time. I don't want them standing around waiting for the battery to finish their warm-ups.

- **For those of you who have smaller marching bands or smaller percussion sections**, remember that you don't have to have a battery. You can field just a front ensemble, but you can't have only battery and no pit in the modern marching activity and do well.

- In my experience as a judge, I've seen too many schools with small percussion sections that try to field a battery but shouldn't. A drumline that can't march and play to a certain degree of quality will have a huge negative impact on your score as well as your students' experience in marching band. (And YOURS!!)
- Consider putting your whole percussion section in the pit if you have the equipment, can buy the equipment, or borrow it.
- If you have a small inexperienced battery, find the kinds of help I've discussed.
- If you have a choice between having a battery and 0-2 players in the pit, seriously consider not having a battery. The exception may be if you have a synth player and/or a bass player.

Other ways to involve your percussionists and help them become more diverse and well-rounded.

- If you don't have a percussion instructor or are unable to hire one, some of these ideas may work for you. (As well as those of you with a percussion instructor.)
 - Hold after school percussion sectionals once a week on concert or marching music.
 - Create an afterschool percussion ensemble, competitive or not, and have them play on a couple band concerts.
 - Having sectionals or an afterschool ensemble gives you a chance to work on technique and musicality which you may not be able to in band class.
 - Many of your percussionist will enjoy having something that's just for them.
 - Give them percussion duets or trios to work on. It will make them better players, better listeners, and help broaden their scope of percussion instruments and percussion music.
 - Consider looking into fundraisers to generate funding for clinicians or instructors, not just for percussion.
 - Pool your resources with multiple schools in your area and bring in a percussion specialist in to do a clinic with percussionists or band directors
- Possibly the easiest and most important way to inspire and push your percussionists is to expose them to recordings and videos of the best bands and other ensembles performing the music they're working on in your concert, marching, and jazz bands as well as percussion ensemble. Find videos and recordings of types of music, ensembles, and percussion instruments they've never seen or heard before or even knew existed. Maybe even that you never knew existed. **The internet is a treasure trove of musical information!** Watch out for the fake diamonds and fool's gold, however.

- If you're not sure of the quality of any videos or other information, please feel free to send me a link to them and I'll check it out for you and give you my opinion.

Hiring a year-round percussion instructor

- If you have the financial resources or can generate them, I believe that having a percussion instructor year-round to teach marching band and concert percussion would be an incredible benefit and possibly the best way to help your "drummers" become good, well-rounded percussionists.
 - If you can get an instructor who has a more well-rounded background to instruct both your marching and concert percussion, that is the best situation.
 - If you can only hire one percussion instructor, hire someone who can do both pit and battery.
 - If you can hire 2 get on for pit and one for battery.
 - Avoid the situation where you have drumline guy and a separate concert guy with differing philosophies. That could be seriously detrimental to your program but more importantly to your kids. You don't want to start the vicious circle of, "Concert band sucks!" "Marching band is stupid."
 - Excellent, experienced percussion instructors are few and far between in Colorado. However, keep in mind that a young instructor without a well-rounded percussion background who is eager wants to do the job can be taught. There are some younger instructors out there with hearts of gold who just want to help kids become better players.
 - Set up some kind of mentorship with an experienced percussion educator to help them fill in any gaps in their percussive knowledge and become a better teacher.
 - You can also help them become a better teacher.
 - There is an infinite number of articles and videos about technique on every percussion instrument and even how to teach several different areas of percussion that an inexperienced instructor can tap into.
- If you have a percussion staff during marching season, consider having a member of the staff working with your percussionists in class during the school year if don't already. I always see high school marching bands and indoor drumlines with multiple percussion staff members, and I always wonder if any of those schools have an instructor working with their concert band percussion year-round. It doesn't make sense to me to have a marching percussion staff and not have someone working with the concert percussionists. That just strengthens the caste system.

Taking it to the next level - Training good leaders

- Having good leaders is an incredible benefit, especially if you don't have a percussion instructor.
- Delegating authority
- Teach them how to teach
 - I learned this from flying solo as the only percussion instructor when I taught at Gateway and for most of my time at Bear Creek.
 - When newer members come in and they need to learn warm-ups or work on music, I often have some, or all, of the vets teach them exercises or run sub-sectionals.
 - I monitor them, of course, and help guide them on how to break things down, etc.
- **Hold them responsible for their own success as well as each other's.**
 - Once I teach my pit how to set up in competition, put on mics, run speaker cable, etc. I don't do it for them, and they are responsible for setting up their own gear. I hear instructors say, "My pit sets up so slow." Yep... and why is that?
 - In any band or percussion ensemble, once parts and instruments are assigned, if they ask me where a piece of their equipment is or their drumsticks are I tell them it isn't my stuff, it's theirs. I'm not responsible for it. (Unless they really have looked and can't find something.)
 - I tell them they are individually responsible for making sure anything they need gets on the truck and they see it first-hand. If they come up to me before a performance and tell me they forgot something important I say, "Well I guess it's not going to be very good performance, then." Like

I said earlier, you don't have to always be that heavy handed. However, someone only needs to forget their equipment once, and it's pretty much taken care of for the rest of the season.

- The moral of the story? – Don't do everything for them! As much as you want to see them succeed, it's ultimately up to them to make it happen. Explain that to them. Baby birds need to learn how to fly. Human babies have to fall down and hit their heads on the coffee table once or twice before they can walk. You can't keep them in the stroller their whole lives.

Taming the Beast! - Bottom line

- Your drummers aren't inherently evil. You don't have to be an ogre or Jedi to bend them to your will. They just need guidance.
- You need to be direct, honest and tenacious but most importantly, at the same time you have to let your percussionists, and entire band, know how much you care about them and about music and let them know why what you ask of them is in their best interests. That will sell them on what you're trying to do almost every single time.
- Be genuine. I believe kids can smell bullshit from a mile away and they won't buy what you're selling if you're not sincere and honest with them.
- Be interested in what they like and do musically.
 - Many kids today are interested in composing their own music with Ableton or Logic
 - Knowing the kind of music that they listen to can help you understand them more and give you a better chance to make a connection. YOU might get into the music they like and discover new genres.
 - Don't be a snob, like, "You shouldn't listen to music like that because it's garbage!" Be open minded. Expose them to what you may consider better music by telling them and encouraging them what to listen to, not what NOT to listen to. Sometimes they can turn YOU on to great music.
 - Use their musical tastes to expose them to more styles of music.
- Be involved even if you have a percussion instructor or staff.
 - Communicate with your staff, impart your philosophy on them, and have a conversation about what I've presented today if you feel it applies to your situation.
 - It's your job to help guide your percussionists. If you have a percussion instructor, it's their job to help you with that even past marching band.
 - Both you and your percussion instructor should be realistic with them about what they need to know if they plan to become a music major. Let them know that they can't be just being a one trick pony if they want to audition and study percussion in college.
 - I teach my kids as if they're all going to become percussion majors at college. When they audition for chairs in band, or for honor bands, I talk to them about how to approach an audition and what to do and not to do.
 - I can't say this enough but utilize every possible resource available to expand their knowledge and skills in the greater universe of percussion. Utilize those sources for increase your own knowledge of percussion technique and personal growth as a band director.
 - Most of the kids in Colorado are only exposed to a couple of different kinds of percussion. Their knowledge generally limited to marching/indoor percussion, and standard concert band percussion.
 - Show them all of the possibilities in the beautiful universe of percussion! That will get them excited and make them diverse.

Appendix - Percussion ensemble information

- There's a lot of good percussion Ensemble music out there where kids don't have to play three gong notes during a piece and that concert bass drum parts can be more interesting than just going boom boom boom.
- CSU had an excellent percussion festival in the spring of 2019, could have it in 2020 because of Covid. Clinicians for high school ensembles then the CSU ensemble had a concert that night. Really got a lot of my kids excited about playing percussion.
- **Pick music that will get them excited about playing percussion**
 - The growth of percussion ensemble music in the past 40 years has been amazing! There is an almost limitless choice of works where kids don't have to play three gong notes during a piece and that have concert bass drum parts can be more interesting than just going boom boom boom, There are several more recent works that are much more interesting and accessible to middle school and High school percussionists.
 - Check out music from these publishers and composers as a start.
 - **Publishers**
 - C Alan (Digital downloads available)
 - Tapspace (Digital downloads available)
 - Rowloff
 - HoneyRock
 - **Composers**
 - Nathan Daughtry
 - Eric Rath
 - Jim Casella
 - Brian Blume
 - Brian Slawson
 - Chris Brooks
 - David Steinquest
 - Julie Davila
 - James Campbell
 - Dan Moore
 - I plan to put easy to intermediate percussion pieces on my website soon.

You can also find a lot of titles from these and other publishers and composers at J.W. Pepper

- Look for pieces with cool auxiliary parts. Check out music from these publishers and composers as a start. Check out music from these publishers and composers as a start.
- Get your students playing mallets by performing pieces with easier mallet parts.
- Find pieces that utilize instruments and techniques they might not use in concert band.
- Many percussion ensemble works are written for body percussion which is fun for the kids and doesn't take ANY equipment!
- There are several "found sound" (i.e., junk) pieces. I spend a lot of time at thrift looking for items with cool sounds. I get some craazy looks from people.
- There are many older, classic percussion ensemble pieces out there. Most of the ones truly worth playing are advanced high school and college level. They can also be very academic and esoteric making them hard to relate to for the average high school percussionist.
- Avoid overly intellectual and softer, slower pieces unless your players are more mature.
- You can find a lot of easier pieces that are fun and even challenging for younger players. If that's what you're looking for and planning to buy, take a good look at those pieces and ask if there are truly worth working on and performing.

If you're not sure if a percussion ensemble piece is good, worth playing, or the right level for your students, please ask me to check it out and I'll let you know.