

**SFA Lumberjack Marching
Band Percussion
Handbook
2008**



Dear Prospective 2008 SFA Drumline Member:

My name is Kenny Peters and I am the Drumline Coordinator for the 2008 Lumberjack Marching Band. I would like to take this time to extend a welcome to you, along with thanks for considering joining the SFA Drumline. The SFA Drumline proves to be a growing success every year in the realm of marching percussion. If we are fortunate to have your company for the 2008 marching season you can expect to become well acquainted with other members that will share your same excitement and enthusiasm for the Drumline. We hope that the August camp will prove to be both an educational and fun experience for you.

The August camp will consist of reviewing technique, exercises, cadences, show music, and of course the audition process which will be taking place as we are rehearsing along with the possibility of a short interview/sight read with the staff. We hope that at the end of the weekend you will leave with a better understanding of marching percussion. We will start off the camp reviewing fundamentals of playing which will cover: grip, strokes, heights, and overall technique. As the camp progresses we will thoroughly go over the exercises on the webpage along with other warm-ups to be provided at or before the time of the camp. It is imperative that you have all of the exercises listed committed to both your hands and memory BEFORE the camp. We do not want to spend time trying to learn the basic exercises as we will have more during the camp weekend. We will be evaluating the progress of everybody throughout the duration of the camp and will try to place everybody on the instrument that they want, but we MAY move people around to try to facilitate the needs of the percussion section as a whole. By Sunday we hope to have both the Drumline and front ensemble set.

I understand that everybody comes from different percussion backgrounds. There are multiple schools of thought concerning marching percussion, but understand that we do things at SFA a particular way. We encourage input from others, but don't forget to be open minded to our methods concerning technique, rehearsal, and musicality. I would also like to encourage anyone to approach me or one of the other student leaders with any problems they may have at any time. Communication is very important and I would greatly appreciate keeping those lines open.

I would like to again extend my appreciation for your consideration of joining the SFA Drumline and hope to see you at camp in August.

Respectfully,

Kenny Peters
SFA Drumline Coordinator
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Dear Prospective 2008 SFA Drumline Member:

Greetings! I hope the summer is finding you well. It's time to start thinking about the 2008 Lumberjack Band season and being a part of the SFA Drumline. As a member of the drumline your season will start on Friday, August 8 as we engage in a private percussion camp that will also include a short audition process. This camp is incredibly important in that it will give us a chance to immediately introduce and develop the fundamental approaches/techniques that will define our overall effectiveness throughout the fall season. As a member of the 2008 SFA Drumline you can expect to be surrounded by the highest level of commitment, enthusiasm, energy and excellence in both your peers and your instructors. Participating in one of the finest performing ensembles at SFA will demand a lot of hard work and preparation but the rewards will be invaluable. Whether pursuing a career in music, computer graphics, or any other profession your experiences with the 2008 SFA Drumline and Marching Band will promise to be one of the high points in your collegiate career. Music will be available online at: www.music.sfasu.edu/lumberjack. Please look over, and be familiar with, this material BEFORE coming to camp. We will work very hard and very quickly so preparation is of the utmost importance. Enjoy the rest of your summer and I look forward to developing an outstanding musical experience with the 2008 SFA Drumline.

Sincerely,

Dr. Scott Harris
SFA Percussion Director
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First Things First

Slow and Steady

The number one problem that I see with most percussionists is that they rush through the fundamentals and start tackling the “beefy” stuff. I cannot stress how detrimental this is toward building the foundations of being a good player. Now I realize that playing eight on a hand is not the most exciting thing but there is a reason why ALL drumlines learn a variation of this exercise and start off their entire warm-up sequence with it. Trust me, they are not thrilled to play through the exercise but they understand that an exercise like eights is one of the building blocks to forming a great drumline. Once you realize that going through the basics everyday for a substantial amount of time is necessary, you will build up the mechanics that will help you learn and play the “beefy” stuff easier and better. You need to remember that slow and steady wins the race. You will get bored and tired of hearing the same thing over and over again, but understand that it is all necessary to becoming a great ensemble.

Practice Habits

There are certain things that must happen while you practice:

1. You have to be alert and ready to learn.

If your body and mind are not ready to practice then you might as well not start. If you just go through the motions you run the risk of teaching your mind and hands something that is incorrect. Make sure that you have been awake AND FUNCTIONAL for some time before you start practicing. This will help you in focusing on grip, stroke, heights, etc. while you practice.

2. You have to practice with a metronome.

As much as you like to believe that you have a great sense of time a metronome will always tell you when you don't. There is a reason why we are called the battery section; we have to be as perfect as can be when it comes to tempo. Human error and fluctuation cannot always be detected when you are concentrating on other things, but a metronome will.

3. You have to know what your hands are doing.

We all know what the drummer face looks like. It is that dead still face that looks straight forward without any emotion or fluctuation. This may look cool for performances, but when you warm-up it is not necessary. Make sure while you practice that you look at your hands and make sure they are doing what they need to do. There is no way to tell where your heights are if you don't look down. There is no way to tell if you have good playing zones if you don't look down, get the point?

4. You have to practice at a tempo that you can play at.

Most music will have a tempo indication at the beginning of the piece to indicate how fast, or slow, it should be played (duh!). This doesn't mean that you should practice it that fast. You should practice any piece of music at a tempo where you can play it correctly with proper technique. Once you can play at this tempo consistently then you can turn up the metronome a few clicks. Remember that slow and steady wins the race.

5. You have to actually practice.

It is difficult to become a better player if you don't actually practice to become one. Take the time out of your day to practice. Remember that repetition is one of the best tools that we have. Once you practice something for long enough your spinal cord will remember what it feels like. You don't want to practice with bad technique because you will teach yourself how to be a bad player, and nobody wants that.

The Basic Strokes

The Legato Stroke

This is the most fundamental stroke that we use. The reason that we use the term legato is because it describes the fluid motion of the wrist and arm. The legato stroke is a full stroke that is activated from the wrist and sends the stick down to the head with enough velocity to return the stick to its starting position. It is important to remember that the stroke is from the wrist but it is not restricted to the wrist. The arm will contribute to the stroke to a certain degree. If your body is relaxed, as it should be, then your arm will naturally add the correct percentage of velocity that is needed to achieve the stroke. With all that said, the entire stroke from the wrist to the arm must be done in one fluid motion. Do not stop the stick when it strikes the head and never tense up.

The Down Stroke

The down stroke follows all of the same mechanics of the legato stroke except that you stop the stick one inch off the surface of the head after it has hit. Again, do not tense up or “choke” the stick to stop it; simply leave your hand in the down position.

The Tap

The tap stroke is a stroke that is controlled by the wrist and the fine muscle groups in the fingers. This stroke starts with the stick in the down position. The wrist and fingers will send the stick down to the head and return the stick to the starting position. Notice that I did not say that the stick drops to the head. The stick should have the same velocity as it would have with the legato stroke, but it just has less distance to travel. A good bass concept to apply to the tap stroke is “play through head”. Think of having enough velocity to play through the head rather than just barely hitting it.

The Up Stroke

The up stroke follows all of the same mechanics of the tap stroke except you raise the stick to vertical playing position.

SFA Pit Tips

General Technique Considerations

Almost everything we play in the pit will use a “full” or legato stroke. This means starting with the wrist low and the mallet high. The stroke should be activated by the wrist; this causes the mallet head to go down, strike the key, and come back up – all in one smooth motion. The most effective way to achieve this is by using the “back fulcrum,” or using the pinky and ring finger as the fulcrum of the mallet. Although this type of stroke is ideal for full strong keyboard playing, it doesn’t cover the type of music the pit is best known for...runs! Quick, intricate music, such as runs, are much easily played by using the “front fulcrum,” similar to what a snare or tenor drummer might use. This grip is achieved by using the thumb, pointer, and middle fingers as the fulcrum of the mallet; it enables the player to initiate the stroke using smaller muscles (the fingers) which are easier to manipulate quickly.

If you have any questions involving these technique considerations, feel free to contact me. Below are some tips for the exercises that have been posted:

No Flams

No Flams’ title explains the purpose behind the majority of the exercise. Most of the exercise consists of both mallets playing at the same time; this technique is known as the “double stop.” One of the most important considerations when playing double stops is keeping both mallets moving at the same rate of speed from the same height. This allows the mallets hit the keys at exactly the same time. Timing and note accuracy can also prove troublesome in this exercise so, as always, learn it slowly and accurately, and use a metronome.

Tempo

Quarter note = 60 – 120

Verde

Verde is the classic pit exercise because of its obvious emphasis on scalar runs. The main focuses will be tempo stability as well as note accuracy and eventually dynamic contrast within the exercise. Each student should come to camp with this exercise memorized in all 12 major keys.

Tempo

Quarter note = 84 – 160

Tripeggios

Tripeggios is a note accuracy exercise; the “trick” behind this exercise is shifting. This means, immediately after hitting each note, the mallet should slide up and over until it stops over the

next note to be struck with that mallet. The only way to make this technique a habit is slow steady practice. Each student should come to camp with this exercise memorized in all 12 major keys.

Tempo

Dotted quarter note = 72 – 152

No Flams and Tripeggios should be played almost entirely with the back fulcrum technique described above, while Verde can use either (slower-back; faster-front). Keep all of these things in mind when practicing, and I look forward to seeing you in August!

Jason Morgan

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