

OREGON STATE™

DRUMLINE



Marching Cymbals Technique Packet

Introduction

Welcome! The Oregon State University Cymbal Line is pleased to share its technical approach to playing marching cymbals. Our cymbal line is creative, impactful, and incredibly fun! This packet articulates the techniques we use to create memorable and entertaining performances.

Playing marching cymbals in this ensemble is both a challenging and rewarding experience. Our performers push themselves -- musically, mentally, and physically -- to create an amazing performance experience for the fans of Oregon State University and for themselves.

The packet contains a breakdown of all standard techniques used in this cymbal line. For students offered a position in the cymbal line, it is expected that you will be familiar with the information in this packet prior to the start of drumline camp, so that we can begin cleaning and fine-tuning the technique right away. That said, we do understand that people will be arriving with different levels of marching cymbal experience, so don't worry if you do not understand all of the information. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Grip

Grip is a key part of cymbal technique. It can make or break a cymbal player, figuratively and literally. If the technique is not followed it will take away from our musicality and presence during a performance as well as possibly cause injury and unnecessary discomfort.

At Oregon State we use a grip commonly referred to as Garfield grip (named after the Garfield Cadets, who developed it). In our opinion, it is the most controlled and comfortable grip in marching cymbal playing.

To start, we put our hands through the straps as shown in figure 1. We then rotate our hand away from the body to have the strap rest on the webbing of the thumb (figure 2 and 3).



Now that the cymbals are on your hands we need to talk about finger placement. There are many schools of thought when it comes to this subject, but most modern cymbal instructors

agree that you should have a wide surface area covered on the cymbal. To achieve this we spread our fingers out as wide as comfortably possible with all of your fingertips applying light pressure to the cymbal (this is best accomplished with properly tightened straps which we will cover in a later section).

Positions

In this section we will go over the standard playing positions we use on a regular basis. You should note that does not mean that we will *only* use these positions as we have visuals that require us to change these slightly on a case-by-case basis. The main positions are set, vertical (also referred to as “vert”), flat, choke, vert tap, flat tap, ding, zing, hi-hat, ride, and standby. Each of these is broken down below.

Set

Set position, also referred to as the “Attention” position, is defined as placing the center of the cymbals at the point where your femur and hip meet, with the edges of the cymbals slightly turned in toward the front of the body to create a clean silhouette. Arms will have a slight bend in them and very minimal flare away from the body.



Vertical

In this position you will hold your cymbals up in front of you in a vertical orientation (thus the name). This will be done by having your upper arms parallel to the ground. From here you will bend at the elbow until the knots of the cymbal straps are in line with your eyes (note this angle will be slightly different from person to person).

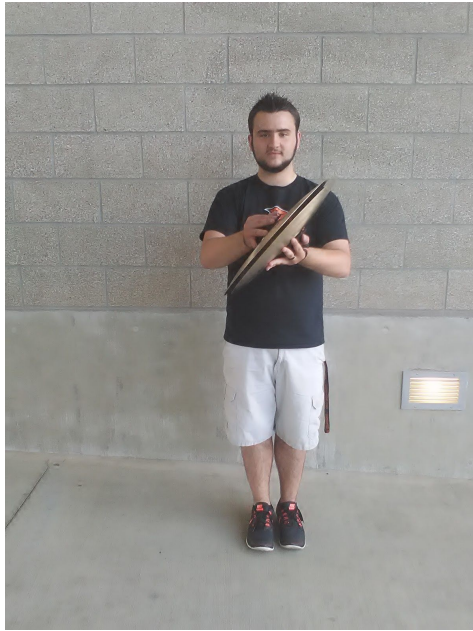
When in this position, you should have your cymbals about 1-1.5 inches apart; this will give the best visual presentation to the audience. The cymbals will not be parallel to each other, rather there will be a slight angle at the front of the cymbals that flares out toward you (shown in the figure below). To you, this angle will be apparent but to anyone observing the line it will look as though the cymbals are in parallel with only the front edge being visible.



You should note that in this position people have a tendency to arch their back. This is because our bodies try to keep our center of mass over our hips which is the most comfortable position for us to be in. This is great for comfort but the visual result is unpleasant. To combat this natural occurrence you should do regular abdominal strengthening exercises (see the exercises at the end of this packet).

Flat

This position's name is slightly misleading. You will not actually be holding the cymbals in a flat orientation. In this position you will hold the cymbals out in front of you about 7-8 inches away from your body. The cymbals will fall at the natural angle from the left shoulder to the top of the right hip and will be approximately one to one and a half inches apart and will be in a parallel alignment.



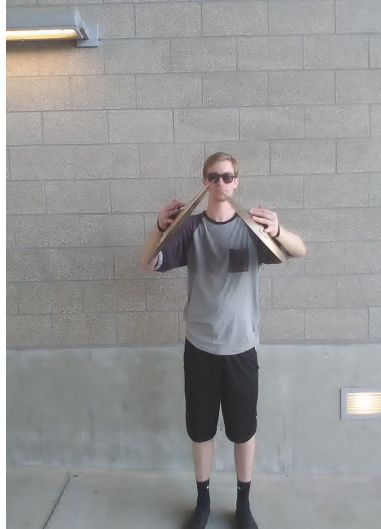
Choke

When moving to choke position, start in set. From there, move the cymbals up along the sides of the body until your arms are parallel with the ground. Angle the cymbals toward each other until there is a 1 to 1½ inch gap between the edges of the cymbals.



Vert. (Vertical) Tap

To find this position, start with in the standard vertical position. Create a 60° angle from the top of the cymbals. After this, overlap the right cymbal by approximately one inch. This position can cause soreness in the forearms until the appropriate muscles are developed.



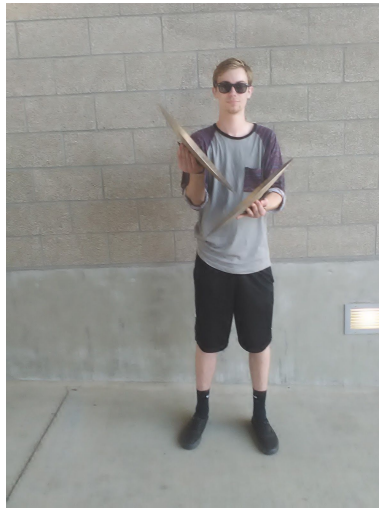
Flat Tap

Flat tap position is derived from the choke positions. From choke, move the cymbals about 2 ½ to 3 inches away from the body and down about an inch.



Ding

In ding position set the left cymbal in flat. With the right cymbal create a 90° angle at the dome of the left cymbal.



Zing

Zing is very similar to ding, but with one change. Start out with the left cymbal in the same position as it is in ding position. From here place the edge of the right cymbal just above the dome of the left cymbal. The right cymbal should be perpendicular to the ground. This is to create a more articulate sound.



Hi-hat

To go to hi-hat position first start in flat, then pull the cymbals against the body contacting just below the sternum. From here rotate the cymbals until they are parallel with the ground with the right hand on top.

This position is used both for playing hat sounds and for holding hi-hat for snare players.



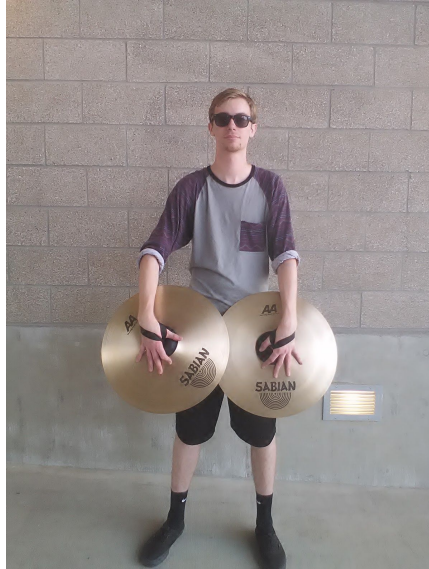
Ride position

This position is used to hold ride cymbal for a snare player. To do this lift the left cymbal up and hinge the wrist down slightly to give the snare player access to the edge, bow, and bell of the cymbal as shown below.

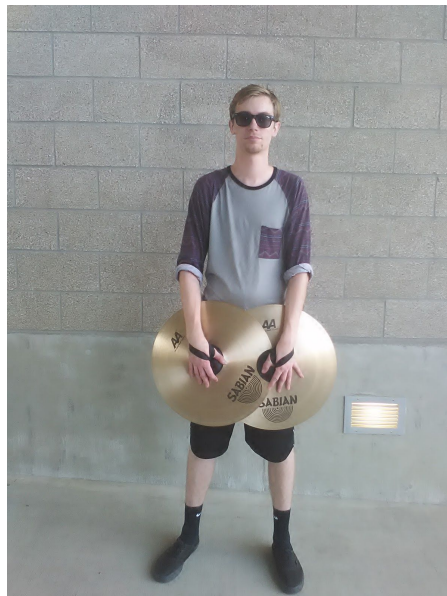


Standby

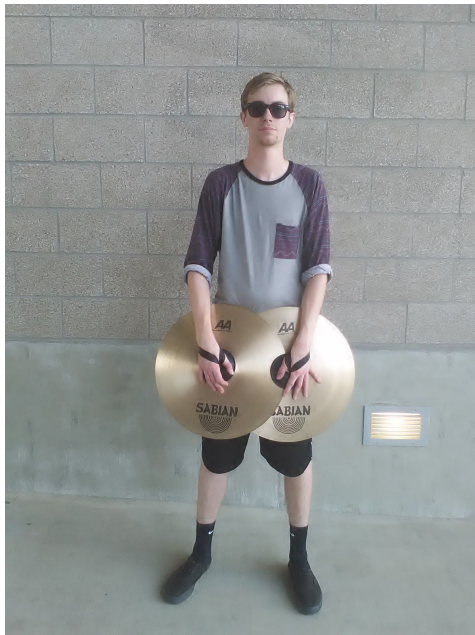
When the ensemble is told “at ease”, “relax”, or any other version of this you will go to what we call standby. To go to this position start in the set position. From here angle the front edges of the cymbals in toward your body as pictured below.



From here you will slide the left cymbal under the pad of the right cymbal.



Once in this position rotate the cymbals so that the logos are able to be read by spectators.



Note: when moving to this position we will do the first two as quickly as possible in a ripple from right to left.

Sounds

This section explains all of the different sounds you will use throughout the season. Note that while most of the sounds will stay in their designated positions many of them can move to different positions for visual purposes.

Flat Crash

To perform a flat crash start in the flat position. One beat before the crash push in with your fingers until both cymbals contact their corresponding arms as shown in images below.



When you play the crash first contact with the front edges of the cymbals than push through to contact on the back half of the cymbal, continuing to push through until your right arm is fully extended.



Two beats after the crash is played quickly, pull back into the flat position.

Vertical Crash

The vertical, unlike the flat crash, has a two-motion prep. The first portion of the prep is similar to the tap position, except it does not have the right cymbal overlapping the left. This position is regularly referred to as the A position.



The second part of the prep is known as the V position. As expected you will hold the cymbals in the opposite orientation as the A position, but this time the right cymbal will be inset on the left by about an inch.



When playing the crash, both hands will push in toward the vertical position. The cymbals will first contact at the bottom, where the right cymbal is inset. After initial contact the cymbals roll up through the vertical position. At the end of the crash move through the prep sequence again, this time ending in vertical position without crashing.

With this crash we have two count structures that we will use depending on tempo. If the crash is being performed above 120 bpm we will use a quarter note prep for a vertical crash. For example with a crash on beat 1 in 4/4 time you will go to A on beat three before the crash, V on beat four before the crash, on beat two after the crash you will be back at A, beat three you will hit V, and end in vertical on beat four after the crash.

When we are playing music at tempos up to 120 bpm we will use an eighth note structure. This means the first part of the prep will be on beat 4 and the second part will be on the "&" of four. You will go back to A on beat two, just like in the quarter note structure, but unlike the quarter note system, you move to V on the & of two and land in vertical on beat three after the crash.

Orchestral Crash

The orchestral crash is also played from the flat position. This crash follows a similar structure to vertical crashes, but unlike vertical crashes it does not lock into two different defined positions, instead it flows through them in a single beat.

To perform the prep first move the cymbals into a straight line that mirrors flat, just like the picture below, one beat before the crash.



After the prep quickly flow move back to flat to complete the crash. After the crash is completed, on beat two roll back to prep position. Then roll back to flat on beat 3.

Crash Chokes

Crash chokes are a common staccato sound used in cymbal playing. They can be performed as both flat and vertical crashes. To perform a crash choke prep the crash as you normally would. After impacting move the the choke position as quick as physically possible. After the choke is completed ideally you will pop out to the next playing position two beats after the note is played.

Sizzles

Sizzles are performed by pushing the two cymbals together to create a continuous sound. This is done by allowing the cymbal to move freely by pulling your fingers from the cymbal. To end the sound pull the cymbals apart and putting your fingers back on the cymbals.

Sizz-press

A sizz-press is the same as a sizzle, expect instead of having a soft release the note has a staccato release. This is done by quickly pushing the cymbals together to create an air pocket to end the sound.

Sizz-suck

A sizz-suck is another sizzle sound with a staccato ending with a louder ending note. To perform a sizz-suck start with a sizzle and push forward similarly to the follow through for a flat crash. At the end of the note quickly pull the top cymbal back and push the cymbals together in one motion; this will cause the sound to end with a slight accent.

Slam

To perform a slam quickly press the cymbals together to create an air pocket sound. This can be done in both Flat and Vert.

Tap

In either tap position move the right cymbal away from the left in a hinging motion 1 beat before the sound. To perform a tap move your right hand back to the proper position, contacting the left cymbal slightly.

Dead Taps

Dead taps are done by playing a flat tap while in the choke position.

Tap Chokes

To perform a tap choke start by doing a tap in either flat or vertical position. As soon as you make contact with the cymbals pull them into the choke position. Similarly to a crash choke you will pop out to the next position two beats after performing the note.

Vertical Slap Choke

While in vertical rotate the cymbals to the left, as depicted in the first image below, to prep for the sound.



To perform a slap choke quickly rotate the cymbal to the right impact just past the bell on each cymbal. As soon as sound is initiated move the the choke position as quickly as possible.



Flat slap choke

To perform a flat slap choke start in the choke position. After this push out quickly like you are prepping a tap choke, “over shooting” to create contact.

After initiating sound quickly move the the choke position.

Hats

While in hi-hat position hinge the right cymbal up from the left and quickly place it back on the left cymbal to produce an air pocket sound.

Dings

Starting in ding position, use a circular motion to contact the front portion of the bell of the cymbal. When contacting fingers should be off of the left cymbal allowing it to ring.

Zings

Starting in zing position contact the left cymbal slightly below the bell with the edge of the right cymbal. In a fluid motion push down and to the right with the attacking cymbal. Come back to zing position one beat after the note is played.



Maintenance

Maintaining your cymbals, just as with any other instrument, is very important. Taking the extra time to keep your instrument in its best condition will really help make the line look and sound its best at all times. The following two subsections will explain the few simple things you should regularly do to maintain your instrument.

Straps

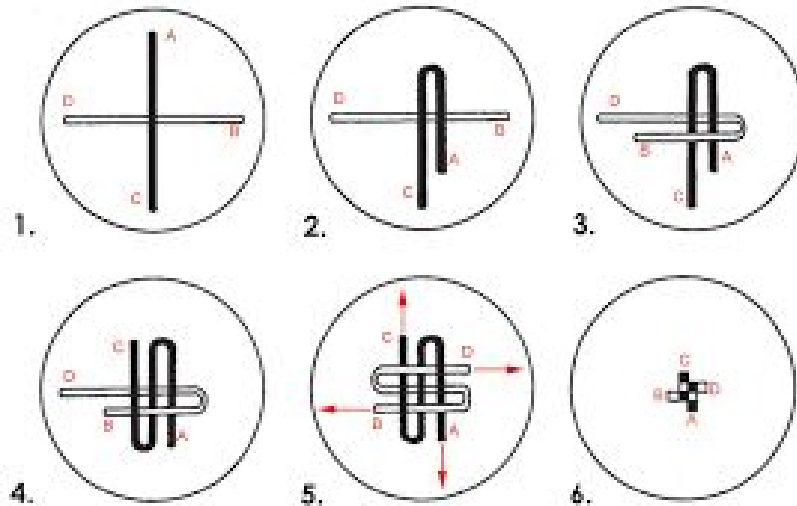
Before we talk about maintaining the straps on your cymbals we need to talk about how tight they should be to properly perform. The general idea is that when the strap is on your hand if you extend your arms straight out and are not holding the cymbal with your fingers there should be about a $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ " gap between your hand and the cymbal pad.

Playing this instrument involves lots of motion; it is common for the straps to become loose over time. Therefore, it is recommended that you regularly re-tie the straps before every performance as well as when it is needed before rehearsals.

To tie the knot used for cymbal straps first must orient the strap as they are in the first image below. After this bring we must stack the ends of the straps so that they feed through the

cymbal cleanly. When doing so we stack them starting on the opposite side of the strap from the hand it goes on. This means when working on your left cymbal start with the tail on the furthest right than stack them in order going toward the left, so that they look like the second picture below.

After this feed the strap through the cymbal until it is at the proper tightness on your hand and flip the cymbal over. From here spread out all of the ends of the strap and follow this diagram to tie the knot.



When doing this for the first time it may be necessary to cut your straps down so that they do not extend past the bell once the knot is formed.

Cymbals

Cymbal plates require minimal maintenance. One of the few things you will need to do is polish them regularly, about once every two weeks. When polishing cymbal use either cymbal polish (we keep some in the drum room) or glass cleaner and a cloth. When applying the cleaner be gentle on the logos and remove the cleaner shortly after applying.

The only other form of maintenance you need is to check for small cracks before every use of your instrument. If you locate any cracks forming on your cymbals please inform the cymbal squad leader and the percussion coordinator, so that that we can take note that a replacement will be needed.

Strength-Training Exercises

NOTE: Consult with a medical professional before beginning any new exercise program.

Playing cymbals is a very physically challenging endeavour. In order for you to be able to enjoy the instrument from the start of the season it is important to start building muscle as soon as possible. Below we have listed out some workouts that will work the main muscles used in

playing this instrument. If you cannot complete the exercises at the rep counts listed below, that is okay. It is more important to maintain the relative proportions of the workout sets, than it is to do the reps listed. This also means that if you get to the point where the workouts are too easy you can easily “up the reps” to get the most out of the workout.

IMPORTANT HEALTH AND SAFETY NOTE: As with any new exercise program, it is easy to do too much, too soon, and too fast and thereby injure yourself. Stretch first and drink plenty of water. Start all exercises with lower reps, slower motions, and less frequent sets. Listen to your body and don't “push through” nerve, ligament, tendon, or bone pain. Temporary muscle fatigue and soreness is an expected short-term result of some of these exercises, but joint problems and pain from repetitive stress injuries is *not*. Please be careful and use common sense. If you develop pain not associated with temporary muscle soreness, rest and ice the source of the pain. Consult a medical professional if pain persists or worsens over time.

Ab set

To do this ab workout start out by lying flat on the floor and then go through the following exercises:

- 10 crunches with legs flat on the floor
- 10 standard crunches
- 10 crunches with legs extended at about a 45° angle from the ground
- 30-second rest
- 10 left oblique crunches
- 10 right oblique crunches
- 10 crunches with your feet planted on the ground
- 30-second rest
- 10 crunches with left foot on right knee
- 10 crunches with right foot on left knee
- 10 reverse crunches (from lying position lift feet slightly off the ground. From here you will use your lower abs to pull your knees toward your chest. From here reverse the steps to end back at the starting position)
- 1-minute rest
- 5 toe touches or v-ups (v-ups will be more challenging but I do recommend doing them after you have been doing this workout for a week or so)
- 5 hip raisers (starting from a toe touch position with your hands by your sides push your legs into the air so that your lower back lifts slightly off the ground then relax back down to the starting position)
- 10 penguin crunches (start by lying down with your feet planted on the ground about shoulder width apart. Using your obliques touch your left heel with your left hand then repeat on your right. One rep is to both sides)
- 10 russian twists (make sure to turn from the sternum)
- 1-minute rest
- At least 20-30 seconds of a cobra stretch to relax your abs after the workout is done

Begin this workout twice a week, and eventually increase to 3-4 times/week. See the **IMPORTANT HEALTH AND SAFETY NOTE** above.

Upper Body Workout

This workout was originally developed by the Santa Clara Vanguard Cymbal Line, arguably the best cymbal line in DCI, many years ago to increase the arm, shoulder, back, core, and chest strength of their members. The reason it is important to develop these muscles is because they are the main muscle groups used in playing cymbals in modern marching music. This workout does ask for cymbals, but if you do not have them you can use anything that you can put in the proper positions and weighs about 5 lbs. The workout is as follows:

- 10 standard pushups
- 1 minute holding cymbals in vert
- 1 minute rest
- 10 close grip pushups (can be diamond pushups if you can do them)
- 1 minute hold in the vert "A" position
- 1 minute rest
- 10 wide grip pushups
- 1 minute hold in the vert "V" position
- 1 minute rest
- 20 standard pushups
- 2 minute hold in flat position

NOTE: In this workout (especially the holds), your arms may shake due to muscle fatigue. If you are experiencing pain not related to short-term muscle fatigue or soreness, stop. Just as in the last workout, you can adjust the number of reps and how long you hold the cymbals as necessary for your personal ability. We recommend doing this workout 2-4 times a week, but start with 2 times per week, including a proper recovery period. Again, use common sense; see the **IMPORTANT HEALTH AND SAFETY NOTE** above.