

Snare Drum Exercises – Essentials

Exercises Every Percussionist Should Know

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Forward and Breakdown by Christian Kilgore

This compilation of snare drum exercises is what I would consider to be the most essential exercises for any snare drummer. Every exercise in this packet focuses on essential skills for playing the instrument and are widely known throughout the percussion community for their success in young percussionists. Knowing these and mastering the techniques they focus on is a great step towards becoming a better percussionist. Note that these can be used in both a marching and concert context. Either way, these exercises can help you develop your technique and approach to the instrument. Below is a short introduction to each exercise and recommended starting tempos.

Eight on a Hand – When playing this exercise, it is important to think about your timing and your technique. If you are playing with a quarter note met, your eighth notes should line up with the met and then be placed directly in between. Make sure not to waiver as you continue to play and switch hands. This is also a great exercise to check your grip and make sure you are not feeling any tension in your hands. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 72 bpm.

Taps / Bucks – To really master this exercise, it is important to take it slow and focus on the different strokes required to play this. Every accent that is followed by a tap should be played with a down stroke, meaning your stick starts high and after striking the drum, it stays close to the head. Additionally, every tap that is followed by an accent should be played with an up stroke, meaning your stick starts low and after striking the drum, it lifts up, ready to play an accent. Being really particular about your heights will make this easier to play and help with your accent/tap definition. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 60 bpm.

16th Note Accent Grid – This exercise focuses on accenting every possible 16th note partial in a beat. In order to achieve the best accent definition, you need to use the same skills required for Bucks (focusing on down and up strokes). As you play this exercise, it is important not to vary in speed and to know the relationship between the accents and the quarter note downbeats. It is also worth noting that every accent on a downbeat or & will be on your right hand, while every accent on the e's and a's will be on the left hand. Recommended starting tempo: eighth note = 92 bpm.

Double Beat – Double Beat is an exercise that starts to introduce us to playing two notes rapidly in one hand. At slower tempos, you should stroke out every note, but as you increase the tempo, you will eventually need to switch to quick doubles. With this exercise, make sure you understand exactly where each note lands in relation to the down beat. A fun challenge could be playing this exercise while tapping the quarter note on the rim with your opposite hand. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 72 bpm.

Three Note Timing – In this exercise, it is important to focus on rhythmic accuracy and what is known as “natural sticking.” Natural Sticking is the idea that, when playing constant 16th notes, we always start on the right hand and alternate. This means that every downbeat and & will be on the right hand and every e and a will be on the left hand. Being consistent in this practice helps our playing sound more consistent and helps performers read rhythms faster. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 72 bpm.

Gallop – Gallop, just like double beat, helps us focus on playing two notes rapidly. At slow tempos, make sure to stroke each note, stay relaxed, and focus on getting the same sound quality out of each stroke. At faster tempos, eventually, you will need to get two notes per stroke which is commonly referred to as a “diddle.” Always focus on good sound quality and making sure the rhythms are always accurate. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 60 bpm.

Chicken and a Roll – This exercise focuses on the same skills as gallop but has an emphasis on a consistent double stroke roll. The double stroke roll is achieved when you play two rapid notes per hand at a consistent tempo. When you play eighth notes in this exercise, you are playing the “check.” When we introduce the diddles, your hands move at the same rate, just with two notes per stroke. Again, focus on playing the rhythms consistently with this new approach. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 60 bpm.

Triplet Roll – Triplet Roll is similar to Chicken and a Roll but now with a triplet feel. Since there are now three notes per beat and three is an odd number, downbeats will alternate between your right hand and your left. Feeling the shifting between hands is essential for any triplet-based rhythm or exercise. The slash through a note indicates a diddle. For the latter four measures, accents appear on some downbeats. Note that the downbeat is not diddled. It is important to play these rhythms with strict meter and not to slur the phrase. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 72 bpm.

Paradiddle Breakdown – The goal of the paradiddle breakdown is to understand every part of a paradiddle and slowly build it together. The paradiddle consists of two single strokes and then a diddle. The pattern is then repeated off the opposite hand. The check in measures 1, 3, and 5 uses similar skills as Bucks. Throughout the exercise, we add notes into this check, yet the check remains constant. Four paradiddles in a row can be seen in m. 6. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 60 bpm.

Paradiddle-diddle Breakdown – The paradiddle-diddle breakdown helps us understand every part of this rudiment and build it together similarly to the last exercise. The first four notes of a paradiddle-diddle are the same as a right-handed paradiddle and then we add an extra diddle in the left hand. The check in measures 1, 3, 5, and 7 uses similar skills as measure 4 of the previous exercise. Just like the previous exercise, we add notes into the check, yet the check remains constant. Four paradiddle-diddles in a row can be seen in m. 8. Watch out for the time signature! Recommended starting tempo: dotted quarter note = 50 bpm.

Gallop Repeat 2 times

r r l r r l r r l r r l r l l r l l r l l r l l r r l r r l r l l r l l

Repeat 2 times

r r l r l l r r l r l l r r l l r r l l r r l l r r l l r

Chicken and a Roll Repeat 2 times

r l r l r r l l r r l l r l r l r r l l r r l l r l r l r l r l r l l r

Triplet Roll

r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l r l

R l r l r l R l r l r l R l r l r l R l r l r l

R l r l r l r l r l r l R l r l r l r l r l r l R

Paradiddle Breakdown

R r L l R r L l R l r L r l R l r L r l R r L l R r L l

R r r L l l R r r L l l R r L l R r L l R l r r L r l l R

Paradiddle-diddle Breakdown

R r r R r r R r r R r r R l r r R l r r R l r r R l r r R r r R r r R r r

R r r l l R r r l l R r r l l R r r l l R r r R r r R r r R l r r l R l r r l R l r r l R l r r l

R r r R r r R r r R r r R l r r l l R l r r l l R l r r l l R