

# Marching Percussion Basics

by Eric Willie

What is the current state of marching percussion?

1. Traditional fall marching bands.
2. Drum Corps International
3. Winter Guard International
4. Percussive Arts Society

## **Battery Percussion/Drum Line Essentials**

### I. Size of the Drum Line

The number of players in your wind section will determine the number of percussionists you will need on the field. Below is a list to help guide you in selecting personnel for each of the instruments.

S.D.	3	S.D.	5	S.D.	8/9
Tenor	2	Tenor	3	Tenor	4/5
Basses	3-4	Basses	4-5	Basses	4/5
Cymbals	2	Cymbals	3-4	Cymbals	4-8

### II. Size of drums

Below is a recommended list of drum sizes needed for the battery section.

Snare Drums: 14"

Tenor Drums: 1) 6", 10", 12", 13", 14" (Recommended)

2) 6", 8", 10", 12", 13"

You may choose to have four drums (Either 10", 12", 13", 14" or 8", 10", 12", 13") or may have six drums (Either 6", 6", 10", 12", 13", 14" or 6", 6", 8", 10", 12", 13").

Bass Drums: 3 Players – 18", 24", 28"

4 Players – 18", 22", 24", 28"

5 Players – 18", 22", 26", 28", 30"

Cymbals: You may choose to have all of the cymbals the same size or have them varied. If they are the same size, I would recommend purchasing 18", if different I would recommend purchasing in 2-inch increments (E.g. Three Players – 16", 18", 22", Four Players – 16", 18", 18", 20", etc.).

### III. Steps to Making a Great-Sounding Battery Percussion Section

1. Rehearsal Etiquette

If the marching percussion section has discipline, so will the rest of the ensemble. Establish rehearsal etiquette before playing.

2. Marking Time

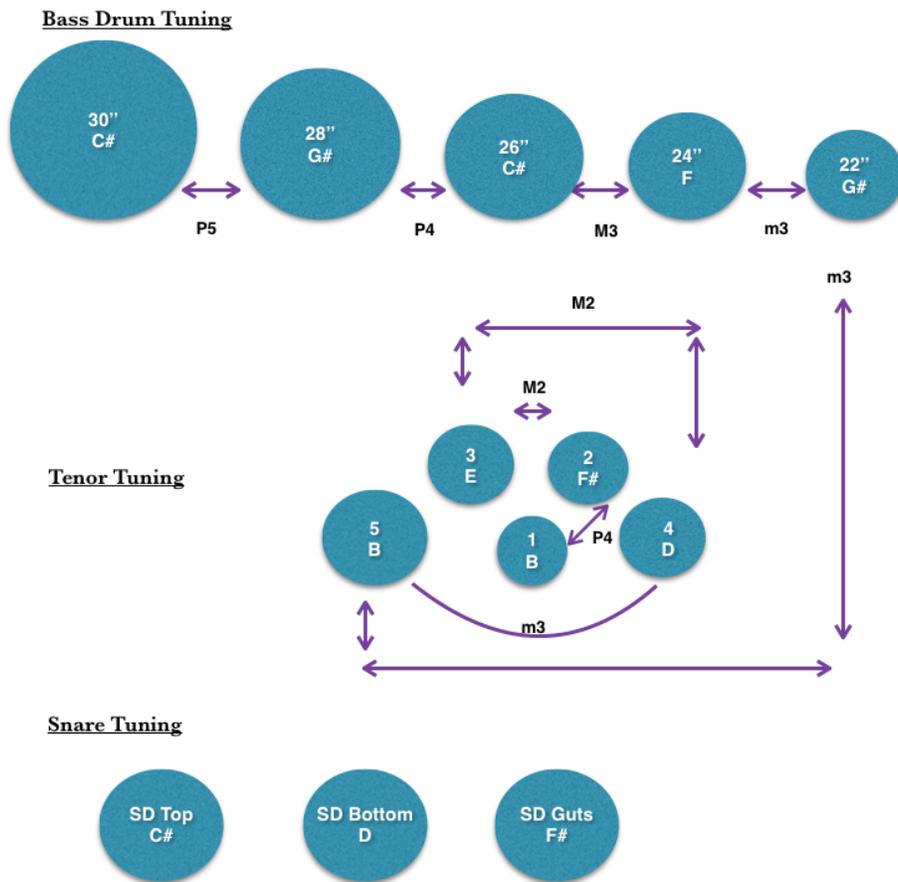
The battery must be able to march well to play well. When practicing exercises or music, the battery must move their feet in time.

3. Have a consistent, logical warm-up/exercise routine

To develop uniform technique, dexterity, and hand strength, the battery must have a set routine that they follow each practice session. In addition, establish exercises that will assist in other areas of percussion (orchestral snare drum, drum set, etc.).

4. Have a defined dynamic system.  
 For easier definition of dynamics from player to player, it is most logical to develop a stick height system that directly relates to given dynamics. Not only will this assist with balance, but will also help with attaining stick height uniformity. The following is a stick height/dynamic system example:  

<i>pp</i> - 1in. on edge	<i>mf</i> - 6in.	<i>fff</i> - 15in. w/Arm
<i>p</i> - 1in.	<i>f</i> - 9in.	
<i>♩</i> - 3in.	<i>ff</i> - 12in.	
5. Work to develop strong listening skills.  
 Each section must have a strong player to which whom the other players must match. Also, it is important for the players to develop the listening skills necessary to play cleanly.
6. Work to achieve a uniform technique and sound.  
 The student's technique should carry over from concert technique and be reinforced through the exercise routine
7. Have a consistent tuning scheme throughout the battery section.



#### IV. Understanding Proper Marching Percussion Technique

1. Marching Basics  
During initial rehearsals, the battery should be a part of the full-band marching rehearsals to learn set position, carriage, as well as forward and backward marching styles.
2. The “Crab” Step  
-If moving in a horizontal position, the opposite foot goes in front.  
-If moving backward at an angle, the front foot will be determined by the direction. For example, if I am moving backward and to the right, my right foot will be forward.
3. Posture  
Shoulders and arms remain relaxed while marching, to ensure proper playing.

#### V. Some general rules for drill design including marching percussion.

1. Avoid long, straight lines or diagonals.
2. Coordinate battery voices to wind voices.
3. Consider the battery’s role in the music when doing visual design. Are they being used only for pulse? Are they featured in this moment? Is this a section solo?
4. Having successful, musical, drill design to ensure continuity from phrase to phrase.
5. Highlight your assets.

#### VI. Web Sites for further information:

1. Drum Corps International ([www.dci.org](http://www.dci.org))
2. Winter Guard International ([www.wgi.org](http://www.wgi.org))
3. Percussive Arts Society ([www.pas.org](http://www.pas.org))
4. Pearl/Adams Percussion Educational Media (<http://pearldrum.com/media/education/>)
5. Bill Bachman’s Technique Web Site (<http://www.drumworkout.com>)
6. Vic Firth Marching Percussion Features Web Site ([www.vicfirth.com/features/#](http://www.vicfirth.com/features/#))
7. Steve Weiss Music ([www.steveweissmusic.com](http://www.steveweissmusic.com)) to order instruments and hardware.
8. Drum Corps Planet ([www.drumcorpsplanet.com](http://www.drumcorpsplanet.com))
9. Scott Johnson, Blue Devils Percussion Percussion Arranger ([www.scojopercussion.com](http://www.scojopercussion.com))
10. Shane Gwaltney, Music City Mystique Percussion Arranger ([www.shanegwaltney.com](http://www.shanegwaltney.com))

If you have any additional questions, feel free to e-mail me at [ejwillie@uncg.edu](mailto:ejwillie@uncg.edu), or visit [www.ericwilliepercussion.com](http://www.ericwilliepercussion.com).