DRUM MAJOR CONDUCTING HELP

Practice Techniques

These are some easy practice techniques which help with conducting form. Included are also some tips, tricks, hints and interesting points of note to help the beginning conductor.

Downbeats

To refine arm movement and make sure you are correctly hitting the focal point, tape some paper to a wall. Hold a pen in each hand and stand before the wall. Move your arms as if you were conducting the down beat. Try to keep the strokes in relatively the same place and all hitting the focal point. To find your focal point, stand in front of a table with a height approximately where your focal point would be. Mark Xs on the table where your finger tips should hit. Conduct in front of the table and try to tap the Xs briefly every down beat. (Substitute the table with a friend's open palms if your can't find a good table). *Helpful Hint* Think of the focal point as a hot-plate. It's hot so you only want to touch it briefly. Flick the focal point quickly, avoid slapping it. To get the flicking motion down, get a big rubber band and loop it around your middle finger. Pull the band back to your elbow and conduct down beats with one hand. Feel the rubber band pulling your finger back as you flick downwards. Try to remember this feeling and copy it without the rubber band. To check whether your hands move in towards your chest, stand in front of a mirror in the starting position. Have someone mark on the mirror (with post-it notes or tape) the edge of your chest starting from under your armpits. Next conduct downbeats in front of the marked mirror, trying to keep your hands from crossing the marked line. *Helpful hint* When conducting, think 'down'. Often one can begin to emphasize up as the beat. Severe emphasis on the up beat turns into hitches, or little accents at the top of the patterns. Thinking 'down' helps to eliminate this. Raise your arms, but focus on them dropping to the focal point.

Conducting two

*Helpful Hint* At the end of beat one, the hands and arms should remain in front of the body, not way out to the sides on a plane with the body. Be mindful that on the swing up, the hands stay out and do not come back in. (Quick check: at the end of beat one, if your hands are anywhere closer to your body than your elbows are, your hands came in.) Be mindful of spreading your hands too far apart in the 'out' part of the pattern. If your throw your hands way out, you will rush to bring them in again, and the beat will not be consistent. *Interesting note* Most marches are conducted in two. Why? Well, you have two feet right? Some songs in four can be conducted in two. Since four can be divided into two, marching bands can play songs in four even though normal band members have two feet.
Conducting three

A further step-by-step explanation:
Down: bring arms down, hit focal point, go back up.
Out: bring arms down hit focal point, go out.
Up: bring arms down and in, hit focal point, go straight up.
*Tip* the ‘Star Spangled Banner’, the national anthem of the United States, is conducted in three, NOT in four, a common mistake.
*Interesting note* Waltzes are also conducted in three.

Conducting four

Down: bring arms down, hit focal point, go back up.
Down: bring arms down, hit focal point, go back up.
Out: bring arms down hit focal point, go out.
Up: bring arms down and in, hit focal point, go straight up.
This is a great teaching pattern since much music is in four and since it can be broken down into the three, two and one patterns very easily. The basic four pattern works with a variety of patterns, making it the best pattern for conducting a tempo change or for recovery when the band falls apart.

Fast tempo
Remember, the fast tempo pattern is the same but much smaller to accommodate the lack of time. Keep the upper arm relatively still; the elbow replaces the shoulder as a pivot point, so try to eliminate extra motion in the shoulder and upper arms to conserve energy and keep a consistent beat. Conduct with the forearms. Any extra movements in the arms must be with the hands to keep the beat clear. Conducting with small relaxed patterns conserves energy and prevents much frustration. Remember: The key to conducting a tempo change is the rebound.

Slow pattern
In a slow pattern, most of the arm movement is from the shoulder. Make sure you have a straight, even rebound on beat one, to maintain tempo consistency. Slow patterns are bigger than fast tempo patterns.

Basic Patterns
Four Rules of Conducting
1. all beats are downbeats
2. all beats rebound
3. all beats strike the same focal point/focal plane (depending on style)
4. the size of the pattern is dependent on tempo
Somewhere between the belly button and upper chest should be designated the student's focal plane. For beginning conducting purposes, this is where all beats will hit and rebound. The point at which each beat hits the plane is called the focal point or ictus.

**Learning process for starting position:**
1. Fold hands back to elbow, then elbow back to shoulder.
2. Fold out, turn hands over, slightly extend and push out elbows. This is starting position.
3. Establish each student's focal plane (which looks best on them). Our primary objective in the beginning is to establish a clear, smooth, and consistent wrist flick.

**Learning process for wrist flick:**
1. Finger tips up, then flat, repeat. DO NOT let them move anything but the wrist
2. Level/Up exercise (start slow and steady, then progress to sixteenth/dotted eighth rhythm)
3. Progress to adding a little more lower arm, then slightly move the elbow. * Maintain good poise and arm position.
4. Add slight upper arm

**What are we looking for?**
1. Solid poise and carriage
2. Conventional foot/body position
3. Accurate placement of focal place
4. Consistent striking of ictus on the focal place
5. Good wrist flick - fingertips stay level or above - stay away from "petting the kitty"
6. Good follow through on rebounds
7. Minimal, but sufficient use of lower and upper arms

**Preparatory Beats**
always happens one beat before music starts (unless otherwise called for by musical or director needs) can give w/ prep:
tempo
dynamic
style
breath
(cue)
Never conduct 2 prep beats - this is called a double prep which can very easily confuse band members as to where the entrance is.
Example: Star Spangled Banner: conducting beats 1 and 2 before the pick-up on 3. Double preps are not only full size beats but little, hesitant beats before the actual prep as well. This is a bad habit to get into, avoid by all means.

**Cutoffs**
1. decide what beat the cutoff is on
2. count back 2 beats
3. down circle off starting two beats behind anytime you cutoff on 2 in any meter, eliminate the down beat circle through rebound
Example: Star Spangled Banner uses 2 types of cutoffs
1. Scoop-hold
2. Down-flip hold (hold on 2, down-flip on 1)

Key Things to Remember: rebounds bigger on slow tempo don't sweep rebound with fingertips always practice with mirror and metronome always follow through so you can move onto next beats, OR, follow through at the end of a release (dictates resonant sound)

Style
Dictating style is one of the most important things you can do with you conducting (behind tempo).

articulation - the way in which notes are begun and how they are performed
Marcatto marked and accented, hot focal point
Legato smooth and connected, brush by focal point, moving slow & smooth
Stacatto light and bouncy (short), hot focal point, light top

Key Things to Remember Don't over-do it. Only do what requires the correct response from the group and remain consistent use box patterns for really fast tempos Cues and Dynamics
The purpose of a cue is to provide visual communication between the conductor and the band that will signal a certain section (or individual) to play any specific entrance. A strong cue from the DM is usually very helpful in allowing the musicians to perform their entrances with total confidence.

Ways give cues (prior to the entrance):
establish eye contact with people involves
simple nod or hand gesture (or you may choose to give stronger signal depending on the music)
Example: Drop the left hand to the side prior to the entrance and leave it there while you continue conducting the pattern with the right hand. One count before the cue, the left hand rebounds with the right to conduct the appropriate beat in the direction of the section being cued. This must be combined with necessary eye contact. Give a strong downbeat on the beat in which the syncope happens, let instrumentalist subdivide themselves.

Size variation and pattern
softer the music, smaller the pattern and visa versa very big pattern, drop 2 with the left hand

pattern variations with dynamics
dynamics with left hand
facial expressions
size of pattern and prep beat
practice by: left hand only, left hand snapping with right, left hand patting with right, left hand down beats with right,
Hand Positions and Facial Expressions
Hand positions can be used to express many musical ideas. As human beings, our facial expressions tell a lot, use this to your advantage to reflect the music.

Key Things to Remember: communication is the 1st key to directing cues and dynamics DO WHAT WORKS!!!

Pattern Variations
1. down in reverse around up use on accent of 3
2. down over out up use in legato passages
3. triangle three
4. double triangle
Key Things to Remember: watch as many other conductors as possible, be concerned with basic patterns first, experiment with other styles only when in firm control of the basics

Score Study
1. instrumentation--who was it written for
2. title--sets theme
3. helps to know background of music and composer
4. style, have music dictionary to use with score
5. tempo--ALWAYS have metronome
6. aural image--how do you think it should sound?
7. meter and meter changes
8. key signature
Key Things to Remember: use the highlighted/color-coding system to mark entrances, cues, dynamics, etc.
don't focus on one solo instrument
who plays the melody?
countermeology?
who is doubling parts?
mark articulations and styles
look for complicated rhythms and know how to count/sing them
mark tempo/meter changes

Meter
pulse - the main subdivision within each measure of music that would determine what beat pattern to use when conducting
2/4 = 2 Beats = 2 Pulses
3/4 = 3 Beats = 3 Pulses
4/4 = 4 Beats = 4 Pulses
6/8 = 6 Beats = 2 Pulses
9/8 = 9 Beats = 3 Pulses
3/8 = 3 Beats = 1 Pulse

**Simple subdivision** - a beat that can divided into two equal parts: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4

**Compound subdivision** - a beat that can be divided into 3 equal parts: 3/8, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8

Examples: Song, # of Pulses, Subdivision, Time Signature, Beat Pattern
Star Spangled Banner, 3, Simple, ¾, 3
Pop Goes the Weasel, 2, Compound, 6/8, 2,
Good King Wenceslas, 4, Simple, 4/4, 4,

**Asymmetric Meter** - uneven meter; one pulse is simple, the other is compound
Examples: 5/8 (2+3 or 3+2) 7/8 (2+2+3, 3+2+2, 2+3+2)

**Tempo**

You must control the tempo and lead the tempo, you cannot follow the band.

*How do you deal with a tempo problem?*

DO NOT PANIC
Resort to the most basic patterns and emphasize beat one
Make sure you and the percussion section get on the same page quickly.

*How to use and what to use the metronome for:*

determine exact metronome marking for each piece of music
write down the desired tempo changes and memorize them
practice singing and conducting tempo's with and without a metronome between rehearsals
repeat this again and again until you are perfect
During rehearsal, use metronome to check the tempo before starting each tune think about
using a PA system or long ranger behind percussion section.

**Sound Delay:** The speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. Generally speaking,
people outside the 35 yard lines and behind the front/back hash should watch the conductor.
Everyone else inside, should listen back for time, particularly the pit ensemble.

To start the ensemble:

**Vocal Command or Visual Command?**

Use both standing in front, listen for jam block in the back of the field.
One of the most important things you can do as a drum major is to spend time rehearsing the
with the percussion section, and KNOWING the percussion parts. It also may be helpful to
watch the feet of the section (center snare) in case tempo fluxes were to occur. If they start to
speed up or slow down, it may be necessary to go with them to avoid falling apart.

**Key Things to Remember:**

Insist on the tempo you want in rehearsal
Be Aware of everything happening on the field
Listen and Watch for potential problems
Do not suddenly deviate in tempo unless called for in music always have a metronome with
you, AT ALL TIMES. know the drum book!