



**Texas Bandmasters Association  
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**From the Podium to Percussion-Tips for  
the Non Percussionist Band Director**

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# ***From the Podium to Percussion - Tips for the Non-Percussionist Band Director***

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention  
By Miles Locke and Andrew Smit  
Clinic: July 20, 2023 | 11:00 AM | Room CC 207

*This is not a “Percussion Methods” course review. Instead, this clinic is designed to give insight, tips, and perspective to the non-percussionist band director on how to confidently take ownership of your percussion section. Understand the root causes of some common misconceptions or issues with concert percussionists and build upon your already established band directing skills to address them properly*

Part 1: Have a Plan for Involvement

Part 2: Have a Sound In Your Head of What You Want to Hear

Part 3: Elevate and Take Ownership of Your Percussion Section Through Action

Part 4: Resources/Conclusion

## **Part 1: HAVE A PLAN FOR INVOLVEMENT**

### LOGISTICS

- Instrument placement within the ensemble
  - Place “cutting” instruments towards the center
  - Place “non-cutting” instruments towards the edges
  - Place timpani near tubas/low voices
- What gets packed up after daily rehearsal vs. what stays out?
  - Have expectations for your percussionists. Communicate that plan and **hold them accountable** from day 1. Must be taught and consistently reinforced.
- Give them TIME to put away at the end of rehearsal. Account for that time in your lesson plan.

### Daily Drill

- What are your percussionists doing during daily drill? Do they know what they should be doing?
- Percussion involvement can (and probably should) look different from program to program.
- If you don't know what to do, here are some options:
  - Use warm up time as set up time
  - Percussion has written parts that align with winds
  - Percussion plays on various instruments to provide “time” for the band
  - Percussion has pad warm-ups that align with daily drill, but focus on percussion-specific techniques

## UNDERSTAND THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES THAT PERCUSSIONISTS FACE

### Internal Challenges

- A percussionist is a soloist almost exclusively
- The majority of the foundational year is played on “fake instruments” like gum-rubber pads and small glockenspiels. There is also a tendency to practice on these instruments.
- The vast amount of instruments they are expected to know how to play; all similar in technique, yet all unique in their own way in regards to technique and the implements used to play them

### External Challenges

- The variety of implements needed to play all the instruments
- They rarely feel their instrument
- Playing multiple instruments (often within the same piece)
- Following a conductor
- Were percussionists actually taught pitch and octave?
- Inconsistencies in notation

### Inconsistencies in Notation

- Notation is not standardized (mostly)
- Suspended Cymbal Rolls\*\*
  - When does the roll start? When does the roll end? What dynamic does it start at? What dynamic should it end at? What is the shape of the crescendo? What does the release look like on paper?

*Example of notation inconsistencies using a suspended cymbal roll:*

The image shows six examples of suspended cymbal roll notation on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Each example is accompanied by a numbered list of observations:

1. No starting dynamic
2. Weird starting spot and not a lot of time to crescendo all the way to forte
3. A short rhythm release (usually reserved for choked releases), but “l.v.” special text to let it ring
4. Half-note release with no dynamic context
5. Short-rhythm release with staccato marking (choke?)
6. A “Normal” looking SusCym roll, but with a relatively loud starting dynamic

## LESSON PLANNING

- **Ensure that your percussionists get reps on their music**
  - Especially if percussion frequently rehearses on their own, prioritize percussion when they are with the full group.
  - Remember that percussionists are essentially soloists and they need reps with the full group to make sense of their part and the winds need reps with them to understand what is happening musically
  - Remember full band rehearsal may be the only time they play on “the real” instruments (actual snare drums and keyboards that will be used in concerts). They need reps to get the feel and sound of those instruments.
- **Transparency with your students on what to expect**
  - Make sure students know what music is being rehearsed each day.
  - Knowing exactly what music to expect helps with the setup and logistics.
  - “Give respect to get respect.” Clearly communicating and following through with rehearsal goals is a great way to gain respect from your percussionists.

## Part 2: HAVE A SOUND IN YOUR HEAD OF WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR

## SCORE STUDYING

### Memorize textures/orchestrations so you know what to expect

- Ask questions about how you want orchestrations and textures to sound
- Listen/watch recordings of percussion ensembles
  - Train your ears and discover what is possible in the modern day concert percussion section
  - Make notes of sound possibilities to experiment with your own ensemble

### Build a firmer understanding of the natural projection of sound for each instrument

- “Written dynamics” vs “Sounding Dynamics”
- Composer intent vs Conductor preference
- Adjusting to the performance venue

<p><b>“Cutting” Instruments</b> <i>(these instruments tend to cut through the winds’ sound with little to no effort)</i></p>	<p>All Cymbals (especially China &amp; Crash) Metals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brake Drum</li> <li>● Triangle</li> <li>● Finger Cymbals</li> </ul> <p>Xylophone Claves (especially fiberglass) Tambourine</p>
<p><b>“Wildcard Instruments”</b> <i>(these instruments can cut or blend depending on the instrument, implement being used, and performance venue)</i></p>	<p>Snare Drum Glockenspiel Bass Drum Wood Blocks (depends on quality/implement) Tam Tam Most Accessories</p>
<p><b>“Non-Cutting” Instruments</b> <i>(these instruments naturally tend to be covered up by the winds)</i></p>	<p>Marimba Vibraphone Chimes (cuts but doesn’t project) Low notes on Timpani</p>

## IMPLEMENTS - STICKS/MALLETS

**The Golden Rule:** Implements do not affect dynamics; Playing does.

- Implements primarily affect timbre
- One can play soft with a “hard” implement and loud with a “soft” implement

**The go-to should be to address HOW they are playing and not WHAT they are playing with**

- Have a common sense approach to this
- Give player the benefit of the doubt
- If they have the proper implement, start with the approach towards the instrument and don't change the implement right off the bat
- After trial and error, experiment with implement changes

## ADD/CHANGE/EDIT/DELETE

**HOT TAKE: You should be OK with (to an extent) changing, adding, or removing parts to better serve your ensemble**

- Many composers are not percussionists. So, they do not always have the best way of describing what or how to achieve the sound they have in their head. It is OK to add, change, or remove parts as long as it is done to better serve the ensemble's performance.
  - Add a SusCym roll at end of phrase
  - Play Cabasa instead of shaker
  - Add a timpani part to the march
  - Double the glock part on Vibes
  - etc.

## **Part 3: ELEVATE YOUR PERCUSSION SECTION THROUGH ACTION**

### USE YOUR MUSICIAN EARS AND SPEAK TO THEM LIKE MUSICIANS

**Vocabulary shouldn't be different when talking to percussion**

- Use musical terminology such as “legato, staccato, marcato, etc.”
- Avoid hyperbole like “Louder! Hit it so hard it breaks” or similar phrases that you would never say to a non-percussionist in regards to their instrument

**Percussionists also need to learn how to translate information from a wind perspective to apply it to their own instrument**

- Articulation
- Note length and note shape

DO YOU ACTUALLY HEAR IT? (Be honest with yourself. It's OK to say no!)

**If you hear something, SAY SOMETHING!**

*Examples:*

- Timpani ringing holding over after a release
- Timpani out of tune (c'mon y'all !)
- Tambourine being picked up (inadvertent sound)
- Speed of the triangle roll
- Individual strokes in a snare's buzz roll

*\*\*This all ties back to having a sound in your head to start. Know what to expect beforehand so you know where to guide them\*\**

**Don't wait for or fully rely on your percussion director to address it**

- Your percussionists need to know how to take information from the conductor and not exclusively from their percussion director
- Learned Helplessness/Weaponized Incompetence/Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of never addressing your knowledge gaps because "that's what we have a percussion director for"

**If you DON'T hear something, or don't know what to listen for**

- Bring in another set of ears dedicated to percussion.
  - Ask your assistant to focus their attention on percussion and give notes after the rehearsal.
  - If your budget allows, bring in a clinician for your percussionists
  - Make recordings and listen more intently to percussion after-the-fact
  - Send recordings to colleagues or clinicians for feedback

**TEACH A PERCUSSION SECTIONAL**

**You (not your percussion director) should teach a percussion sectional**

- You are going to hear things you've never heard in the full ensemble setting
- You may notice things in your score that you never noticed before
- You can address nuances and fine-tune balance/listening responsibilities
- Your percussionists learn to take information from you more
- Your percussionists get more practice watching and following your conducting

**It is totally understandable to fully delegate your sectional teaching to your percussion director. However, SO many immediate benefits come from you teaching it yourself**

- One recommended option is that both are present so the percussion specialist can jump in and provide hyper-specific feedback and/or help "translate," yet the real benefit comes from the YOU leading the sectional.

GET CURIOUS!

**The best thing you can do is EXPLORE**

- Don't be afraid to jump in
- If you get into a scenario where you do not find a solution that works, that is where the real learning is!
- Reach out to a percussion specialist and get context to your issue and try out their suggestions

**You have help!**

- Percussionists LOVE talking shop and helping people understand our instrument better
- Utilize all resources at your disposal

<b>Part 4 RESOURCES/CONCLUSION</b>
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RESOURCES

- [Percussive Arts Society](#)
  - PASIC
  - Percussive Notes Magazine
  - Group Membership (access to Archives)
  - Texas PAS Chapter
  - PAS Day of Percussion
- Facebook Groups
  - [Percussion Solutions for Band Directors](#)
  - [Texas PAS Chapter](#)
- Method Books
  - John Bingaman's [Firm Foundations for the Beginning Percussionist](#)
  - Kennan Wylie's [Simple Steps to Successful Beginning Percussion](#)
  - Mark Wessel's A Fresh Approach to the [Snare Drum](#) (and) [Mallet Percussion](#)
- High-Quality Publishing Companies
  - [Tapspace](#), [C. Alan](#), a few self-publishers
- Percussion Directors in the area
- YouTube Channels of Percussion Companies
  - [Vic Firth](#), [Black Swamp](#), etc.

CONCLUSION

**Take ownership of your percussion section!**

- Have a plan to involve your percussion section
- Have a sound in your head of what you want to hear
- Take action!

## SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES



Scan the QR code or go to [tinyurl.com/49s5ed6e](https://tinyurl.com/49s5ed6e) to access the following:

- **PDF of this clinic's handout**
- **Percussion Instrument Projection Chart**
- **“Does This Mallet Work?” Chart**
- **Keyboard Ranges**
  - Has diagrams for each instrument with highlighted middle C to help students play in correct octave
- **Timpani Cover Printouts**
  - Has ranges for each drum as well as important tips for students to remember
  - Print and put on each timpani cover
- **Quick Reference Guide**

Andrew Smit's website: [www.andrewsmitmusic.com/](http://www.andrewsmitmusic.com/)

Miles Locke's website: [www.mileslocke.com/](http://www.mileslocke.com/)