

Howard High School Basic Strokes

At Howard High School we use four different strokes to approach a drum:

- Legato stroke (full)
- Staccato stroke (down)
- Up stroke (rebound)
- Tap stroke (inner beats)

1. Legato (full strokes): starts high, ends high

- Think “16 on a hand”
- Sticks start and stop at the same point, letting the stick “bounce” back naturally
- Goal is to allow the rebound to “do the work”
- Rebound should be the same speed as the initial movement (Don’t stop it!)
- Avoid letting the stick *hit* the back of the hand (which stops the motion), but all fingers should remain on the stick throughout the duration of the stroke
- Apply all **Key Points** below

2. Staccato (down strokes): starts high, ends low

- Think “accent tap”
- Should **sound the same** as Legato strokes, and **feel the same prior to hitting the drum**
- Once contact is made with the drum, the difference between Legato and Staccato strokes is the stopping of the wrist motion, which prevents the stick from rebounding to the initial height. Do this by using the weight of your hand.
- Avoid squeezing the fingers to stop the motion
- Apply all **Key Points** below

3. Up strokes (rebound stroke): starts low, ends high

- Think “tap accent”
- Stick has played inner beat height and immediately needs to rebound to accent height
- Rebound from the drumhead is essential
- Apply all **Key Points** below

4. Tap strokes (inner beats): starts low, ends low

- Legato (full) strokes at an inner beat height but with slightly less dependence on rebound
- Goal is to provide full sound within less height
- Avoid letting the stick simply fall into the drumhead. This will cause a very soft

Accurate use of the four types of strokes assures visual uniformity and prevents wasted motion. In fact, each stroke is a preparation for the next stroke. For example, two paradiddles would be executed as follows: down, up, tap, tap, down, up, tap, tap.

Key Points

1. With the exception of the starting point, the strokes are identical until the point of contact with the drum. A Legato stroke rebounds off the drumhead to the next desired height. A Staccato stroke uses the weight of the hand to stop its rebound from coming up past playing position.
2. Always lead the stroke from the head of the stick
3. Match gripped hands should be more of a hinge motion. Rest your arm on a table and knock on it without picking up your arm; this is the primary motion of the wrist.
4. The main focus for both hands is a wrist turn, but allow the wrist, fingers, and arms to work together to create a full/relaxed sound
5. When playing, the weight of the stick generally sits in the middle of the hands (Between the middle and ring fingers).

**NOTE* Having the weight/rotation points further back in the hand (Rather than the front finger fulcrums) enables us to achieve a fuller sound while focusing on the proper wrist rotation*

6. Minimize the amount of “human interference” (Allow each stroke to be as efficient as possible)
7. If the stick is held tightly, the natural vibrations and resonance of the stick are “choked off,” resulting in a very thin quality of sound.
8. Consequently, the shock of an improper stroke into the drum will be transferred directly into the player’s hands and forearms, potentially resulting in unnecessary injury.

General “Feel” as You Drum

- Relaxed
- Strong
- Confident
- Let the sticks feel “heavy” inside your hands (Let the weight of the hand do the work)
- The stronger a player you are, the more “chops” you possess, the more efficient you become, hence the more relaxed you are
- Learning to breathe naturally while playing anything regardless of its difficulty will result in a more relaxed, healthy sound and approach
- If in doubt, listen to what you are playing critically in order to correct issues