

Innovative Percussion[®] Inc.

The Multi-Part Technique Program
For the High School Ensemble

David England

The Multi-Part Technique Program

For the High School Front Ensemble

Every summer you look forward to the fresh start that begins with your high school front ensemble. There are new faces, new hopes, new enthusiasm, and *new abilities*. You sit down to develop a technique program and find yourself asking the question, “How do I write exercises that will warm them up, maintenance their technique, advance their skills and meet *all* of their individual ability levels?” It’s difficult to come up with a series of exercises that will address all of those things at once. You will almost certainly bore your advanced students if it’s too easy or get your new guys in over their heads if it’s too hard. The challenge of developing various ability levels within a group setting is a common problem for high school instructors. Yet one of the greatest rewards is seeing the students develop their abilities to new levels each year. So, is it possible to create a technique program that will take everyone progressively to the next level and develop basic, intermediate and advanced skills at once? Yes. The solution is the multi-part technique program. Multi-part writing is an efficient and educational way to get your players where they need to be without skipping steps to get there.

How it works

This is not a new idea. As a band director I have a couple of different method books that use this idea for developing wind players. I’ve found that it works well for percussionists too. Basically the system is made up of several different parts, each with a different function and purpose, and all of which can be performed together. The following describes how each part functions and how to create each part. Be sure to check out the written example “Eights” as we go through the process.

Mallet 1

To create this part, take a basic skill, such as the legato stroke as shown in the example, and write a basic part. It shouldn’t be hard and it should focus on *one skill*. *Everyone* should be able to play this part.

Mallet 2

Add a second part that combines the basic skill with intermediate to advanced skills such as stickings, double strokes, and/or fluid movement around the instrument.

Mallet 3

You can add this part whenever applicable. This part should address an advanced skill, such as four mallet permutations, or it can be used to emulate a show part that requires a certain skill or pattern. In the example “Eights”, both concepts are used.

Timpani

The timpani part, like the mallets, starts with basic skills. At first there are a few drum changes and sticking patterns, but no tuning changes. These parts should be written for the *ability of the player*. They should increase in difficulty and develop new skills throughout the technique program. For example, the timpani parts at the end of the technique program will have frequent tuning and drum changes and more complex rhythms.

Snare Drum

This part has two functions. First, *everyone in the ensemble should learn this part*. They should play it together with sticks and pads. Basic two height drumming skills, double strokes, paradiddle and roll patterns are extremely helpful in developing the kind of chops we want our mallet players to have. Not to mention the fact that it makes them a well-rounded percussionist. Secondly, *the students that are assigned to the accessory or percussion parts will play the Snare Drum part during technique development*. This will make them more proficient at the parts they are actually playing. These students should also develop basic mallet skills by playing Mallet 1 parts whenever possible. Snare Drum parts should increase in difficulty and develop new skills as you go through the technique program.

Additional Parts

Parts should also be written for specific accessories and world percussion instruments. This allows students to develop the much needed skills in those areas. We have used conga parts, shaker, and Djembe parts during certain exercises to improve good technique for the show parts. Also, if you have a keyboard, bass guitar, or other rhythm section instruments, make sure to incorporate them into the technique program as well. You can make their parts similar to what is being played by everyone else or develop a rhythm section-type part for them to play. You can get real creative with this and it makes it really fun to play, *and* to hear!

Adapting Your Current Exercises

If you already have a series of exercises arranged it is very simple to adapt them to the multi-part system. To create easier parts like a Mallet 1 part, you can take your standard part and slow it down metrically, or use every other note, or augment the part in some way. Basically, “water it down.” To create more complex parts you can arrange a new part that follows the key or chord progression of your exercise. Then incorporate the various technical aspects you want to focus on during the exercise. This is how I came up with the Mallet 2 part in “Eights.” It is based on the major arpeggio for the key and then I added a sticking and melodic pattern to give focus to the technical aspect of double rights/lefts and fluidity of movement up and down the instrument. This part was also easily adaptable to four mallets with a couple of minor variations.

Benefits

Many benefits accompany the multi-part approach. As far as variety goes, you will never run out of options! As you would with any basic exercises, you can modulate keys, change sticking patterns, change four mallet intervals and permutations, or add dynamics and shaping. But, because all of the parts can be played together, you can also switch back and forth between portions of Mallet 1 and portions Mallet 2 for a “new” exercise or run Mallet 1 and Mallet 2 together for an extended exercise. It’s also possible for half of the students to play the snare drum part while the others play mallets. Multi-parts

give you variety in rehearsing as well. You can work on balance among the different parts, check your players’ sound quality and timing against similar parts, or isolate players by parts so you can focus on individual skills. The more options you have the more your players can learn. Each variation will also help advance new skills. The best part about this approach is that it is very motivating. It eliminates a lot of fear and discouragement from your underclassmen! *No one is ever forced to play a part that is above their ability* and they are given room to grow. It’s great when a student advances from a basic part to a more advanced part and when *all* the mallet players can suddenly play basic snare parts technically correct. The basic part options are easy enough that even the freshman who can’t find a “C” can build confidence performing them! And the options for advanced parts and techniques will keep your better players working hard and keep them from getting bored (and upset) while waiting for others to “get the part”.

Conclusion

Multi-part writing for your technique program is a simple way to make good use of the time that goes into your marching percussion rehearsals. It’s an easy way to make your technique program more versatile and fun than a stock “6,3,2,1” exercise. It’s very educational and you’ll be developing everyone’s abilities right where they need it. This way you *and* your students can be happy with doing technique! And you can look forward to your new start this year more than ever before! Best wishes!

David England is in his 13th year as the percussion arranger and program coordinator for the Father Ryan High School Percussion Section from Nashville, TN. Father Ryan has won three WGI World Championships and is a 13 time WGI Finalist as well as a three time winner of the PASIC indoor marching percussion standstill competition. As a band director, David currently teaches at Blackman Middle School in Murfreesboro, TN. He graduated from Middle Tennessee State University where he studied with Lalo Davila. He marched with the Cadets of Bergen County and was on staff for the Dutch Boy Drum and Bugle Corps.

Eights

David England

In octaves as well

Mallet 1
r r r r r r r r r r r r r r l l l l l l l l l l l l l l l l l l

Mallet 2
l r r l r l r r l r r l r l r r l r r l r r l r r l r l r l r l r l

Mallet 3 (4 mlts.)
1 2 3 1 3 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 3 2 3 4 1 2 3 2 3 4 1 2 3 2 3 4 4 4 4 4

Timpani
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 l r l l r l

Snare
r r r r r r r r l l l l l l l l r r r r r r r r l l l l l l l l

5
Mallet 1
sim.

5
Mallet 2
r l l r l r l l r l l r l r l l r l l r l l r l r l r l

5
Mallet 3 (4 mlts.)
4 3 2 4 2 3 2 1 4 3 2 4 2 3 2 1 4 3 2 3 2 1 4 3 2 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1

5
Timpani
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 r l r l

5
Snare
r r r r l l l l r r r r l l l l r r l l l l r r l l l l r r l l r