

Why drum?

Hand drumming is easy to learn, and provides instant enjoyment. You will have fun playing on your own, and can go even deeper into the music by playing with a group of drummers. Once you start, you will find that you can get years of enjoyment from drumming.

Drums are perhaps the first instrument (after the human voice), and can imitate the very first sound that you heard – the rhythm of your mother’s heart beat.

There is something very primal and universally human about tapping out rhythms. It’s no wonder that percussion is considered the most prevalent form of instrumental music making found in different countries around the world.

Many people in North America are now playing hand drums as a way to break free from the intense schedule and multiple pressures of our modern life. Getting “lost in rhythm” can provide a much-needed break and allows us to recharge.

Hand drumming can also be an entry point to learning about other cultures through their music and traditions.

You can get started right away!



How to use this guide

This guide is designed to be added to from time to time as you cover new rhythms in your weekly classes and workshops. The sheets are written in a large font so that you can place it next to you as you drum to follow along with the rhythms. Along the way you will also learn about the origins of the music and tips to help you improve your playing.

Writing about music has been compared to “dancing about architecture”, which is to say that there is only so much of this intangible art form can be described in words. Your best reference for the rhythms is a recording, and you are always welcome to bring a recording device to class. That way you can listen and review the rhythms at home, and even play along with your recording.

In class it helps to listen deeply to the rhythms and not to worry too much about getting them “right”. Most of our learning will be in the form of call and response – listening to a rhythm and then echoing back what you have heard.

The best part about drumming is how much fun it can be to “lose yourself” in layers of rhythms. The more you repeat a rhythm, (no matter how basic) the more depth you will perceive. Some of the most powerful rhythms are the ones that appear the most simple and basic when you first play them.

ENJOY!

Getting started with drumming

There are really just two things to remember:

- ❶ *Play with a light touch*
- ❷ *Don't think!*

(By the way, these two pointers also works wonders for experienced and professional hand drummers!)

Playing with a light touch allows you to get great sound and eliminates any chance of feeling sore after drumming.

Thinking (strangely enough) gets in the way of the playing.

Once you have an idea of what the rhythm is, don't think about it too much – just play! You need to let go enough to feel the beat, while at the same time be able listen to the music that you are creating with your drum, and with other players in the room.



Ten helpful tips for hand drumming

- ① *Remove rings*
- ② *Start slowly*
- ③ *Sing your rhythms*
- ④ *Smile and wave*
- ⑤ *Make it music*
- ⑥ *Listen deeply*
- ⑦ *Feel the beat*
- ⑧ *Enjoy the ride*
- ⑨ *Play with a light touch*
- ⑩ *Don't think!*



How to get great sound on your drum

If you are seated, make sure that the chair (or other object that you are sitting in) is high enough. (Sofas tend to be too low).

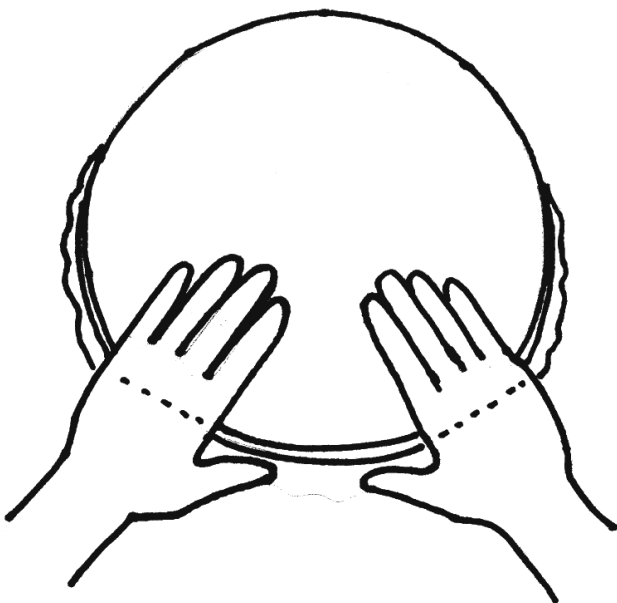
Come to the edge of your seat, with your feet flat on the ground. Tilt the drum slightly away from you.

Make a triangle with your hands – thumbs and index fingers forming the sides of the triangle. This is your landmark position. Let your fingers and hands rest flat on the drum.



Now pull your hands back toward you until the thumbs are completely in the off the playing surface of the drum. That's right - your thumbs should be in the air. This is to avoid knocking the edge of your thumb on the rim of the drum – that would hurt!

This landmark position is best way to quickly develop great sound on your drum. A light touch on the drum will also help.

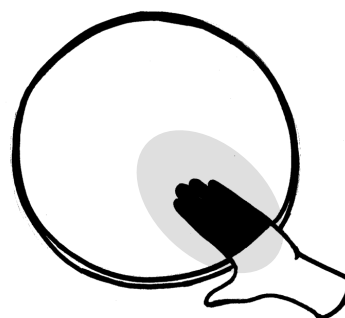


Each time that you sit down to play, place your hands down in the flat triangle position and pull back to the edge with your thumbs no longer contact the drum.

If you remind yourself of the contact points before you begin to play, it will soon become a habit.

There are **three main sounds** on your drum:

❶ **TONE** - Played on the edge of the drum with the fingers flat and naturally together. Your thumbs extend away from the fingers – in fact your thumbs will not contact the drum at all when playing this sound. A warm, full sound is produced.

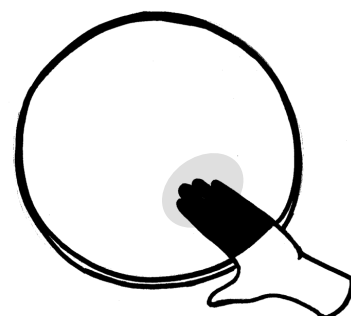


❷ **BASS** - This low sound is toward the centre, with all of the hand touching the playing surface (palm fingers, and thumb). Imagine that you had dipped your hand in paint and you are now making a handprint on the drum.



❸ **SLAP** - This sound played in exactly the same spot as the tone (on the edge, with the thumbs off the playing surface). **The slap is sharper (higher pitched) than the tone** and uses the tips of the fingers more than the tone.

But the slap does not require hitting the drum harder. Keep your wrists very supple and let this sound develop over a few weeks or months of playing. Developing a good technique right from the beginning will accelerate your mastery of this more challenging sound.




Reading rhythms

Your notes use a simple notation that makes it easy to read your rhythms. Each of the three basic sounds on the djembe has its own symbol. A moment of “rest” or silence is a dot.

 = TONE

 = BASS

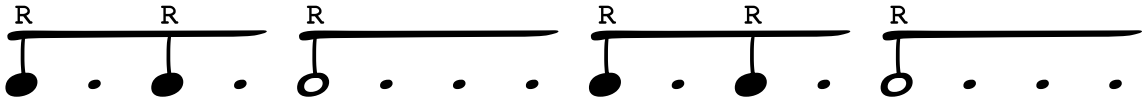
 = SLAP

 = REST

Above the notes are dark lines that show the relationship these notes have to a background pulse. These lines will usually be 3, 4 or 6 beats in length.

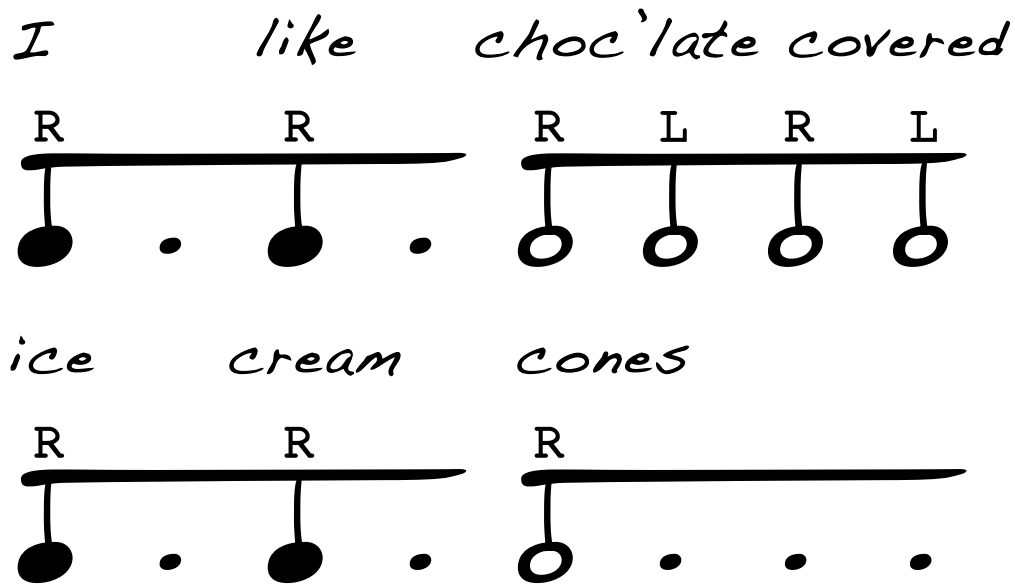
The following is a written example a rhythm from your class:

BASS BASS TONE **BASS BASS TONE**



Written above the notes is an “R” or “L” to indicate which hand should be used for each note that you play. *If you are left handed, please reverse the handing.*

Here is a written example of the now semi-famous rhythm “I like chocolate covered ice cream cones”:



If you were to tap your foot on the background pulse of the rhythms, you would tap four times, once at the beginning of each grouping indicated by the four dark horizontal lines.

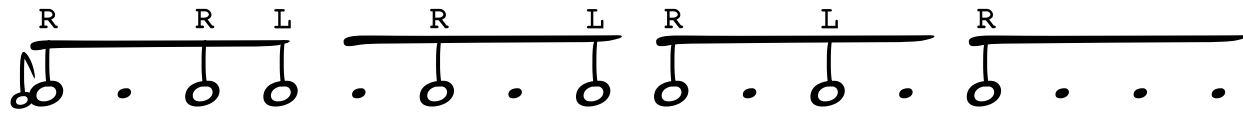
It really helps to vocalize the rhythms as you play them. In class you can record the rhythm and vocalization that goes with it for your own reference. That way you will have an audio example of the correct timing and “feel” of each rhythm. Please feel free to bring a recording device to class!

POLYRHYTHM

4/4

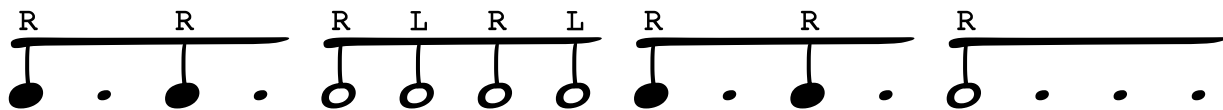
Call

Bro Doe Doe Doe Doe Doe Doe Doe



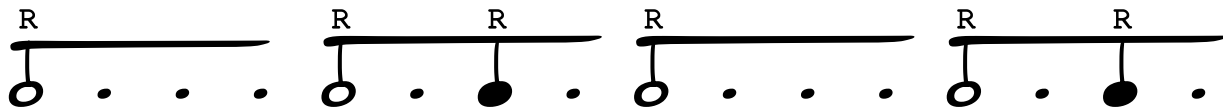
Djembe 1

I Like Choc'late Covered Ice Cream Cones



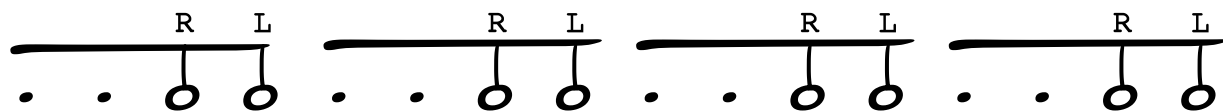
Djembe 2

Go Go Team Go Go Team



Djembe 3

Regg-ae Regg-ae Regg-ae Regg-ae



Bass Drum

Boom Boom Boom Boom



Playing your drum at home

Imagine this scenario - You come home late after a long day at work - your boss has really been piling on the work this week. Luckily, relief is in sight – you head for your drum and start tapping out your beat. Within seconds, you are transported to a very funky place.

Drumming at home
= Instant stress relief!

Even a just few minutes of drumming a day can contribute to a feeling of well being, and can really improve your playing skills. You will be surprised at how quickly you learn!

Drum slowly at first, and try to develop a natural sense of curiosity about your playing. The more playful you are, the quicker you will discover new sounds, the easier variations on rhythms will be, and the stronger your own “**rhythm power**” will become.
Drumming is (first and foremost) fun.

*“We do not drum
because we are happy...
We are happy because we drum”*

(Apologies to Ralph Waldo Emerson)

How to maintain harmonious relationships with your family, friends and neighbours...

Nothing feels better than letting loose for a few minutes on your drum... in fact playing your drum can it can even help cure a headache (try it out next time).

However, your housemates and neighbours may not share the same opinion... especially if they are not joining in on the jam session! Hand drums are pretty loud and some rhythms can be, shall we say, very repetitive.

How can you avoid an eviction notice for noise? One tip is to take a **thin towel** and lay it over the head of your drum. This will muffle the sound considerably, and also can help you hear your tone and slap sounds more clearly on the drum.

You can also try placing a **small pillow in the opening** at the base of your drum. This will really cut down on the volume of the instrument, but it changes the contact feeling. Playing may seem stuffed with a pillow in your drum.

Another way to play without creating a lot of volume is to use a **blue plastic water cooler jug** as a practice instrument. You know - the kind that is delivered in trucks or that you can refill at the grocery store. The standard size (5 gallons) is the right size to get your correct hand positions and sounds surprisingly good!

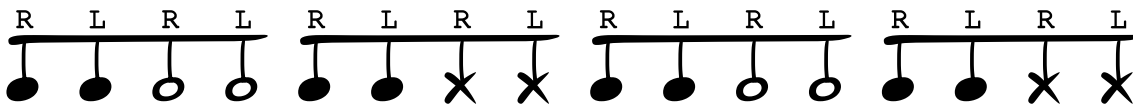


Exercises for improving your sound

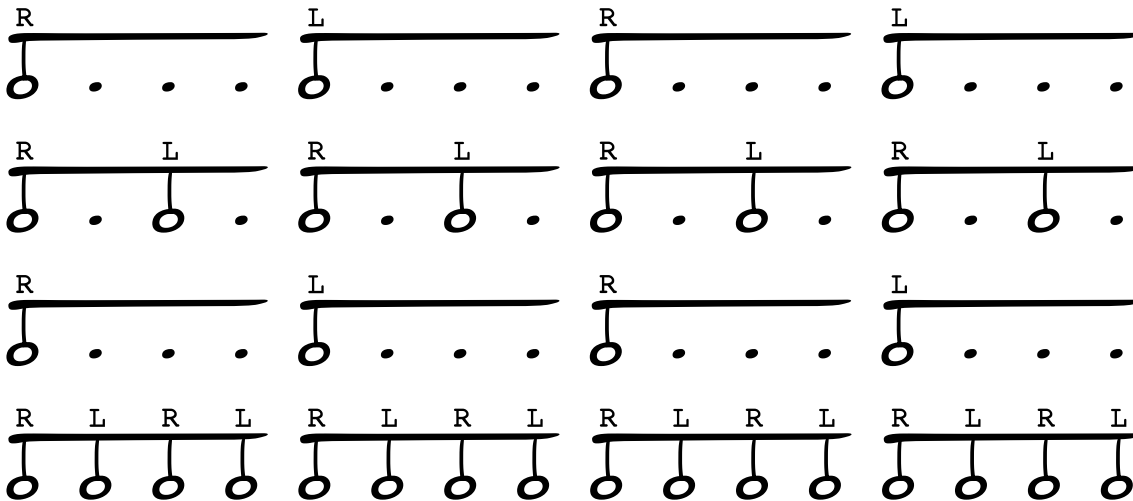
Start slowly and clearly, with a relaxed, light contact... as you get into the groove, you can begin to gradually speed up over the course of ten or 15 minutes. If you feel your muscles getting tense, or your sound getting worse, slow down again.

Written above the notes is an “**R**” or “**L**” to indicate which hand should be used for each note that you play. *If you are left handed, please reverse the handing.*

Exercise #1



Exercise #2

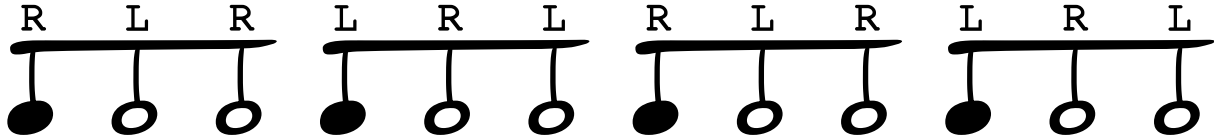


You can repeat this pattern substituting bass notes or slap notes. Try saying “Slow, Slow, Slow, Slow” for the first and third lines, then “fast fast fast fast fast fast fast fast” for the second, and “double double double double double double double double” for the fourth line.

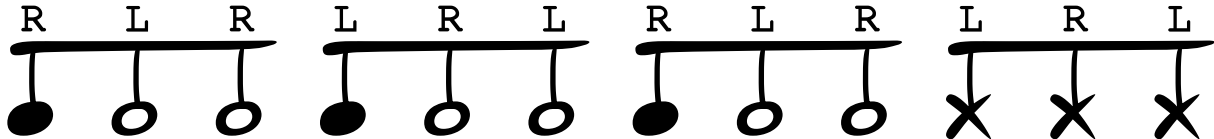
Exercises for improving your sound

These next three exercises have a different feeling. It is often referred to as the “Walking Beat”. Your hands alternate between right and left throughout the pattern.

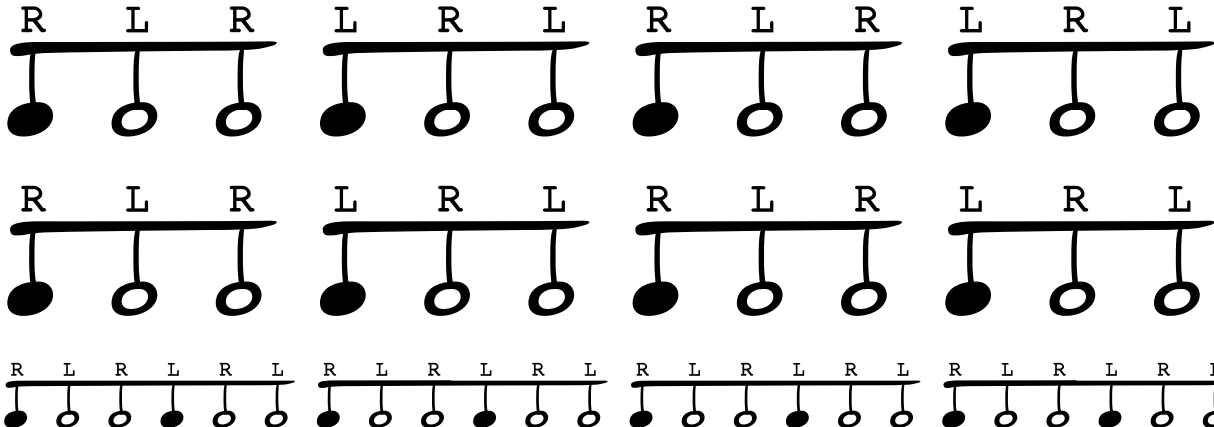
Exercise #3 - “The Walking Beat”



Exercise #4 - “The Walking Beat” with slaps



Exercise #3 - “The Walking Beat” plus double time



How can drumming help your business?

"For business to function most effectively, all of its working parts – departments, teams/workgroups, management and employees – need to be in synch. **Current cutting-edge research has shown a remarkable impact of group drumming on our physical well-being.** Employees are more content and satisfied on a day-to-day basis, which in turn shows up in a reduction in stress leave as well as higher awareness and decreased levels of work-related depression." **Corporate Training Magazine** Vol 2 Issue 1- Jan 2006

Drumming is a unique activity that your group will never forget. And there are health benefits, too! Recent studies show that drumming can lower heart rates, boost the immune system, and lower the incidence of sick days at the workplace.

