



DRUMMER DAN'S

BEGINNERS GUIDE TO DRUMS

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Introduction

Hi, I'm Dan...Drummer Dan.

I teach one-on-one drum lessons in New York City with students of all ages, skill levels, musical backgrounds, and from all over the world.

The overwhelming majority of my students start as absolute beginners. So, it is with those new to the drums in mind with creating this guide.

Every first lesson I do with beginners is very similar, starting with the basics, incorporating the hands and feet, hopefully concluding with putting a beat together and playing it. My goal is to get every new student playing a beat on their own by the end of our very first lesson.

I have basically condensed my introductory lesson into these 8 pages. If you can absorb the information as it's laid out, I'm confident you'll be able to play in no time.

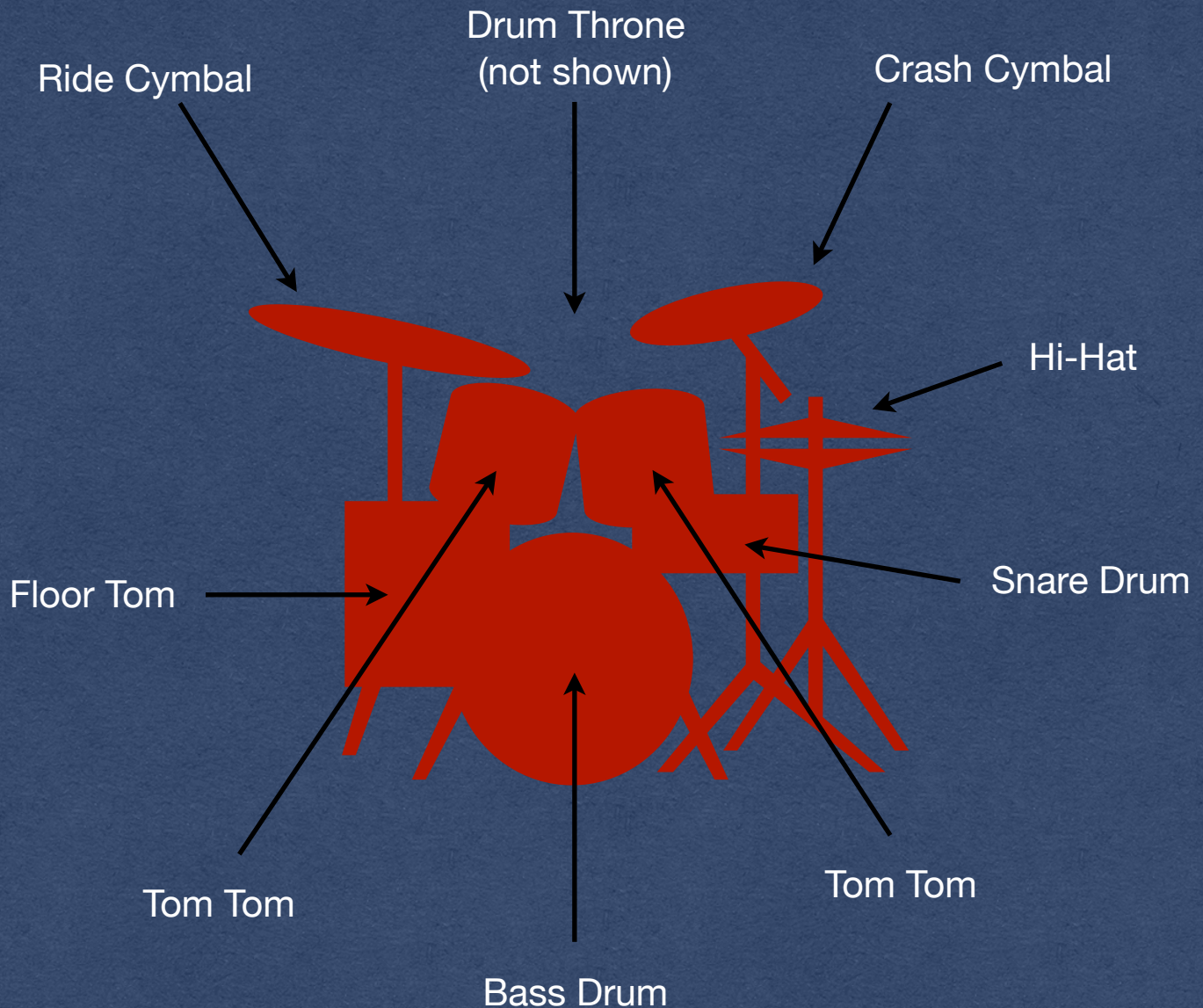
Of course understanding is not the same as playing. Make sure you are comfortable with the mechanics of each exercise before going on to the next. Speed is not the initial intent here, that comes naturally with time and practice.

Quick note for my left handed friends. Lead with your left when doing these exercises. You can switch the order on every sticking pattern so it reflects your dominant hand. Also, on the last page I demonstrate an easy and good way to approach playing the kit called open handed.

Welcome to the path to becoming a drummer! You are already just a little bit cooler!

Dan

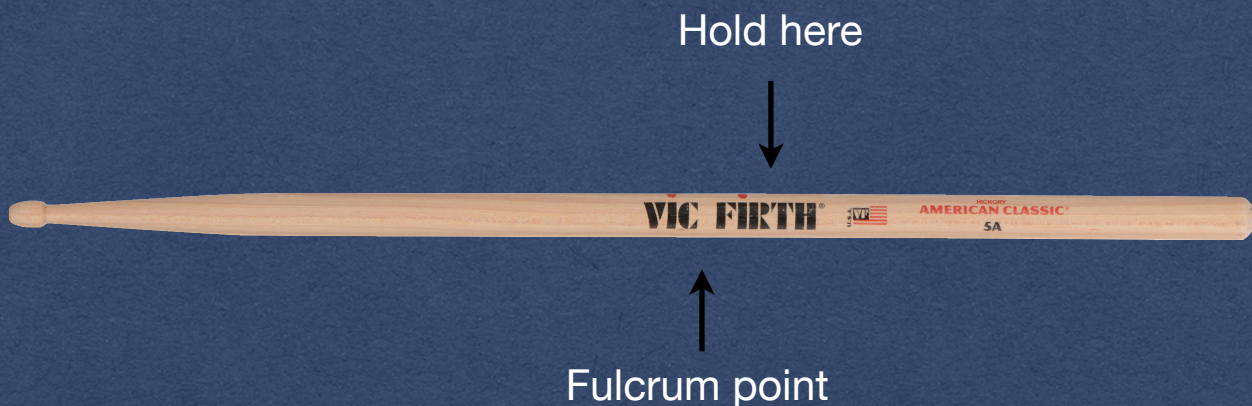
Parts of the drum kit



Drum kits are highly customizable. Illustrated above is a standard 5 piece kit, but you can add as much as you want...more tom toms, cymbals, a second bass drum, a cowbell, wood block, wind chimes, electronic drum pads, a gong, the possibilities are endless.

Holding the drumsticks

Every drumstick has what's called a **FULCRUM** point, or where the stick naturally balances. You can find this spot by balancing the stick with a finger. From the fulcrum, move about an inch toward the thick end. This is where you'll hold the stick.



Take your thumb and index/pointer finger of your dominant hand and lightly pinch the drumstick at that spot behind the fulcrum. Curl the rest of your fingers loosely around the stick, letting the tips of your fingers cradle it. You want to hold the drumstick loose enough so there's always a little space between your palm and the stick. Be very careful not to squeeze or choke the drumstick.

We'll be using **MATCHED GRIP** (the most common), meaning same grip on both hands. Some drummers play with traditional grip, but we'll save that for another time.

Drumsticks come in many different sizes, shapes, colors, and kinds of wood. It can seem overwhelming at first, so I recommend starting with a pair of **5A**. Manufacturers universally use the same size system, like the Vic Firth pictured above, so brand is your choice. Have fun and test out as many sticks as you want, you may be surprised how many options there are!

Sitting at the kit

When you sit down at the drums, rest your left foot on the hi-hat pedal and right foot on the bass drum pedal, straddling the snare drum between your legs. Everything is centered around the snare drum, it's the nucleus. It is important to keep your body relaxed and maintain good posture. You will benefit greatly long term with playing more smoothly, progressing much faster, and avoiding any unnecessary strains.



TWEAKING THE KIT

THRONE: Based on your height, you'll want to adjust the throne so your legs are slightly sloped down, making sure your thighs are below the top of the snare drum. Accidentally smacking your leg with a stick is not fun.

DRUMS: Every drum except the bass drum can be height adjusted as well. Start with the snare drum, then make sure each tom tom is reachable without straining yourself.

H-HAT: The top cymbal on the hi-hat is attached to the CLUTCH. You can adjust the distance between the two hi-hat cymbals by moving the top one up and tightening the clutch. You don't need a large gap, just make sure it closes completely when you press on the pedal.

CYMBALS: Every cymbal should be reachable without stretching or twisting your body too much. Make sure they are all at a natural arms length away and no higher than your shoulders. Boom stands are the most adjustable, you can modify the height, angle, and distance.

The single stroke roll

The SINGLE STROKE ROLL is rudiment number one, so let's start there. It simply means playing single hits with alternating hands. Right, left, right, left, right, left, right, left or...

R L R L R L R L

Try playing this on the snare drum or practice pad. If you are left handed, reverse the order, starting with your left. Speed isn't important at this stage, focus on single clean hits. The goal is to have each hit sound and feel identical.

Tips for a great single stroke roll:

Use your wrists. You want your arms in a comfortable relaxed position, the motion comes mostly from the wrists.

Keep your hands loose. Avoid squeezing the sticks, you want the stick to naturally bounce back like a basketball.

Keep all your fingers on the stick. It's good habit to always keep light contact with all fingers on the stick. This adds a lot of control.

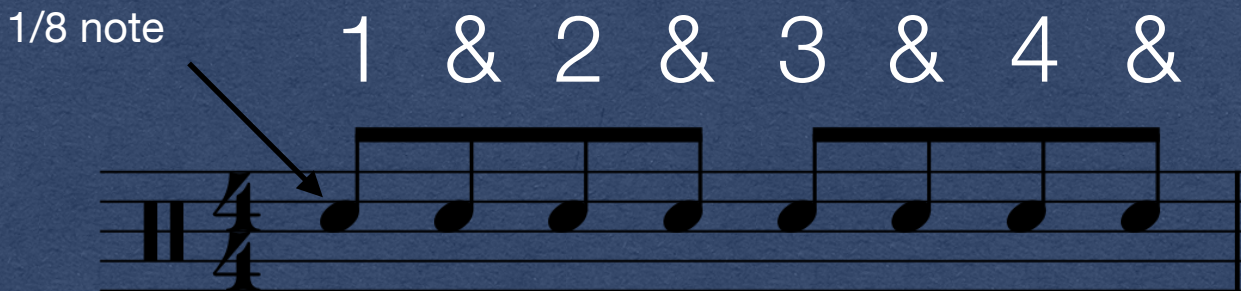
Rebound to same starting height. Try to have the stick rebound to the same height after each hit. This really helps to avoid double hits and other extra unwanted sounds.

Counting a measure

We will be using 4/4 (or common time) as our TIME SIGNATURE. If you can count to 4, you can count in 4/4. Each measure contains 4 beats, with each beat defined as a QUARTER NOTE (notated as 1/4). Let's count a measure...



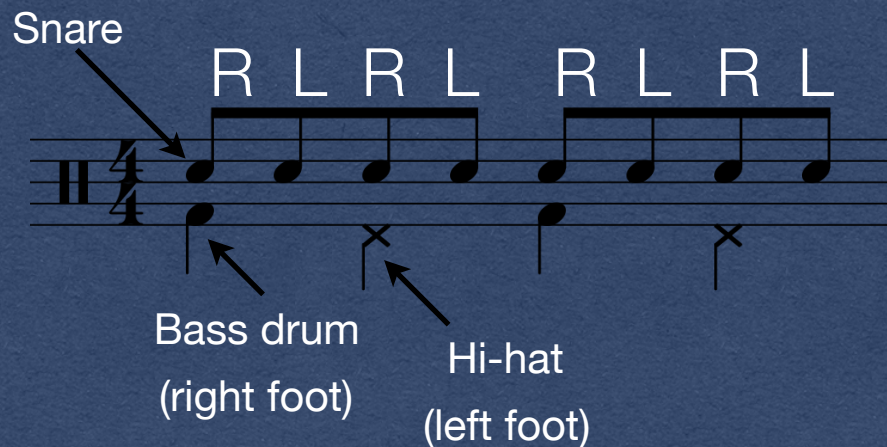
Each quarter note can be split up into smaller notes as well. If we halve a quarter note into two equal notes, we get two EIGHTH NOTES (1/8). Two 1/8 NOTES are the same amount of time as a single 1/4 NOTE. Let's split all four of the 1/4 NOTES, now getting a total of 8 beats. We count 1/8 NOTES by saying "1 AND 2 AND 3 AND 4 AND". Let's count a measure...



Coordination

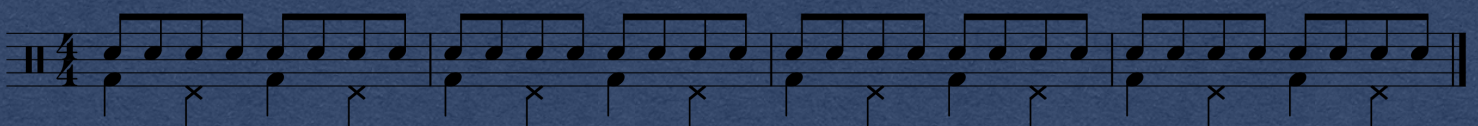
Now let's try an exercise to get all your legs and arms working simultaneously.

First, make sure the hi-hat cymbals are slightly apart and that clutch is nice and tight. Start with just your feet, alternating **1/4 NOTES** starting on the bass drum pedal, then the hi-hat pedal, back and forth. Same counting as above, the bass drum playing beats **1** and **3**, and the hi-hat on beats **2** and **4**.



When you are comfortable doing the feet part, the next step is to add in **1/8 NOTES** on the snare drum using the sticks. Notice that every right hand snare hits matches up with either the bass drum or hi-hat. I suggest counting out loud the first few times, just to make sure each hit matches the right beat.

Try playing 4 measures in a row as notated below.



Building the backbeat

OK! Everything leads to this moment, playing your first beat!



Notated above is the standard basic BACKBEAT, meaning strong emphasis on beats **2 AND 4**. Like the previous exercise, bass drum is played on beats **1 AND 3**, but now the snare drum is on beats **2 AND 4**. And tying everything together are 1/8 notes on the hi-hat.

Keep the hi-hat fully closed with your foot as you're learning, it'll make the hits clearer to hear and easier to count. The hi-hat is played with your dominant hand, shown below is how you can play cross handed or open handed.



Open handed



Cross handed

Now try playing the beat 4 measures without stopping, then 8, then 16, then as long as you can!

