

University of Pittsburgh  
Varsity Marching Band  
Drumline Audition Packet

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**Table of Contents**

1. Foreword.....Page 2

2. Audition process.....Page 3

3. Technique and Approach to the Instrument.....Page 4

    a. Snares.....Page 4

    b. Tenors.....Page 5

    c. Basses.....Page 6

    d. Cymbals.....Page 7

4. Concepts for Playing.....Page 8

## **Foreword**

Thank you so much for your interest in the Pitt Drumline, affectionately known as the Crew, and for taking the first steps in joining our ranks as the new generation of percussionists to serve as the heartbeat for the Pitt Band, as many have done before you in the last 107 years. By doing so, you have put yourself in the top percent of people in this activity and have already shown that you have the desire to continue your percussive career in college, as well as continuing to grow as a performer. It does help that you have the ability to perform in front of crowds as big as 74,000 people at Heinz Field.

Included in this packet will be the following documents and literature. Please make sure you are familiar with all music and exercises, as well as how we approach technique and our rehearsal etiquette. While memorization is by no means a requirement, if you work with the music enough, there should be no problems memorizing our music. Happy practicing and we cannot wait to meet you at the audition camps!

## **Audition Process**

Your audition will be in front of a panel of 2-3 people: Our band director, Dr. Bradley Townsend and one of our Percussion Directors, Paul Rush or Cory Chamberlain. Using a rubric that will be standardized for every audition, you will be asked to play any combination of the exercises found in the “Drumline 2019” packet, available on the band’s webpage ([pittband.com](http://pittband.com)) and Pitt’s “Box” system. We will provide valuable feedback and then you will be invited to join us for our first summer camp in June, where we will set the line based on performance at this camp and improvements from auditions. Additionally, this time is generally used to get the squads and the full battery together to hear how we all sound together! Please fill out the Google Doc to reserve a date and time to come to our campus to audition, and if we can’t find a date that works, video auditions may also be accepted.

## **Technique and Approach to the Instrument**

### **Snares**

*Left Hand:* The stick should sit in the fulcrum of the left hand; situated between the bottom knuckle of the thumb and in between the lowest and first knuckles on the first finger.

Concentrate a squeezing pressure on the stick here. Allow your thumb to touch the middle knuckle on the first finger, and hold it there whilst playing. Allow your middle finger to curl over and, with slight pressure, remain on top of the stick, and the third and fourth fingers should rest underneath, applying slight pressure upwards. Your grip on your left hand should reflect the natural curvature of your hand, meaning that your grip should not feel unnatural or painful in any way.

Aim for the drum height to be so that the left forearm is almost parallel to the ground. When initiating the stroke, initiate from the bead of the stick and have that energy move from the bead, to the wrist, and eventually, the arm. Be sure to turn the wrist and then use subsequent and reactionary arm, meaning that arm SHOULD NOT be the primary motivator of the stroke at any dynamic EXCEPT *ff* and louder.

*Right Hand:* The stick should sit in the fulcrum of the right hand, situated between the pad of the thumb and the middle knuckle on the first finger. Allow the other three fingers to naturally curve under the stick and maintain that shape while playing all strokes and variations. Have the butt end of the stick rest around  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the way down the palm. Have the wrists turned over in order have as much movement as possible. The right arm should be held so that the sticks form a 90 degree angle, but do not stick the elbow out far away from the body.

Initiate the stroke, again, from the bead of the stick and have the energy move from there. The hand and wrist should move slightly faster than the stick while playing to generate as much velocity as possible at the specified height. Only use as much forearm/arm as needed - be as energy efficient as you can while playing.

For both hands, use the natural weight of your hand and arm to stop the stick's movement, as opposed to squeezing at the bottom of the stroke.

## **Tenors**

The stick should sit in the fulcrum of the right hand, situated between the pad of the thumb and the middle knuckle on the first finger. Allow the other three fingers to naturally curve under the stick and maintain that shape while playing all strokes and variations. Have the butt end of the stick rest around  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the way down the palm. Have the wrists turned back slightly in order have as much movement as possible around the drums and in the wrists. The right arm should be held so that your sticks form a 70 degree angle, but do not allow the elbow to be out far away from the body.

Initiate the stroke, again, from the head of the stick and have the energy move from there. The wrist should move slightly faster than the stick, and while playing, generate as much velocity as possible at the specified height. Only use as much forearm/arm as possible - be energy efficient while playing.

## **Basses**

The bass mallet should be held so that no part (or very little) of the stick protrudes from the bottom of the hand. The stick should sit in the fulcrum of the hand, situated between the pad of the thumb and the middle knuckle on the first finger. The gap between the thumb and the palm should be eliminated, but the pad of the thumb (contact point) should remain as flat as possible so that maximum stick control can be maintained. Allow the other fingers to naturally curl around the stick to provide support, but the primary pivot motion should come from the fulcrum.

*Playing Position:* If the drum is on a stand, ensure that the distance between the drum and body is the same as if wearing a harness. Start by relaxing the arms at the sides of the body. Next, bring the forearms up such that the angle between the biceps and forearms is a comfortable 90 degrees. Maintain the same index finger to thumb fulcrum and ensure that the mallet forms a 45 degree angle from parallel to the ground. While in this position, check that the bead of the mallet is at the center of the drum head before playing. Adjustments may have to be made, such as moving the elbows forward or pulling them backwards, but always maintain the relaxed playing position as previously defined. Lastly, create a small amount of space between the torso and elbows such that the hand will not contact the rim while playing. This will also ensure that the mallet naturally points inward toward the head, which will be utilized for tacet heights on the non-playing hand.

*Playing Technique:* Wrist rotation will be the playing style used (envision turning a door knob). Initiate the stroke, making sure that the angle of the wrist does not change (remains almost stationary) from the previously defined 45 degrees from parallel to the ground. The bead should follow a *narrow* path such that each stroke has the most efficient arc pathway. Never tilt the wrist towards or away from the playing position, as this will create a *wide* pathway (“O” pathway). The bead of the mallet should lead the rotational motion. Never allow the hand to lead this motion, as it will create a whipping effect. With regards to stick heights (see below), 15” (*ff*) will be taken as the stick parallel to the ground. For heights like this and above, the stroke will be a wrist and arm based motion. To achieve this full extension (15”), allow the wrist to comfortably rotate as much as possible (80-90% to parallel), then slightly move the arm away from the drum only enough to achieve the desired height. Ensure that all strokes are made at the center of the head with enough velocity to achieve the best sound quality.

Please consult the link provided below and research some of “Bass Drum Group’s” [videos](#) for visual aids in learning how to properly hold the mallet, proper playing position, and the wrist rotation technique.

## Cymbals

Cymbals are arguably the most visual aspect of the drumline, so a lot of what you will learn is much easier to comprehend when you see it. Therefore, this audition packet includes a link to our [google drive](#) where prospective members have access to photos as well as videos that explain important positions and various techniques.

Please be familiar with the following two folders, which contain videos to prepare you for playing cymbals with Pitt's drumline for the first time: [The Basics](#) and [Technical Videos](#).

It is important to be familiar with the importance of a cymbal line in the context of a drumline. Similarly to bass drums, our parts are often split and emphasize places of impact within the music we play as an ensemble. It is important to remember that despite the lack of complexity in our music, it is crucial that we play with the same level of accuracy and precision as the rest of the drumline. Additionally, we have the greatest visual capability on the line with metal plates attached to our hands, so pushing yourself to accomplish uncomfortable tasks is part of the job as a cymbal player. Due to the way our music is designed and how each movement we make is amplified by the cymbals themselves, personal accountability is imperative. We hope to be proud to play cymbals here at Pitt and expect you to practice and rehearse accordingly.

Given the instrument, practicing at home is not as easy as pulling out a drum pad with sticks, so we encourage you to spend time with a metronome clapping through the exercises we provide for you. Once we have an established cymbal line, each member will have access to cymbals that can be used to practice on a regular basis.

You are not just joining Pitt band, Pitt drumline, or the Pitt cymbal line, you are joining a family. In this family you should put your best musician forward, make every step, every note, every rehearsal, and every performance count. You will only get out of the cymbal line what you put into it, so work hard! You will not be disappointed by the reward of pride and most importantly friendships.

:)

## **Concepts for Playing**

### **Wrist Based Stroke:**

*p* = 3 inch stroke

*mp* = 6 inch stroke

*mf* = 9 inch stroke

*f* = 12 inch stroke

### **Arm Based Stroke:**

*ff* = 15 inch stroke (vertical wrist and some arm) [basses: 80-90% horizontal wrist and some arm]

*fff* = Stroke hinged from elbow (still contains wrist bend in addition to arm) [basses: slightly past horizontal with more arm]

**Flow:** A term used to describe hand/stick motion carried over longer rhythmic durations. In most circumstances, we do not want to “stop” the motion and then restart the motion a beat, or two beats later. Rather, we will allow the stick to “flow” during the rest. The idea of “flow” is not just used across rests, but rather within any rhythmic structure or phrase that could possibly contain interruptions in hand motion. The musical phrases are not separate, but rather parts of a whole, so the momentum should carry through each phrase into the next. Be aware, this is not something that is notated, but rather an interpretation of the music.

**Rolls:** Rolls are often a place of uncertainty for many people, especially when placed into a larger ensemble setting. The “check,” or base pattern, is the hand motion and rhythms that you play underneath the rolls, just with the double strokes or buzzes taken out. It’s crucial to remember that when you do add in the doubles to NOT CHANGE YOUR HANDS. For example, at a *mf* dynamic, focus on using wrist and minimal arm in the check, then pump the arms and minimal wrist through the rolls. Think about playing “down” and through the rolls, which will not only help you stay in time, but give a much more consistent and powerful sound throughout the duration of the roll.

**Energy Efficiency:** There is no need to use more effort to slam the stick or mallet into the head or crash your cymbals as hard as possible. Use only the energy necessary in order to create the appropriate sound.

**Posture:** Incredibly important across all instruments. Make sure to have your feet firmly on the ground, shoulders square and even, and chest filling out the harness. Project outward confidence and hold your head straight ahead, however slight head bobbing is encouraged when in a groove section.