

Collin Smith
Horseheads High School

Pillow Trick

For percussionists wanting to develop a good open roll, it does not happen overnight! There are many exercises in lots of rudimental-style snare drum method books that can help the process along. One you will not find in a book that has proven successful is what I call "the pillow trick." Using any type of surface that has NO REBOUND (pillow, folded up blanket, coat, bed, etc.) begin single-stroking two notes in each hand very slowly. Gradually pick-up speed but remain only single-stroking (because you will not be able to bounce on this surface anyway). This exercise should be done using mostly finger motion to control the stick (this works the right muscles to develop an open roll if fingers always stay on the stick.) If you get fast enough, you will notice the sound of a passing helicopter developing...this means you are on the right track! See how long you can keep this going. Because of the lack of bounce, you will get tired quickly, and you should feel it in your forearms. This means it is working. Try to do it for longer each time you do it, and you will notice that this will help with the "transition" part of a NYSSMA-style open roll (the spot you decide to go from single-stroking to bouncing your stick). It is important to be able to single-stroke faster than you can do your slowest bounce to perform a good open roll. The nice thing about this practice strategy is students can do it while they catch up on their favorite Netflix show!

NYSSMA Process

If a student is interested in performing a NYSSMA solo, they must play all required scales or rudiments for me individually, to even be considered for a solo. This shows me their level of dedication and eliminates the frustration of students losing points on things like scales. I make a deal with our NYSSMA soloists every year that if no one misses points on scales, I will dye my hair a color of their choice. As a result, the first 21 out of 25 students came out with perfect scores one year on scales, making me quite nervous!

Once a student has a solo to prepare, I have a process for them to submit recordings to me every two weeks, with different requirements that may look like this:

- March 6 – 50% of solo and 3 scales
- March 20 – 75% of solo with fixes and 3 different scales
- April 3 – 100% of solo with fixes and dynamics and 3 different scales
- April 17 – 100% of solo with all musicality and all scales

No one wants to sound bad on a recording! It provides a certain level of individual accountability.

"Make-Up Lesson" Process

If you are in a similar situation, students cannot attend their lesson if they have a test in class. When I first started teaching, I let students make up their lesson basically any period they could. This quickly became out of hand. In a school of nearly 1400, the amount of testing nowadays in class, and close to 150 students in band, keeping track of make-up lessons was unrealistic. Not to mention, students would "abuse" this procedure and claim they had a test in class anytime they forgot or did not want to attend a lesson. Over the course of the next few years I instituted the following policies to fix these issues:

- 1) Students must make up their lesson before their next lesson (we are on a six-day cycle, so usually about seven or eight days in between lessons with weekends). This keeps it so make-up lessons do not "bunch up" and it alleviates a ton of students wanting to make them up all at the end of the marking period.
- 2) Students must make-up their lesson the same period in which it was scheduled for. This aims to eliminate students wanting to miss gym for every lesson, or not wanting to miss their A.P. class for

a lesson. It also keeps their lesson rotation consistent. For example, if a student was scheduled 2nd period for a lesson and had a test, but chose to make it up 3rd period, chances are their next scheduled lesson would be 3rd period. Therefore, to that classroom teacher it would seem like they are coming out of their class two weeks in a row for lessons. This policy eliminates that situation.

- 3) Students can only make-up a lesson at a time when I am teaching other lessons (more of a contractual reason and the fact that I do not have room in my schedule to have dedicated make-up lesson slots.) Therefore, I have a process for them to go in a practice room and create a recording for me of their practice session that they submit in a shared drive to me. (attached)

Make-Up Lesson

1) Journal

- Turn in your lesson journal in the bin on the front table before you start

2) Practice

- Practice your lesson assignments and band music for 15 minutes
- Choose 5-minutes worth of music to record for Mr. Smith – a combination of scales, lesson book, and band music

3) Read This Before You Record

- Before playing each selection, **describe out loud** what you are about to play and where in the music or book it is, like this: “Measure 42 to 68 in Hey Baby” or “Red book, page 12, number 14” or “E minor scale”
- DO NOT** stop recording between each selection

4) Time to Record

- Turn on Zoom Recorder by holding slider button down until it says, “Hi.”
- Press **red record button**
- State your name and date
- Play your music
- When done, press **red record button** to stop the recording

5) Turn Zoom Recorder Off

- Hold slider button down until it says, “Bye.”

6) Submit

- Take Zoom Recorder to computer in band room, you do not need to log-in to your own account
- Find correct cord by the computer for your Zoom
- Plug Zoom Recorder into computer **while off**
- Open **Documents** folder
- On the left menu list, click **Zoom** (can also find by selecting **This PC**)
- Find the file you just recorded (bottom is most recent one; ignore dates, they will be wrong)
- Right click and **Rename** that file using First and Last Name and Date, like this: **Gustav Holst 9-21-18**
- Right click on file and select **Cut**
- On the left menu list (or **This PC**) open the **(M:) Drive**
- Select **High School** folder
- Select **Make-Up Lessons** folder
- Select the **Lesson #** you are making up
- Right click and **Paste** the file you just recorded into this folder

7) Clean Up

- Make sure all files, even if not your own, are deleted from the Zoom Recorder
- Return the Zoom Recorder to the wall of the practice room**
- Clean up and return to class

