Audition Procedure

In addition to the live audition day, we also require that each candidate submit a pre-audition video for the primary instrument that they wish to be considered on (snare, tenors, bass, and front ensemble). We do not require cymbal candidates to submit a video, but it is highly suggested if you have the resources to do so. All candidates should begin the video by stating your name, high school or JMU class, and the instrument or instruments that you plan on auditioning for. Again, you only have to submit a video for your primary instrument. There will be time to demonstrate your abilities on other instruments on the actual audition days. Front ensemble audition materials will be posted on the Facebook Interest Page and jmu.edu/mrd/ in mid-May.

Audition Videos

- **Snare, Bass, Tenors** - Only Whopper is required. Feel free to submit any supplemental material, including warm-ups and things you have personally been working on, for constructive criticism.
- **Cymbals** - Not required, but highly recommended to select part 1 or 2 of Whopper for video submission, in addition to any supplemental material.

All videos are required to be submitted by **no later than Sunday June 21st at 11:59pm**. Any videos submitted after that time WILL NOT be considered. There are no exceptions to this deadline.

Here is the link for video submissions:


The link should walk you through exactly how to successfully submit your video.

Live Auditions

Live auditions will consist of individual audition, group audition, and a personal interview. Please have Whopper and all warm-ups prepared (watch the Facebook Interest Group and jmu.edu/mrd/ for warm-ups to be posted in Mid-May)\. We will be focusing on fundamentals for much of the day.
Remote Audition

If you for some reason cannot attend the live audition day on Saturday, June 27th, please contact the Drumline Instructor, Steve Cash, so that we know the circumstances. Anyone who does not attend audition day will be required to include all of the warm-ups in your video as well. It is important to know that not being at the live auditions does take away from the amount of time that the staff is able to assess your abilities and therefore will hurt your chances of earning a spot.

If you have any questions, please direct those questions to Steve Cash (jmudrumline@gmail.com) or Tim Kaetzel (kaetzetc@dukes.jmu.edu). We look forward to viewing everyone's video and seeing everyone at auditions on June 27th!

Staff:
Steve Cash - Drumline Instructor
Hunter Desper - Percussion Assistant

Battery:
Tim Kaetzel - Captain
Steven Vereb - Snares
Eli Roberts - Tenors
Grayson Simmons - Basses
Elise Tessin - Cymbals
Relax

Unnecessary tension is the biggest detriment to successful snare drum and percussion playing. Never approach the drum or even hold sticks until you have relieved your body of tension.

Fulcrum

The fulcrum is located between the thumb and index finger. Matched grip realizes this fulcrum in both the Left and Right hands. Placement of the fulcrum at the optimal balancing point (about 1/3 up the stick) is necessary for facilitating rebound and control. The crease formed between the thumb and index finger should be at a 45% angle, a mix of German (palm parallel to drum) and French (palm perpendicular to drum) grips.

Playing Position

Drum Height - Having already released body tension, players should address the drum. Drum height is based on comfort for the performer and angle of bead attack. To find your proper drum height, relax your arms by your sides and then raise your forearms to just below parallel. Typically, snare drums can be raised to “a hands width” (about 3”) below the belly button.

Bead Position – The beads of your sticks should rest 1/2” apart and 1/2” off the head.

Stroke

The wrist initiates all strokes. Due to this, the bead of the stick will be the first item to move. Following the “be relaxed” rule, it is unnatural to inhibit your other muscle groups (fingers, arms) from moving. So, the wrist will initiate the stroke but a combination of fingers, wrist, and arm can be present. Hand and fulcrum tension is the biggest detriment to stick resonance and producing a full sound. The rich sound coming from a weighted (arm presence) stroke is null if the fulcrum is choking the stick.

Legato Stroke – to perform a legato stroke properly a player must never stop the motion of stick travel. Often, players unfamiliar with this stroke will discontinue the motion just after the stick attacks the head. Wrists must throw the stick down to attack the drum and then quickly backup to allow natural rebound.
Tenor Drums - Eli Roberts

Here on the James Madison Quad line, JMQ, we use a fairly standard matched grip technique. The thumb and index finger form the fulcrum, while the other three fingers remain in contact with the stick providing support, even when playing diddles/rolls. When in playing position, the tops of your palms should not be flat, nor should they be perpendicular to the ground, but angled slightly. This is a fairly natural resting position, so don’t think about it too much! Lastly, the tip of your stick, your wrist and your elbow should form a straight line, which gives the stick a slight angle. Having the stick in this position is advantageous not only because it looks professional, but because it keeps the stick clear of the rims.

Zones

Zones are the most important elements of playing quads, and can seriously affect one’s playing ability.

- Playing zones should be less than third of the way across the drum, starting from the rim. This gives us the most sustain and full bodied timbre.
- Playing in the exact center of the drum produces a muted dull sound, so don’t play there!
- On the outside drums, your hands should be moved forwards so that they are close to drums one or two. This minimizes the amount of movement necessary to go to a different drum. You should be able to easily play a scrape from 4 to 2 or 3 to 1 from these zones.
- When your right hand is on drum 3 and your left is on drum 4, they should form a 90° angle with the front sideline (assuming you were facing front on the field).

When playing on the outside drums, it is tempting to play towards the back of the drum, but in this position you end up doing more work than you need to, especially during complicated passages.
Movement

Any movement between drums should be done using a movement of the arm, not the wrist. Changing drums with the wrist will cause your hand to turn over and make drumming harder! Elbows should stay relaxed, but not pinned to one’s side, or in “chicken wing” position. When playing on the spock drums, pull your elbows back to bring the sticks into position.
Bass Drums - Grayson Simmons

The role of the Bassline is to serve the battery and full band with a bass voice that adds in impact and musicality. There are six people playing one part, so naturally members of the Bass Line will need to work together in ensuring the bass drum music is as rhythmically clean as possible as well as forming a close bond with one another to do so.

When gripping the bass drum mallet two things should be noted:

- Playing bass drum is essentially taking matched grip drumming and rotating the hands so that the wrists are vertical instead of horizontal.
- The fulcrum created by the index finger and thumb should be to the point that if a nail was put through the thumbnail it would come out the index finger.

When approaching the drum and setting up playing position remember:

- The mallet head should be in the middle of the drum with the mallet head resting slightly above the playing surface.
- The arms/forearms should be parallel to the ground.
- There should be a natural angle from the forearm into the bass mallet.
- Finally when playing the drum the wrist motion should mimic turning a doorknob. It is important to remember this as using too much elbow power or striking like a snare or tenor drum is incorrect.
- Above all, remember to apply these points every practice session so that the quality of drumming can be improved upon each time. Stay relaxed, stay focused, and stay Gucci.
Cymbals - Elise Tessin

Cymbals are an important voice to a marching percussion ensemble. They provide unique musical notation and impact, as well as intense visual enhancement. To get the most out of a cymbal line visually and musically, the line must be in sync with each other down to the last angle and attack-and that unity starts with YOU.

Personal Training and Posture

Yes, you read that right- personal training. [Marching] Cymbals are the most physically demanding percussion instrument. Trust me when I say that if you don’t prepare your body for that demand, you’ll get knocked off your feet for a while, and could possibly get injured. I highly recommend immersing yourself in upper body strength exercises before auditions, and if you make the line, throughout the summer. You’ll want to focus that training in your upper back and arm muscles. Push-ups are great because they work just about every important muscle group (chest, back, forearms, upper arms, abs, etc.). Please don’t be the person that tries to do as many push-ups in one sitting as possible, that will get you nowhere and you WILL end up hurting yourself. In addition, you want to make sure to strengthen your wrists and very front forearm muscles. There are several yoga poses/hot yoga routines that are really good for this as well as overall strength and posture. Now that I just mentioned posture, that’s another very important component to technique. You’ll need to be able to stand up straight, shoulders rolled back, and chest out in order to crash properly. Although it seems simple enough, maintaining that posture with two 7 or so pound metal plates in your hands for a couple hours at a time can be pretty hard. You can help transition yourself into this playing posture by simply correcting your everyday posture. Sit up straight with your shoulders back if you’re in a chair, walk tall with your shoulders back-make a conscious effort to remind yourself to do so. Also, yoga, push-ups, and go for a run a couple times a week. Trust me, your body will thank you for it.

Here is a video with yoga poses for wrist strengthening:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofTmQ4UF170
And another with some basic upper-body strengthening exercises:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKYPySNKZHo

Playing: Angles and Positions:

You might remember me mentioning angles at the end of the introduction. Here’s where they come in to play. In order for the line to look uniform, we have a basic set of angles/rules we apply to our positioning and playing that make achieving that uniformity easier.

Set and Set-To
Set is the position you are holding the cymbals in before a tap off or count off has occurred. You will be holding the cymbals with a standard grip (hand through the strap, tucked under) with your fingers spread out and over the pad, with the goal being to try to make the pads of your fingers touch the metal of the cymbal. In set, your cymbals will be down to your sides, with elbows at a 45 degree angle, holding them about 3 inches out from the pant seem just below your hips. Set-To is our term for “attention,” or our playing position. For this you will bring the cymbals up in front of your chest (standing up as straight as you can, of course). You will want the top of the cymbal to make a straight line from the top of your left shoulder, just across the top of your belly button, down to your right hip (think of the angle a seat belt makes). You will be holding the cymbals about 5-7 inches in front of you, so that your upper arms make a 90 degree angle with the ground, holding the two plates as close together as possible without them touching.

Prep and Crash

Prep is the position you are in just before you crash. It is really important to practice this position so that your attacks are accurate, loud, and without hitting an air pocket. Prep is always on the beat before the crash. For this position, you will bring your right cymbal up so it digs into the nook of your armpit, flexing your four fingers to point it toward your bottom cymbal. Your left arm will stay in the same position as it was in set-to, but you will flex your fingers to make the cymbal flush with the bottom of your left forearm. To crash, you will simply push the plates together. Except it’s actually not simple at all. You will want to maintain posture as you push through the crash, keeping the momentum at the front of the right cymbal so it transfers to the front of the left cymbal. It is important that you keep the momentum going after the plates hit each other, otherwise the crash won’t resonate. This crash technique is a little tricky to get the hang of, but it has much better sound than vertical crashes (although we will occasionally use that technique throughout the season).

Tap

The last position I’m going to explain is tap. Usually taps are added into music for ornamental purposes and for added visual. For this position you will raise the cymbals up to your eyebrows (not on your face, several inches away) so you can see through the triangle you make with them-the tip of the right cymbal slightly overlapping the left. To perform a tap, all you do is flex your wrist to lift the right cymbal, and lead the hit with your fingers on to the left cymbal.

Practicing for visuals

I don’t expect you to practice visuals on your own, especially because most of you probably don’t have access to cymbals, but there are ways you can start developing muscle memory to help with the learning process for visuals. About 99% of our visuals will in some shape or form come from
a flip. Flips are the standard flow of visual between positions and, like I said, are the basis of many visuals. You can practice the motion by turning and rotating your wrists. If you practice that motion and gain that muscle memory, you’re set. BONUS-it doubles as wrist exercise.

**Things to remember:**

Cymbals are a unique instrument with unique requirements and challenges. It’s an instrument that may seem hard to prepare for, but is just different than drums to prepare for. The best thing you can do to prepare for this is to not only follow this technique guide to the best of your ability, but to become familiar with the warm-ups. You can do this by clapping along with a metronome, listening along with recordings, and familiarizing yourself with the technique denotations. I gave you 3 to techniques/positions to familiarize yourself with as they are the most common ones we use, but there are many more that you will encounter if you make the line. On that note, the most important thing you can do is to have an open mind and be willing to learn. The auditions will be clinic-style, so you will learn all of the technique piece by piece before we roll into the music-so don’t stress! Happy prepping