

Section One

Concepts

Frequently students learn to play one pattern and then nothing more. The learned pattern may sound stiff and lack groove. The students do not know how to make it sound better or fill within the pattern. The concepts in this section are designed to help you improve your patterns and make them sound better. They can also help strengthen your ability to embellish and fill within a pattern without disrupting the time flow or groove. Studying the concepts will also help you develop brush dexterity and coordination. The concepts in this section are an essential part of the book. Experiment with them and use them when you practice the patterns and techniques in later sections.

10 Concepts

- 1** Practice all strokes using only your hands and finger tips on the drum (without brushes)
- 2** Traditional grip is recommended when you hold the brushes
- 3** Grip the brush 2 inches from the wires
- 4** Play the tips of the brushes
- 5** Use your feet to feather the bass and play the hi-hat for bottom and support
- 6** Experiment with counterclockwise or less familiar motions
- 7** Each hand should play a discernible rhythm unless you want color or texture
- 8** Use shape to define strokes and rhythm
- 9** Create variations of shape to imply the same rhythm
- 10** Use the shape to imply fills, accents, and metric modulation

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Concept 1

Practice all strokes using only your hands and finger tips on the drum (without brushes)

It is much easier to capture the shape and flow of a pattern with your hands. Once you have perfected the stroke, it is easier to move to the brushes.

Concept 2

Traditional grip is recommended when you hold the brushes

When using brushes, the traditional grip is superior to the matched grip for strokes and fills. Matched grip inhibits and limits maximum range and freedom for some patterns. Traditional grip gives you a greater range of motion and the freedom to do patterns and fills.

Concept 3

Grip the brush 2 inches from the wires

Although this might be considered a choked grip, it gives you better control for shading and accenting specific strokes, fills, and patterns. The farther your grip is from the wires, the less control you will have; you will have more of the brush working for you, but less control over it.

Concept 4

Play the tips of the brushes

When playing patterns or time, play on the tips of your brushes, holding the brushes at a 45-degree angle to the snare. Otherwise, you will lose the contrast that is essential for pulse, nuance, and soft shadings in accenting, embellishing, and filling. A lower angle gives you a more legato sound. A higher angle gives you a more staccato sound.

Concept 5

Use your feet to feather the bass and play the hi-hat for bottom and support

Brushes can be less rhythmically defined and need greater support, definition, and bottom than sticks. When using brushes, feather the bass drum and use the hi-hat to provide bottom and support. Feathering the bass lets you play very soft quarter notes or half notes to provide bottom and support, with the bass player in a lower harmonic range. However, the hi-hat can overpower the brushes, particularly on ballads where you need a softer execution or 1/4 foot stroke (cymbals 1/2 inch apart).

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Concept 6

Experiment with counterclockwise or less familiar motions

To develop fluidity and facility with brushes, practice less familiar motions. This will help you strengthen the strokes that feel natural or comfortable. It is the best way to discover new strokes and develop variations on established patterns.

Concept 7

Each hand should play a discernible rhythm unless you want color or texture

Brushes are so soft that the subtlety of what you are playing (the pattern) can be lost or less precise unless each hand is playing a shape that relates to a rhythm. White noise, texture, and color may be desirable or appropriate within certain sections of tunes. The defined musical outcome determines how strongly you want to imply time, or if one or both hands are actively shading time, color, and textures.

Concept 8

Use shape to define strokes and rhythm

Use recognizable shapes to begin experimenting with strokes and patterns. Circles, heart shapes, and Xs are three shapes that you can use with almost all tempos and grooves (ballads, medium, fast, Latin).

Concept 9

Create variations of shape to imply the same rhythm

To create greater fluidity between transitional strokes, and to discover your own personal strokes, experiment creating variations of shapes to imply a rhythm. Transitional strokes include circles, heart shapes, and Xs. They may be played as quarter notes, eighth notes, triplets, sixteenth notes, and so forth. The rhythm table in the Techniques section develops this concept more. Do not let shape guide your sound. Let sound guide your shape. Experiment. Be creative.

Concept 10

Use the shape to imply fills, accents, and metric modulation

When creating and maintaining a time feel and flow, brushes are similar to sticks. For example, when playing time with sticks, the right hand predominantly stays on the ride cymbal to create a cushion. The left hand and right foot are used in supportive, accent roles underneath the ride cymbal. When playing time with brushes, both hands are, for the most part, on the snare together. It may be disruptive to the overall time feel or cushion if either hand leaves the snare often. It is easier to embellish, accent, and fill within the original stroke or pattern by maintaining the original shape. The rhythm table and coordination exercises strengthen this concept further.