



Top-10 Rudiments

Part 1: The Single-Stroke Roll

by Bill Bachman

The rudiments are the alphabet of the drumming language. Once you've learned this alphabet, you'll have a large vocabulary of rhythmic "words" that will enable you to express yourself freely on the drums. My goals for this series of articles are to show how important the rudiments are to every drummer, dispel any negative myths about rudiments and their purpose, and help you develop great technique that'll allow you to execute any idea you can think of. Here's the bottom line: Rudiments create chops, chops create vocabulary, and vocabulary creates music.

I believe that many drummers have misunderstood the point of rudiments and their application. Most drumset players only focus on how to orchestrate rudiments around the drumset, rather than investing time mastering the technique needed to execute the figures. The real value of rudiments lies in the physical motions that are developed within each hand that can then be applied to various ideas on the drumset beyond a rudimental context. These motions allow each hand to make music freely without being boxed into playing a rudiment with some voicing (or orchestration) around the drumset.

I'd also like to dispel misconceptions about the ill effects of rudiments. Drummers have said things to me like, "All these rudiments and techniques will stiffen me up, ruin my groove, and confine my imagination." This couldn't be farther from the truth, given that the rudiments are learned using smooth and flowing motions. Amateur drummers often hold the sticks too tight and stroke everything out when they practice rudiments. But when you see mature rudimental drummers play, their hands are like poetry in motion. As for rudiments confining the imagination—that shouldn't happen as long as you're not *thinking* about rudiments when you drum. You want to be making music, not regurgitating patterns.

Playing rudiments properly is a challenge because they are so physically demanding—not so much in terms of muscular strength, but in terms of finesse and dexterity. Many repetitions are necessary in order to train your muscles and to develop the coordination required to play them effortlessly. But all of that practice will be time well spent, since once you develop the proper muscle memory you'll never have to think about the mechanics of the rudiment again.

In this series, we're going to work through my top-10 rudiments: single-, double-, and triple-stroke rolls, paradiddles, the six-stroke roll, flams, flam accents, flam taps, inverted flam taps, and drags. If you have command of these ten, then you can play all of the other rudiments (or hybrid rudiments), since the necessary hand motions are contained within these ten. (The buzz roll is not included in this series because it requires a unique stick pressure technique that's not involved in the other rudiments.)

The first rudiment we're going to look at is the single-stroke roll. The single-stroke roll should be played with full strokes (also known as free strokes or legato strokes), which means that the hands are holding the sticks loosely and are "dribbling" them on the drumhead. Resist any temptation to hold the sticks tightly or to stop the stick at the bottom of the stroke. Allow the stick to rebound back to the "up" position immediately after striking the head.

The technique needed to play this rudiment is pretty much the same at any speed, though different wrist-to-finger ratios will be required depending on the rebound (or lack thereof) of the playing surface. It's common for many players to favor the fingers at high speeds, but keep in mind that finger technique won't work very well on a relatively mushy surface like a floor tom head.

In addition to the exercises provided, be sure to practice this rudiment going evenly from slow to fast to slow over a one-minute period. Practice the exercises with the given stickings, use a metronome (or play along with your favorite tunes), and don't go any faster than you can play comfortably. If you practice these exercises as little as five or ten minutes a day, you'll be amazed at how much your hands improve by the time next month's rudiment comes your way. Note: Whenever you see a one-bar repeat sign, play the previous measure using the opposite sticking, beginning with the left hand. The only exception to this is in the last measure of each example. Good luck!

Bill Bachman is an international drum clinician, the touring drummer in Neal Morse's US-based progressive rock band, and a freelance drumset player based in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of the Row-Loff books *Rudimental Logic*, *Quad Logic*, and *Bass Logic*, the producer of the instructional drum DVDs *Reefed Beats* and *Rudimental Beats: A Technical Guide For Everyone With Sticks In Their Hands*, and the designer of Vic Firth's Heavy Hitter practice pads. For more information, visit billbachman.net.

1

Note: from here play the 2-bar phrases in reverse order to end up back where you started

2

Note: from here play the 2-bar phrases in reverse order to end up back where you started

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