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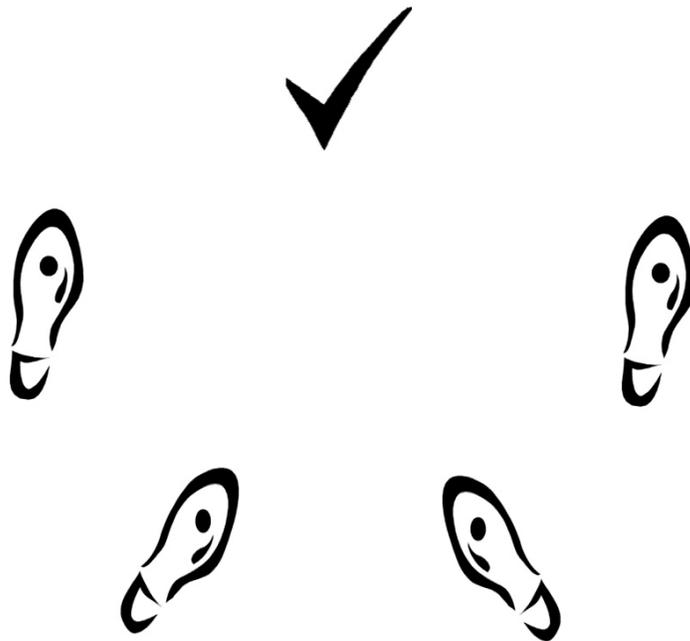
Basics Revisited: Your 100,000 Measure Tune-Up

The Three S's

1. STANCE — “Hand” bells, but we use our Feet, too!

Our stance is one of the most important things in the physicality of ringing bells. If we choose a poor stance, we force the little muscles of our low back to bear the weight of the bells and the change in balance or center of gravity as we ring. This can quickly lead to fatigue, if not outright injury, especially if we ring for extended periods of time, or if we ring heavier bells.

CHECK-MARK STANCE



2. SEAT — *The bell balances on the hand.*



Traditionally, teachers have used the term “grip” to refer to holding the bell in your hand. However, the word “grip” implies action, even when used as a noun rather than an verb, and that colors the way people think about the word. The word “hold” also suffers from this perception. The word “seat” avoids these problems. The bell is not gripped, nor is it held, but instead it is *seated on the hand*.

Creating the seat:

- Stand in your ringing stance, your arms loose by your sides, without bells.
- Gently swing your arms front and back, being sure to clear the sides of your body — meaning, don’t bounce your arms off of your body. Now, stop swinging and let your arms come to rest beside your body, then bend your arms at the elbow so that your forearms are parallel to the floor.
- Look at your hands and the angle of your wrist.
- Is the top of your wrist flat? It shouldn’t be. Your fingers should be in line with the bones of your forearms, parallel to the floor.
- Is the back of your hand even with your arm? It shouldn’t be. Imagine the bones of your forearms extended out in front of you in a straight line. This imaginary line should bisect the space between your thumb and fingers.
- Now, take a bell and place it on the plateau formed by your thumb and first finger. Do not attempt to “grip” or “hold” the bell in any way; that is, do not enclose the fingers around the bell yet, just let it sit on top of your hand.
- Imagine the bones of your forearms extended out in front of you in a straight line and extended back to your shoulder. The plane of the clapper movement should be aligned with this imaginary line.

At this point, you may gently bend your index finger to create a “circle of support” under the handguard of the bell. The other 3 fingers may loosely touch the handle, or they may not. Either way, they should NOT be stiff, but naturally relaxed.

READY TO RING?

Think of those old Western movies — before the cowboy could fire his gun, he had to cock the gun’s hammer. We need to do the same thing with bells. Gently open the three fingers that are not involved in the “circle of support” — your middle finger, ring finger, and pinky — and allow the casting of the bell to lean back a bit toward your body. At this point, the clapper is “cocked” — that is, leaning more toward the “back” side of the bell.

Note: There should be space between your palm and the handle of the bell!

Before we get to the third S, let’s try something:

- With the bell balanced on your hand, gently close your fingers. Does the bell ring? Experiment with how much energy it takes to get the bell to ring using only the fingers. (It might be helpful to use a bell below C6 for this exercise.)
- When your fingers are closed, the handle of the bell should be touching the fleshy part of your palm, the base of your thumb.

If the bell bypasses your palm and sticks out to the side, then be sure that when you close your fingers, they are bending from the second joint, not from the joint attached to your palm.



Think of the fleshy part of your palm as a basketball backboard. The handle bounces off your palm when your fingers close, stopping the casting, and causing the bell to ring.

3. STROKE — *Like a golf swing, the stroke has three parts.*

In years past, ringers were taught not only to firmly grip the bell, but to “snap” the wrist in order to create a sound. Due to our greater awareness of RSI’s, we now know this to be a dangerous thing to do with our wrists! The wrist “snap” is an example of “active wrist” — one must “activate” the wrist in order to ring the bell. The following section will teach a method of ringing that utilizes a “passive wrist” — there is some flexion of the wrist, but it is incidental to the process. The wrist is not held stiffly, it is not tense; instead it is flexible and allowed to move in response to the changing weight sitting on top of the hand.

PREPARATION — Just as a golf pro will not tee up the ball, place the club next to the ball and just scoop it off of the tee, but will instead prepare for the strike by “winding up” into a back-swing, so too must we prepare for the handbell strike.

Imagine a large letter D in front of your body. Practice raising and lowering the bell along the straight part of the D. Do not attempt to ring the bell or to keep the bell upright — let it go where it wants to go for now. Raise it just about to eye level & lower it to the point where your arm is parallel to the floor. What happens to the bell when you give it free rein like this?

NOTE: At the top of the preparation, the bell should be almost horizontal, almost parallel to the floor.

STRIKE — With the bell at the top of the preparation, slowly lower the bell until your arm is parallel to the floor, just as you did in the previous section, but this time as your arm approaches parallel, gently close your fingers to make the bell ring (remember our “sneak preview”?).

Practice raising and lowering your arm along the straight part of the D, and closing your fingers to ring the bell at the bottom. Take a look at the bell — is it vertical at strike point?

Why do we care?

Two words: SOUND PRODUCTION

Where does the sound come out of the bell? Does it come out the mouth of the bell, as if it were a megaphone? No, it comes from the side. You can hear this for yourself by ringing the bell, holding it up to your ear, and tilting it side to side. Where does it sound louder?

Because of this fact, we want the bell to be vertical at strike point. If it is tilted, the sound does not go to our audience, but instead into the table or floor, and ceiling. We hear it fine because even when it's tilted, it is still pointed at our ears!

If the bell is not vertical at strike point, it is probably due to one of two reasons (or both):

1. your arm is not parallel to the floor; or
2. your fingers are not in line with the bones of your forearms, parallel to the floor.

Correct your alignment and try again.

FOLLOW-THROUGH — At this point, we are ready for the third and final component of the handbell stroke: the follow-through.

After the bell comes down the straight part of the D and strikes, re-open your fingers and move your arm forward along the curved part of the D. The bell should end up at the top of your “preparation”, horizontal to the floor, ready to ring again! If the bell does not need to ring again, it can be brought to the front of the shoulder for damping.

But what about the *circles*??

Now that we have learned to make a D shape while ringing, we find that in practical application, the corners of the D get a bit rounded and the D becomes more circle-like. In fact, the D leans toward the ringer so that the strikepoint is “down & forward.”

100,000 Measure Tune-Up

1 2 3 4

Staff 1: 4/4 time signature. Measures 1-4. Notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5.

5 6 7 8

Staff 2: 4/4 time signature. Measures 5-8. Notes: G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6.

9 10 11 12

Staff 3: 4/4 time signature. Measures 9-12. Notes: G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7.

13 14 15 16

Staff 4: 4/4 time signature. Measures 13-16. Notes: G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8.

17 18 19 20

Staff 5: 3/4 time signature. Measures 17-20. Notes: G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9.

21 22 23 24

Staff 6: 3/4 time signature. Measures 21-24. Notes: G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10.

25 26 27 28

Staff 7: 3/4 time signature. Measures 25-28. Notes: G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11.

29 30 31 32

Staff 8: 3/4 time signature. Measures 29-32. Notes: G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12.