

How to Take Proper Care of Percussion Instruments



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Introduction

Schools all across the country support music programs to introduce students to music, and part of that education includes care of the instruments that the students will be using. Teachers can have hundreds of students to train and watch over, and an equal number of instruments. This means that locking up instruments, or only allowing students to use them under teacher supervision, is both impossible and a poor use of the teacher's time and skills. This manual will be a time and cost effective way to teach proper instrument treatment to students so that teachers can focus on musical skills and school resources can be used more efficiently. Additionally, poor instrument care can result in financial costs for which many music programs do not have the funding. Some instruments can cost thousands of dollars to repair or replace, and most programs cannot easily bear such a burden. Finally, proper care will result in a better sound from the instrument and deeper understanding for the student, meaning a greater and more fulfilling experience for both students and teachers.

This training manual will provide new students with the information and instruction on how to

- remove or replace parts of various instruments
- properly clean and care for various instruments
- correctly tune and strike instruments to avoid damaging them

Equipment



Important Sticks

Drum Sticks

Use to play membranophones. These are made entirely of wood and have a small bead on the head. Using these on idiophones can damage the instrument.



Drum Mallets

Use to play membranophones. These have a head of soft wool or cotton fluff. These come in many different sizes.



Keyboard Mallets

Use to play certain idiophones, such as keyboards or cymbals. These have a head of spun yarn. These come in varying levels of density.



Tools

Drum Key

Use this to tune membranophones.

Turn clockwise to tighten bolts, and counter clockwise to loosen bolts.



Instrument Stand

There are many different kinds of stands that fit many different kinds of percussion instruments.

Be sure to familiarize yourself with each one before use, as they are all different, and instruments can slip out of loose stands and become damaged.



Membranophones



Definition of a Membranophone

A membranophone is a percussion instrument which produces sound by way of a vibrating membrane. The most common way of vibrating the membrane is by striking it with a hand or stick. The most common type of membranophone is the drum, which is composed of a shell with at least one membrane, referred to as a drum head, pulled over an open end of the shell.

List of Commonly Played Membranophones

Snare Drum



Bass Drum



Timpani



Bongos



Tom Drums

(Also called tom-toms or tenor drums)



Drum Head Care

Removing Heads

1. Using your drum key, pick any screw on the drum head and loosen by one full turn.
2. On the same side of the drum, go to the screw directly opposite from the first and loosen by one full turn.
3. Proceed counter clockwise from the second screw, loosening the third screw by one full turn.
4. Repeat steps 1-3, proceeding opposite from your current screw, loosening, and then proceeding counter clockwise.
5. Loosen all screws by one turn until all screws are free and you may lift the drum head.

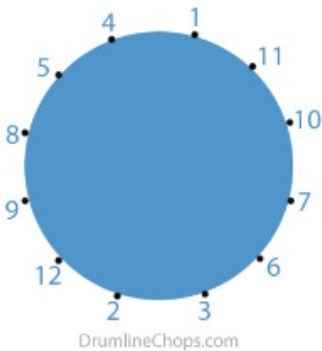


Diagram: The proper order for changing any drum head.

Replacing Heads

To replace a drum head, follow the steps from the “Removing Heads” section in order, with one change. Simply turn your drum key clockwise to tighten the screws, instead of turning counter clockwise to loosen them. Be careful to avoid over tightening the screws.

Tuning

1. To tune a drum, follow steps 1-4 from the previous section, remembering to turn each screw only once.
2. Lightly tap the area of the drum head near your current screw to determine the tension of the drum head in that location.
3. Loosen or tighten each screw as needed, taking care to tap lightly against the head and make only small adjustments with the drum key.

Cleaning

Cleaning Heads

1. Properly remove the drum head as detailed in the “Removing Heads” section.
2. Take a wash cloth and dampen it with water. Do not spray water directly onto the drum head. Do not use household cleaner or other solvents.
3. Using a circular motion, gently rub the drum head with the wash cloth. Do not apply too much pressure or you may damage the head.

Cleaning Shells

1. Properly remove all heads and screws from drum as detailed in the “Removing Heads” section.
2. Lightly spray a wood or furniture polish directly onto the shell.
3. Using a circular motion, take a washcloth and gently rub the shell with the wood polish.

Idiophones



Definition of an Idiophone

An idiophone is a percussion instrument which produces sound by way of the entire instrument vibrating. Idiophones come in a very wide variety. The most important types of idiophones are the keyboard family of instruments, such as the xylophone. Keyboards are composed of the bars, which are strung together, placed in slots on the body, then struck to create sound, and the body, which contains pipes to help the sound resonate.

List of Commonly Played Idiophones

Xylophone



Chimes



Cymbals



Triangle



Steel Pans



Bar Care

Removing Bars

1. Place a soft towel or blanket on the ground near the instrument. This cloth should have the same length and width as the bars.
2. Gently unhook the bar string from the body.
3. Carefully lift bars directly upwards, one at a time. Do not pull them at an angle or the bars may drag against screws in the instrument.
4. Lay the bars on the cloth.
5. Use your fingers to separate the bars along the string and give them maximum distance between each other.
6. Gently fold the cloth over and slowly roll the bars up for storage.

Replacing Bars

1. Place the rolled up cloth on the instrument.
2. Gently unroll the cloth so that the bars extend over their original place on the instrument, with the cloth between the bars and the body.
3. Gently pull the cloth past a single bar, and place the bar into the proper slot. Place bar directly downwards, not at an angle.
4. Repeat step 3 for each individual bar.
5. Once all bars are secured and in the correct place, begin restringing the bar string into the hooks on the body.

Cleaning

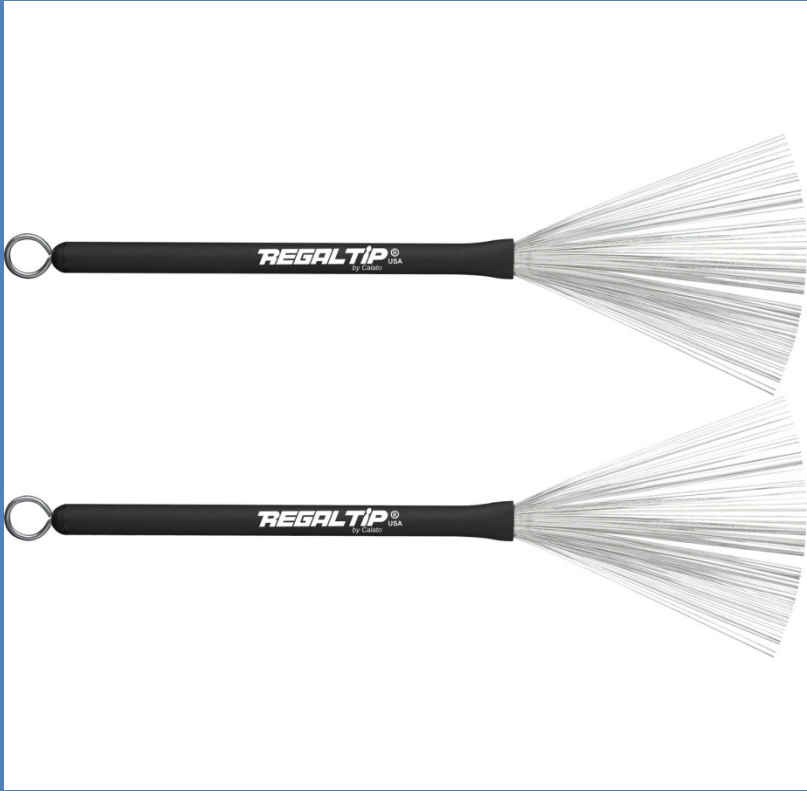
Cleaning Bars

1. Properly remove the bars as detailed in the “Removing Bars” section. Do not roll the bars up for storage. Instead, leave them flat on the cloth.
2. Get a wood polish if the bars of the instrument are made of wood. If the bars are made of metal, get some mild soap and warm water.
3. If the bars are made of wood, take a soft wash cloth and gently rub the wood polish into the bars in a circular motion. If the bars are made of metal, lightly dampen the washcloth with the water and soap, and make vertical strokes along the bars.

Cleaning Body

1. Properly remove the bars as detailed in the “Removing Bars” section.
2. Have both wood polish and warm water with soap ready, as the body of an idiophone may have both wood and metal parts.
3. Place a soft towel or blanket on the ground near the instrument. This cloth should have the same length and width as the body of the instrument.
4. Lift the resonator pipes directly out of their slots. Do not pull them at an angle or the pipes may become damaged.
5. Using smooth strokes, gently wipe the pipes using a damp cloth with water and soap.
6. Use the cloth and the cleaning solutions to clean the wood or metal parts of the body as needed.

Miscellaneous



Other Instruments You May Play

You may perform with many other instruments not covered here. Common examples include:

- conga drums, which are membranophones made of wood and played with the hands.
- wood blocks, which are idiophones made of wood and struck with yarn covered keyboard mallets.
- crotales, which are idiophones made of metal and struck with hard metal keyboard mallets.

Use the skills you learned from this manual and apply them to playing or maintaining the new instruments you encounter.

Other Sticks You May Use

When you perform with new instruments, you may also play them with new mallets. Common examples include:

- brushes, sticks with bundles of metal fibers which extend from a rubber handle.
- hammers, mallets with heads made of heavy materials such as plastic or metal.
- pan mallets, sticks with rubber around the head used to play especially sensitive instruments.

Always remember to strike the instruments only with the head of the stick or mallet, and only use techniques taught to you by the instructors.

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