

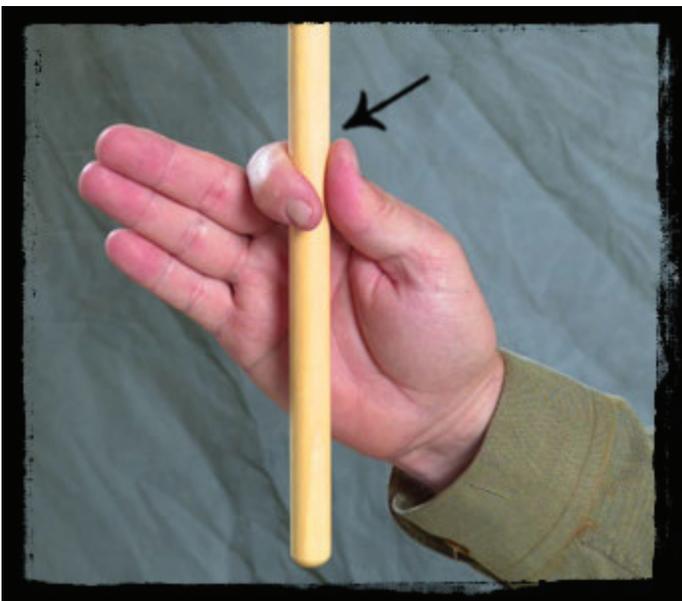
Gripping the Sticks by Mark Wessels

-excerpted from "A Fresh Approach to the Snare Drum"



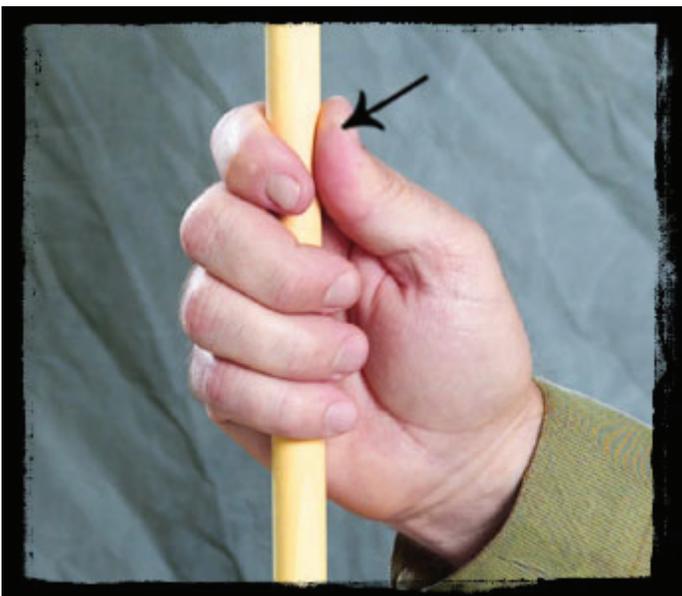
Learning how to hold the sticks properly is essential to becoming a successful snare drummer!

In this lesson you're going to learn how to hold the sticks using the matched grip (where the right and left hands grip the sticks exactly the same). The matched grip is most commonly used because it immediately applies to all other percussion instruments. I HIGHLY recommend that all beginning students start with the matched grip because of the relative ease of learning to play with two hands that grip the stick and move in exactly the same manner.



Start by grasping the stick between the fleshy part of the thumb and the first joint of the index finger about 4 inches from the butt end of the stick. This point of contact is called the "fulcrum" and acts as a pivot point for the stick.

Now, curve the tip of the index finger gently around the stick. Notice that the thumb is horizontally even with the index finger. Once you find the exact spot for the fulcrum, mark the stick with a piece of tape or felt tipped pen so that you can find the perfect place every time!



Lightly wrap the remaining three fingers around the stick. Getting a relaxed feel from the back three fingers is very important! Avoid squeezing the stick unnecessarily!

For the "matched" grip, you'll hold the left hand exactly like the right!



The proper playing position can be achieved by first standing without the sticks in your hands. Allow your arms to hang loosely by your sides with your shoulders relaxed.



Lift your forearms until they are slightly below parallel to the floor. Notice that the hands are naturally flat (or almost flat) and that the elbows are in a relaxed position, a few inches from your sides. You'll want to keep this natural space between the hands.

The positioning of your snare drum or practice pad is very important! Adjust the height of the drum so that the top rim is 4-6 inches below your belly button (about a hand's width).

As you pull the sticks up to playing position, check to see if the forearms are in the correct position (slightly below parallel), then make slight adjustments to the height of your drum from there.

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Bring both sticks up, placing the tips in the center of the drum. Your hands should be flat (or close to it), and the sticks should be at or near a 90 degree angle.



Here is a close up view of the right hand grip. Notice that the hand is flat and that there is no space around the fingers. For matched grip players, the left hand should exactly mirror the right.

In this picture, notice that the stick is resting at the very tip of the index finger and that a “gap” has opened up in the palm of the hand. This fulcrum may be fine for soft playing, but generally is very weak. If you grip the stick in this manner, you will not be able to control full strokes and higher volume levels!

For a stronger fulcrum, rest the stick in the first joint of the index finger, without any excess space between the fingers (go BACK for another look at the stronger grip).



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This is a top view of the correct angle of the sticks. Remember the natural arm position when you just lifted your arms from your sides?

It is important that you not stand too close to the drum, nor too far away. Keep your shoulders relaxed and your elbows at your sides, then simply step up to the drum until the tips of your sticks are in the center of the drumhead.



This shows a grip with an angle smaller than 90 degrees. Notice that the hands are "cocked" at this angle. This position will hinder the movement of your wrists and fingers.



Here's what I call "the chicken wing grip."

Hopefully, you'll notice that the elbows are too far away from the body and that the sticks have a larger than 90 degree angle.

Doesn't look very relaxing, does it? Playing with tension in the shoulders, arms, wrists and fingers is the number one problem that I see with most beginning (and even advanced) drummers! Get off to a great start by staying as relaxed as possible everytime you pick up the sticks!



Take one more look at the proper grip and playing position and see if your hands look just like mine by looking at yourself in a mirror!

Pearl