



Cymbal Technique Handbook

**2024**

## WELCOME TO KUMU'S CYMBAL LINE!

*Included in this packet are techniques of the Kutztown University Marching Unit cymbal line.*

*Cymbal technique has evolved over the years, becoming increasingly complex. Please utilize this packet as your reference for basic crash technique. Mastering these basic techniques will build a solid cymbal line showcasing visual precision and uniformity of sound.*



*Please make sure you take the time to practice the techniques included in this packet in a mirror and with a metronome. It is very important that you are visually hitting the crash checkpoints on the correct counts described in this packet. Start practicing at a slower tempo and work towards the performance tempo.*

*Remember: Practice makes permanent.*

*I am excited to have you as part of the 2024 KUMU cymbal line!*

***Danielle D'Ercole***

Cymbal Technician  
dercoled@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

This technique packet covers many different types of crashes performed at different positions in front of the body. Crashes will be executed from 5 basic positions in front of the body.

- Vertical
- Horizontal
- Vertical Hi-hat
- Klank
- Horizontal Hi-hat

Before we discuss cymbal crashing technique, first let's review the parts of the cymbal, posture, grip, and flips.

## PARTS OF THE CYMBAL



## POSTURE

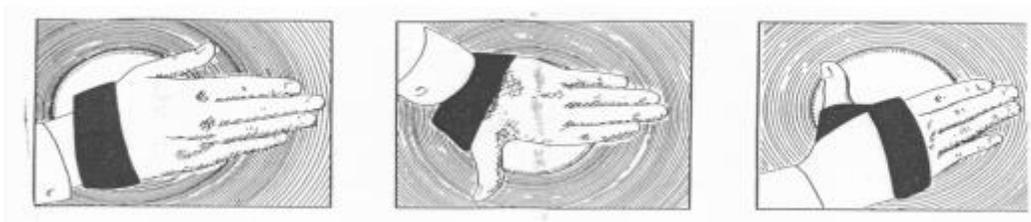
In addition to the posture outlined in the Battery Handbook, cymbal posture includes the following:

- Holding cymbals at a side rest position, parallel to your body, knots tucked in and level with your hips
- Elbows bent at a slight angle next to body
- Holding cymbals at playing position parallel to each other, biceps parallel to floor and elbows at a 45 degree angle, knots tucked in and level with your face, cymbals 2 inches apart
- Remaining still while standing at attention without moving cymbals

## GRIP

Cymbal marching grip is known as the Garfield grip.

- Hold the cymbal in a vertical position and put your hand through the strap up to your wrist.
- Turn the hand so the palm is facing away from the pad of the cymbal.
- Rotate the entire hand downward and turn the palm toward the cymbal until it touches the pad.
- The strap should rest at the base of the thumb and forefinger.



From  
"Marching  
Concepts"  
by Thom  
Hannum

## CYMBAL FLIPS

- When bringing cymbals up to playing position it is important that the cymbals are flipped on one count in unison.
- Begin with cymbal down at sides.
- On the count 3, flip cymbals up to vertical playing position by rotating both hands counter clock-wise leading with the thumbs. (Think of pressing the thumbs down and releasing fingertips off cymbals.)
- When approaching playing position, snap the wrist, and press finger-tips and thumbs back onto the cymbal. This will stop all motion.
- Practice this flip up position, trying to lock the cymbal into playing position with cymbals an inch apart at nose level. This should be done with no sound.
- The flip down, is the opposite motion. Drop tops of the cymbals away from each other, rotating counter clock-wise again. Keep elbows tucked in and lock in rest position at sides.
- Inverted flips are performed by rotating the wrist clock-wise.

## OPEN CRASHES:

All open crashes are characterized by their three-part technique; the prep, attack, and release.

- Prep – everything that happens before the actual crash
- Attack – the crash itself
- Release – everything that happens after the crash

## VERTICAL OPEN CRASH (REGULAR CRASH, REG, VO)

Most refer to this as the regular crash. It is performed at Vertical position and has 7 steps. We call this the AV format because of the appearance the cymbals create of the letter A and V in these positions.

- Prep
  - The prep contains two steps. The first step of this crash is the “A” step. On count 4, pull cymbals apart by the bottoms, while tips maintain the two-inch gap. This creates the letter “A”. The second step is the “V”. On count 4+, from the “A” position, bring bottoms in with the bottom of the right cymbal about one inch inside the bottom of the left cymbal. Tops are open now forming the letter “V”. This is done to keep the cymbals from crashing straight on, creating an undesired air pocket, which can damage the cymbals as well as destroy the sound.
- Attack
  - The next two steps are part of the attack. The attack will be done as a flam with the bottom of the cymbals hitting before the tops of the cymbals. In the third step, on count 1, the bottoms of the cymbals are making contact with the right cymbal slightly inside the left cymbal. This again forms a “V” but with bottoms touching. In the fourth step, the tops of the cymbals come together so that the right cymbal creates a half-moon, about an inch higher than the left.
- Release
  - The last three steps are part of the release. In the fifth step, on count 2, after the tops of the cymbals come together, they will open again into an “A” position. In the sixth step, on count 2+, the cymbals will open again into the “V” position. The seventh step is the last step of the release where the cymbals will return to playing position on count 3. (When crashing on count 1, the lock or reset to playing position is always count 3)
  - This flam impact created by the 7 steps of the AV format allow the sound to escape from the cymbals and travel outward. This style is very visual and should be performed uniformly across the line. Be sure that your cymbals only move on a horizontal plane and do not lift up or down as you crash.
  - Remember: A, V, bottom, top, A, V, stop

## VERTICAL CRASH CHOKE (CC)

This crash is also performed at the Vertical playing position. The prep and attack are the same as the VO crash. For the release, pull apart the tops of the cymbals into a slight "A", pressing the edges of the cymbals against your forearms, as you simultaneously pull them into the shoulder/armpit area to choke off the sound. This is a staccato crash and sound from the cymbals should be cut off completely with no ringing. Return to playing position on 3 unless otherwise noted.

## HORIZONTAL CRASH (HOZ)

This crash is executed at the horizontal playing position at a 45 degree angle. The exact same steps are used as in the VO crash but the playing area extends in a diagonal from the top of your right shoulder to the top of your left hip.

## HORIZONTAL CRASH CHOKE (HCC)

This crash is executed from the horizontal playing position. The exact same steps are used as in the horizontal crash but the sound is immediately cut off after the attack by pulling the left cymbal vertical straight against your left hip, while pulling the right cymbal horizontal in against your chest/right forearm.

## FLAT CRASH (FC)

This crash is executed from the horizontal position, but in the center of the body. Cymbals are at a 45 degree angle. There are four steps to this crash.

- **Prep** – On count 4, press the left cymbal edge into your left forearm so that the cymbal knot faces you. The rest of the left arm does not move. Also, on count 4, bring the right cymbal back towards your right ear like you are pulling a cord. Make sure you push the back edge of the plate into your right forearm. The right cymbal should be resting in your right bicep. Aim the right cymbal towards the top edge of the left cymbal between the edge and the bell.
- **Attack/Front Contact** – On count 1, hit the right cymbal at the point previously mentioned on the left cymbal, relaxing both cymbals away from the forearms, and making both at a 45 degree angle, parallel to each other.
- **Attack/Crash** – Also during count 1, after front contact, push the right cymbal across the left cymbal so that the right cymbal's back edge is in line with the bell and the top edge of over the left cymbal. Cymbals are still at a 45 degree angle, and apart but barely touching.
- **Set** – On count 3, return to the flat crash set position. All movements should be staccato.

## FLAT CRASH CHOKE (FCC)

This crash is the same as the flat crash in prep and attack but immediately following the crash, bring the cymbals back to the sides of the body to klank position to choke off sound. Klank will be described later.

## **EFFECT CRASHES:**

Effect crashes are cymbal crashes that result in different stylized sounds achieved with different techniques. They are performed at all 5 playing positions.

### **HI-HAT (HH)**

This crash is executed at the horizontal playing position. Both cymbals are placed together against the stomach horizontally. Be sure to displace cymbals half an inch. Cymbals should stay connected in at the stomach during the crash. Prep by lifting only the top cymbal to an appropriate height. Push the cymbal back down to create the attack. The sound produced should be short and crisp.

### **VERTICAL HI-HAT (VHH)**

This crash is executed at the vertical hi-hat position. Both cymbals are placed together resting against the sternum in the middle of the upper chest. The right cymbal is slightly displaced an inch higher than the left one. While keeping both cymbals connected against your chest, open the outside edges to an appropriate degree for the prep. Clamp both cymbals closed for the attack to make a short crisp sound.

### **KLUNK (KLU)**

This crash is executed at a klunk position with both cymbals at 45 degree angles from each other forming an "A". Both cymbals rest against the sides and elbows are bent at 90 degrees. For the prep, keep the left cymbal stationary. Then, pull back the right cymbal until the arm is straight out in front of the body. On the attack, bring the right cymbal in and strike the left cymbal. It is important to keep the cymbals against the body the entire time to create an dull, thud sound.

### **KLANK (KLA)**

This crash is executed at a klank position with both cymbals at 45 degree angles from each other forming an "A". Both cymbals are down at sides and half an inch from the body with elbows bent at 90 degrees. Keeping the left cymbal stationary, pull back the right cymbal until the arm is straight out in front of the body. Bring the right cymbal in and strike the left cymbal. Immediately pull both cymbals in to the sides keeping the 45 degrees. This should be a short, staccato crash similar to a crash choke.

### **HORIZONTAL OPEN ATTACK CHOKE (HOAC)**

This crash is executed in the horizontal hi-hat position. Cymbals are held horizontal and parallel to each other, about two inches from the body. On the attack, force both cymbals together making a crunch sound. Pull cymbals back apart on the release.

## **VERTICAL OPEN ATTACK CHOKE (CRUNCH, CR)**

This crash is executed in the vertical playing position. Hold cymbals vertically and apart at the normal set position. On the attack, push cymbals together to make the crunch sound. Pull cymbals back apart on the release.

## **TAP (T)**

This crash is executed in the vertical playing position with both cymbals at a 45 degree angle (creating an "A") Place the outer halfinch of the right cymbal over top of the left cymbal. Be sure to keep arms and cymbals away from the body in the "A" position. On the prep, lift the right cymbal two inches away from the left cymbal. On the attack, press down with the fingers and hit the edge of the right cymbal against the top edge of the left cymbal resulting in the ting sound. For the release, let the cymbal bounce back up to the "A" position.

## **TAP CHOKE (TC)**

This crash is executed in the vertical playing position with both cymbals at a 45 degree angle (creating an "A") Start with the tap motion but instead of ending in the "A" position, pull both cymbals into the vertical choke position under the arms. This is a staccato crash. Don't forget to press the cymbals into your forearms to help cut off all sound. Return to "A" position on count 3.

## **SLIDE CHOKE (SC)**

This crash is executed in the horizontal hi-hat playing position with the right cymbal over the left cymbal. Lift the right cymbal for the prep and on the attack, press down on the left cymbal halfway between the bell and the far edge. Slide the right cymbal forward to extend your arm fully. Simultaneously pull the left cymbal about an inch away from the body to keep the sound from being cut off. Pull the right cymbal back for the second part of the crash and end with both cymbals pulled into the stomach. Release back to horizontal position.

## **DRAG SIZZLE (SIZZ)**

This crash is executed in the horizontal playing position with cymbals at a 45 degree angle. On the prep, lift the right cymbal to make it perpendicular to the bottom, left cymbal. On the attack, drop the bottom edge of the right cymbal to make contact, and drag the right cymbal across the left cymbal to make the sizzle sound. During the crash the cymbal must remain in contact with each other or the sound will die out. Choke off the sound as noted in the music with the left cymbal still at a 45 degree angle against stomach and the right cymbal horizontal against the stomach.

## **PRESS SIZZLE (P.SIZZ)**

This crash is executed in the vertical playing position. Use the same prep as in the crunch but after the attack, leave the cymbals against each other to vibrate. Lift finger tips off the cymbals to keep the sizzle vibrating. Cut sound by pressing both cymbals completely together. Return to playing position on the release.

## SUCTION (SUC)

This crash is executed in the vertical hi-hat playing position. For the prep, hold left cymbal a two inches away from the sternum. Hold the right cymbal out and overlapping the outside edge of the left cymbal with the inside edge of the right cymbal. The cymbals should create a diagonal line with the right cymbal higher than the left. On the attack, slide the right cymbal diagonal down against the left cymbal until both bells meet. This should make a short suction sound. Release and slide the right cymbal back to the prep position without making contact with the left. When playing sixteenth note sucs, you may need to choke sound by pressing the right cymbal against the forearm while moving back out to the prep position.

## KRUANT (KRU, BONG)

This crash is executed in the horizontal playing position with the cymbals positioned in the "V" formation. Hold the left cymbal at a 45 degree angle with the bell facing up. Hold the right cymbal perpendicular to the left cymbal with the bell facing up. For the prep, pull the right cymbal out diagonally until reaching arm's length. On the attack, bring the edge of the right cymbal down striking the inside center of the left cymbal. Release the right cymbal back out to arm's length and reset to playing position.

## ZISCHEN (ZICH)

This crash is executed in the vertical playing position with cymbals forming an "A". Place the right cymbal inside the left cymbal about two inches from the bell. On the attack, drag the edge of the right cymbal along the grooves of the left, pulling out to about two inches above the left cymbal. On the release, return back to the prep position.

### AERIAL CRASHES:

Aerial crashes are crashes that start with the regular crash but release into a visual. Visuals are movements made by the cymbals that do NOT produce sound. Aerial crashes will be created and added when music is MEMORIZED. It is extremely important to memorize preps, crashes, and release counts before visual techniques can be added. This is motivation to learn your notes. 😊

## SOUND QUALITY

All parts of the open crash should come together to produce and a colorful ringing sound. To improve sound quality, focus on creating a flam impact as outlined in the break-down of the Vertical Crash. Hitting cymbal edges straight on without the A V technique will dampen the crash, resulting in an air pocket characterized by a dead sound. This can also cause the cymbal to invert (turn inside out) or warp cymbals over time.

## CYMBAL DYNAMIC LEVELS

Cymbal dynamics are controlled by the distance of the prep before a crash and by the controlled force of the cymbals upon impact. This system is shown here labeled as levels 1-5, ranging from piano to fortissimo. The musical dynamics equated to each level is shown as a basis for reference, as levels can vary based on musicality and number of players playing the same note.

*pp/p* - 1

*mp* - 2

*mf* - 3

*f* - 4

*ff/fff* - 5

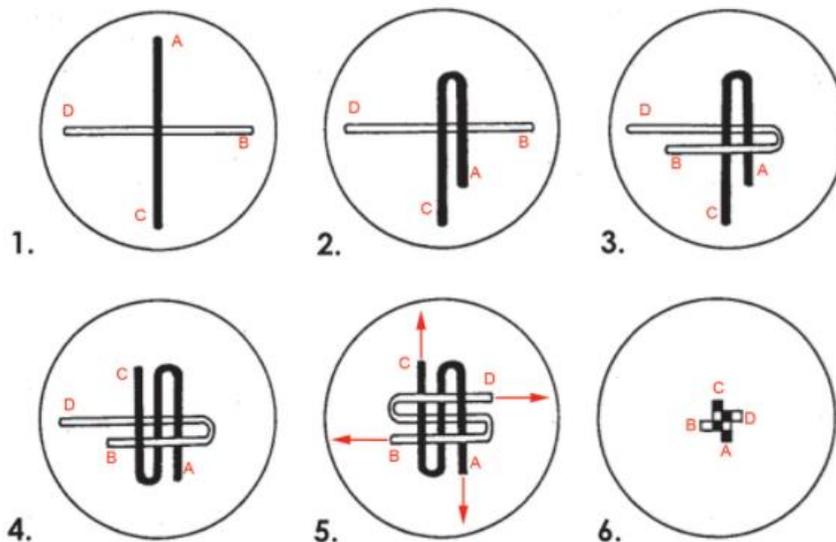
- Level 1 - During the prep, the left cymbal makes the AV motion into the right cymbal which is held stationary.
- Level 2 - During the prep, both cymbals move with AV motion, primarily using the wrist while staying in front of the face.
- Level 3 - During the prep, both cymbals move with AV motion, using the arms to shoulder width distance and release at the same distance.
- Level 4 - During the prep, both cymbals move apart farther than shoulder width distance, using more force on the attack than level 3. Release is at the same distance.
- Level 5 - During the prep, both cymbals move apart at their farthest distance point, using the most force on the attack and releasing with the same distance.

## PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

Playing cymbals is physically demanding and you must stretch before playing. Make sure to stretch: arms, hands, legs, calves, necks, and shoulders. It's also not a bad idea to do some weight lifting on your own time to improve upper arm strength or endurance conditioning such as running. When you start the season it is normal for your arms to be sore and in the case of poor technique, developing the occasional bruise. Please take care of your body. Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water and get plenty of rest before rehearsals/performances.

## CYMBAL MAINTAINENCE

- Cymbals should be kept in a cymbal bag zippered when stored and not in use.
- At any time when cymbals are taken off, they should be placed on the ground in a uniform pattern.
- Do not place cymbals on pavement or concrete. This can put gouges in the edges and encourage cracks to form.
- If it rains and cymbals become wet, they must be toweled off and set out to dry before being placed back into a cymbal bag.
- Cymbal straps and knots are your responsibility to maintain. Check knots periodically during rehearsals and performances. Tighten straps before rehearsal starts.
- Tying the Turkish Cymbal Knot:



## REFERENCES:

- Kutztown University Marching Unit Online Clinic Series: KUMU Approach to Cymbal Playing Part 4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw\\_HSPiqko8&t=1587s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw_HSPiqko8&t=1587s)
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- LMS Music Supplies. Tying the Cymbal Strap. 2018.  
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