

Types of Rolls

There are three basic types of rolls, as follows:

1. Open Roll —

This roll has exactly two bounces per hand. Its nickname is the “MA MA DA DA” roll. The hand motion is RRL.

2. Closed Roll —

This is a multiple bounce roll in which each hand plays a multiple bounce or buzz. The hand motion is buzzed RLRL.

3. Single Stroke Roll —

This roll is played with the hand motion RLRL as fast as possible. It is used primarily on timpani. Other instruments using this roll are marimba, bells, xylophone, snare drum, and occasionally on the vibraphone. Sometimes it is used on the drum set to give a timpani-like sound to the tom-toms, or for flashy snare drumming.

What type of roll should be used in which situation?

The roll notation itself does not tell a player which kind of roll to play. Generally, in concert situations a closed roll is used. The author believes this should be the first roll taught, because the technique is a little easier to master while counting and playing the sixteenth note pulse. However, there is nothing wrong with learning the “MA MA DA DA” roll first. That roll is generally used in marching bands, and is part of the rudimental approach to playing snare drum. It differs in sound from the closed roll, and it is imperative that the more advanced student be aware of both techniques. For the beginning student, only one style is necessary until he or she becomes proficient at it (this may take as long as two or three years). In any elementary, middle, or high school concert band situations, the single stroke roll should not be used except in the unlikely event that the part specifically calls for it.

