

# Purchasing Sticks and Mallets

Purchasing the right sticks and mallets for a percussion student can make a world of difference in the long-term pleasure and success of his or her work. This article will clarify worthwhile investments in the percussion student’s “toolbox” at different ages, will explain their purposes, and direct the reader to some options for purchasing them. Please know that while I do endorse specific brands, what is important is the function of a given stick or mallet, not the brand name. This article should help to clarify these functions. To begin, please peruse the table below of suggested purchases, understanding that certain terms will soon be explained:

|                            | <b>Drum Sticks</b>  | <b>Keyboard Mallets</b>   | <b>Other Sticks or Mallets</b>                                  | <b>Other Equipment Purchases to Consider</b>  |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Elementary School</b>   | <p>Concert Snare Drum Sticks</p> <p>Drumset Sticks</p>              | <p>1 pr. Med Hard Cord - Birch (Marimba/Vibes)</p> <p>1 pr. Med. Hard Plastic – Birch (Xylo./Bells)</p> | <p>1 pr. General Timpani</p>                                    | <p>Metronome</p> <p>Stick Bag (and/or Stick Bag Packages)</p> <p>Drum Pad</p> <p>Bell and/or Snare Drum Kit</p>   |
| <b>Early Middle School</b> | <p>2<sup>nd</sup> Pair of Drumset Sticks (for use in ensembles)</p> | <p>1 Set Med. Hard Yarn – Birch (Marimba)</p>   | <p>Brushes (Drumset)</p>  | <p>Drumset (5 piece kit with Ride Cymbal, Crash Cymbal, Hi-Hat &amp; Throne)</p>  |
| <b>Late Middle School</b>  | <p>Marching Snare Drum Sticks</p>                                   | <p>1 Set Med. Hard Cord - Rattan (Vibraphone)</p>   |   | <p>Black Towel</p> <p>Larger Stick Bag</p> <p>Tambourine</p> <p>Tambourine Bag</p> <p>Triangle w/ Clip</p> <p>Triangle Bag</p> <p>Triangle Beaters</p> <p>Pitch Pipe and/or Tuning Fork</p> <p>Hand Drum(s)</p> <p>Steel Drum</p> <p>Marimba</p> <p>Recording Device and/or MP3 Player</p> <p>Music Software (<i>Finale/Sibelius</i>)</p> |
| <b>Early High School</b>   | <p>Concert Snare Drum Sticks</p>                                    | <p>1 Set Med. Soft Yarn – Birch (Marimba)</p> <p>1 Pair Med. Hard Rubber – Birch (Marimba)</p>          | <p>1 pr. Staccato Timpani</p>                                   |   |
| <b>Late High School</b>    | <p>Concert-Rudimental Snare Drum Sticks</p>                         | <p>1 pr. Med. Hard Plastic – Rattan (Xylo/Bells)</p> <p>1 Set Med. Soft Cord - Rattan (Vibraphone)</p>  | <p>2 pr. Timbale Sticks</p> <p>1 pr. Ultra-Staccato Timpani</p> |   |

### Drumsticks

**Concert Snare Drum Sticks** have a somewhat pronounced bead (round ball at the tip of the stick) and are thicker in diameter than drumset sticks. The model I suggest is the IP-LD (Innovative Percussion Lalo Davila Model) for beginners. A comparable model is the Vic Firth SD1 General.

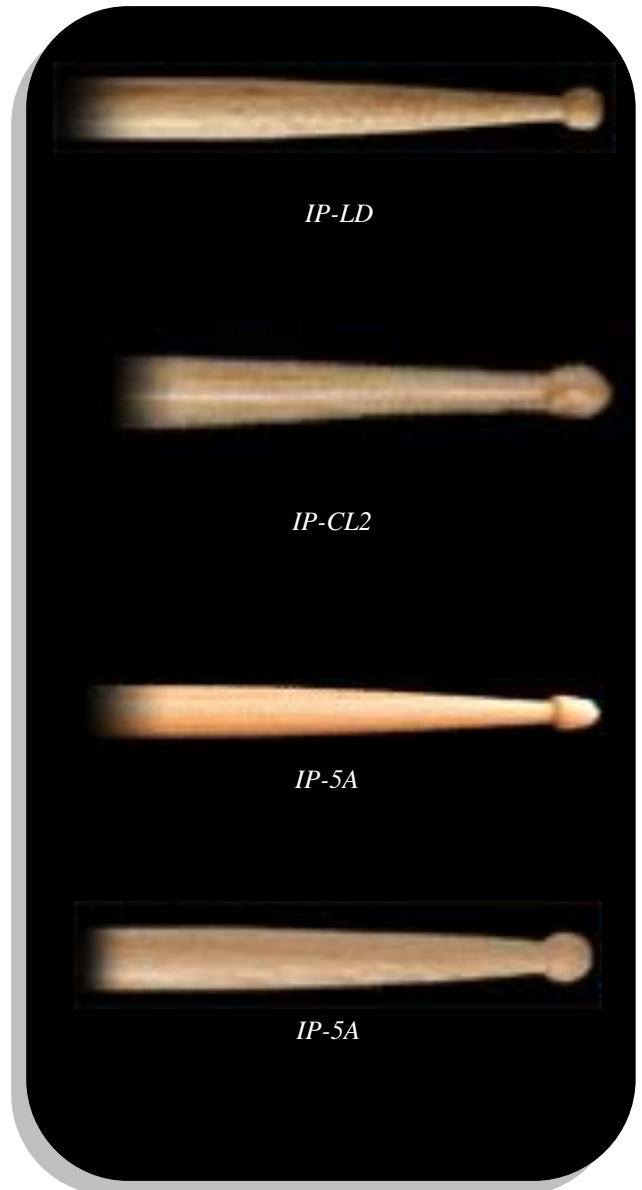
Over time, these wear out and a newer stick will be necessary. I like for students to take this opportunity to upgrade to a drumstick more suited for concert snare drumming. I prefer the IP-CL2 (Innovative Percussion Chris Lamb 2). Another model that will do well in this regard is the Cooperman Nick Patrella #5. I also like for advanced students to have a more “rudimental” concert stick available (referred to in the chart above as rudimental-concert drumstick). For this, I like the Glen Steele Model, available at [www.steveweissmusic.com](http://www.steveweissmusic.com).

**Drumset Sticks** have a number of different styles to them, depending on the style of music being played, but the ones I prefer to have students start with feature an “acorn” bead at the tip. These tips wear out from playing on cymbals over time, which leaves the stick less articulate on ride cymbals. This is why I suggest a second pair for when students begin playing in ensembles. (Articulate sticks leave a student less prone to “overplay” in ensembles.) I suggest the IP-5A (Innovative Percussion – 5A) for both purchases. A comparable model is the Vic Firth 5A drumstick.

**Marching Snare Drum Sticks** are normally provided by a high school’s drumline, but it is worth owning a personal pair a couple of months prior to marching to acclimate one’s self to the change in weight and diameter. I suggest the IP FS1 (Innovative Percussion Field Series 1). A comparable stick, though a different style, is the Vic Firth Ralph Hardimon stick.

### Keyboard Mallets

Different keyboard instruments call for different mallets. In fact, playing a keyboard instrument with the wrong mallet may not only sound bad but can even damage the instrument. It is for this reason that there are a number of different types of keyboard mallets. Keyboard mallets I suggest for students feature a combination of different handles (made from two different types of wood – either birch or rattan), different mallet heads (wrapped in yarn, nylon cord, or unwrapped mallet heads), and in different amounts (either two mallets called a “pair” or two pairs of mallets – e.g. four mallets – called a “set”).



### Keyboard Mallets (Cont'd)

Most students will spend the majority of their beginning years playing on a set of bells or a xylophone. Because the mallets provided with most bell kits or stores can sound brittle and discourage practice, I suggest owning a personal pair of softer, **Medium-Soft Plastic Mallets**. I prefer the IP F12 (Innovative Percussion Fundamentals Series #12). A comparable mallet is the Encore brand's 92R (Blue Poly-ball).

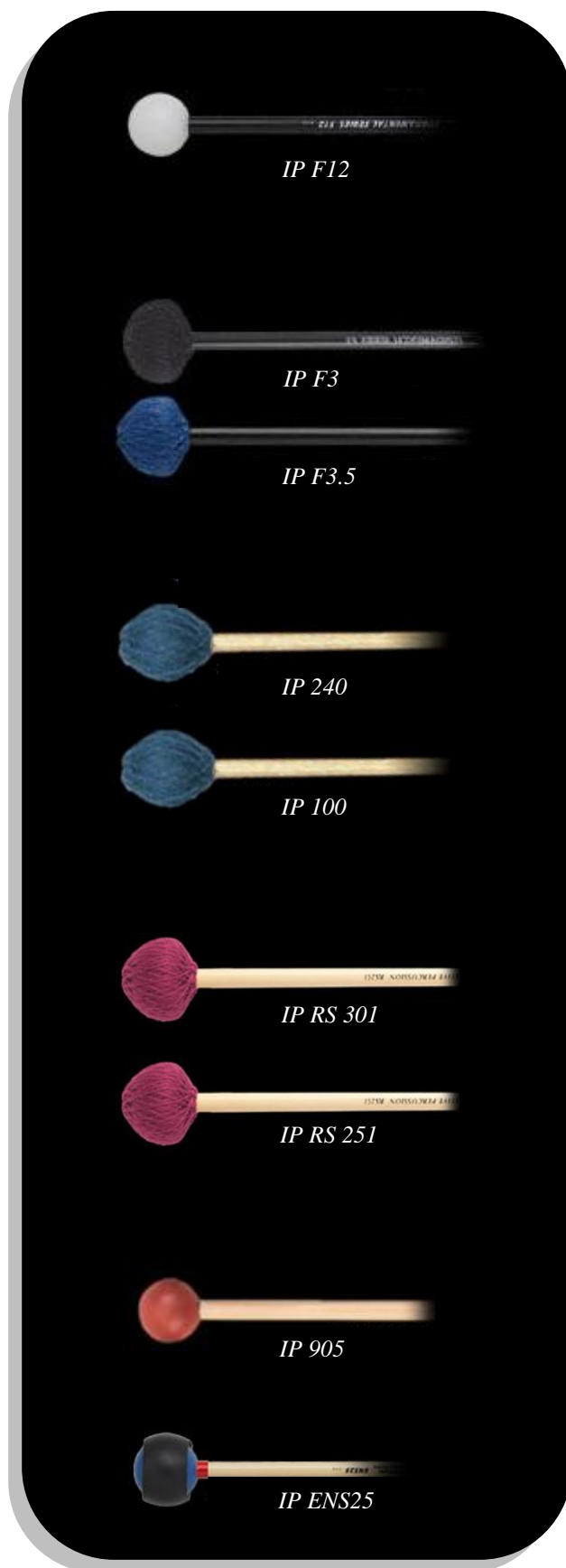
A **Medium-Hard Cord Mallet** (pair) is a good starter for students in elementary school and middle school who may find themselves playing on marimba, xylophone or vibraphone from time to time. I suggest the IP F3 or F3.5 (from the Innovative Percussion Fundamentals Series). These feature a birch handle. Another very well-recognized basic mallet is the Mike Balter M23, blue cord mallet.

As students progress to studying four mallet technique (normally on the marimba) I suggest buying a set of **Medium-Hard Yarn Mallets**. A great set of mallets for general four-mallet use is the IP 240 (Innovative Percussion Soloist Series 240 - Birch Handle). Be sure, when ordering a *set* of four mallets, that you are actually ordering two *pairs*. A similar mallet is the Vic Firth Robert Van Sice Medium-Hard Mallet. Later in high school, a **Medium-Soft Mallet** is also a good idea. I suggest the IP 100 (Innovative Percussion Soloist Series 100)

Another keyboard instrument that is played at the late middle school/high school level is the vibraphone. This calls for a different set of mallets – **Medium-Hard Cord Mallets** with rattan handles. These will last longer striking the metal bars of the vibraphone, are more forgiving on the hands with the rattan handles against the hard keys, and project better in ensembles. The model I suggest is a set of the IP RS301 (Innovative Percussion RS 251 - maroon). Later in high school, a **Medium-Soft Cord Mallet** set is a good option, as well. (IP RS 251)

As students perform more exposed bell and xylophone parts in band and percussion ensemble (high school), it is helpful to have a **Hard Plastic Mallet** available. I suggest the IP 905 (Innovative Percussion James Ross IP905 – Bright).

Other useful mallets are **Medium-Hard Rubber Marimba** mallets. These are helpful for more “percussive” marimba parts and work well on other instruments, too. I suggest the IP ENS25 Medium Hard Ensemble Series.

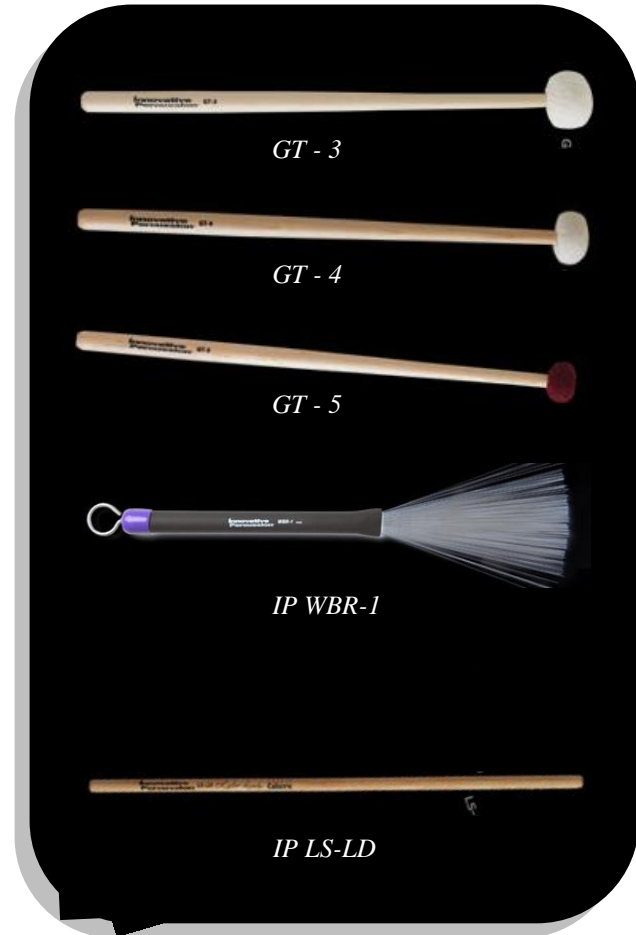


**Other Sticks and Mallets**

**General Timpani Mallets** will suffice for the majority of a high school percussionist’s career, but college-bound music students should also purchase **Staccato Timpani Mallets** and/or **Ultra-Staccato Timpani Mallets** for more articulate work. I suggest the IP GT-3 for a first timpani mallet purchase (Innovative Percussion Medium, General Timpani Mallet #3) and the GT-4 and GT-5 afterward. Comparable timpani mallets are the Vic Firth Tim Genis Series of Timpani Mallets.

**Brushes** are a very common accessory used in drumset performance. There are a number of different types of brushes available to students for use on drumset, many of which have interesting features for specific effects worked in to their design. I am personally fond of wire brushes (which are the industry standard for brushes), but students should be careful not to damage the wires in retractable brushes by bending them. I suggest the IP WBR-1 (Innovative Percussion Wire Brush #1).

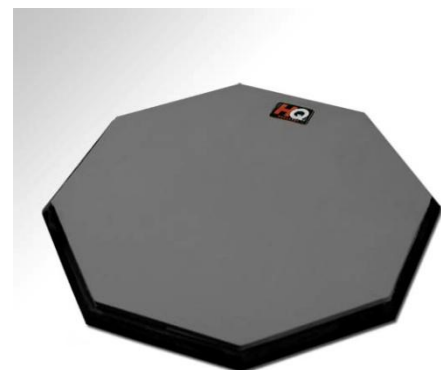
Students in jazz band and percussion ensembles may need **Timbale Sticks** from time to time. These are different from normal drumsticks in that they are significantly thinner (allowing for special sounds on timbales) and do not feature a tip like drumsticks do. I suggest the IP LS-LD (Innovative Percussion LS-Lalo Davila Timbale Sticks).



**Other Equipment Purchases to Consider**

A **Drumpad** is imperative for serious percussion study. Drumpads allow for extensive drumming without significant noise for people nearby and provide a good platform on which to develop drumming technique. These should be large pads (the size of a snare drum head) so they don’t bounce around when struck and should be as sturdy as possible.

There are many different styles of drumpads, but the style I prefer is called a large “gum pad”. This is a thin piece of rubber glued to a similar sized piece of wood. Other drumpad styles feature a tunable head (a white, textured pad with a plastic rim that comes with most beginning bell kits) or ball bearings built into a pad that simulate a snare sound, but I have seen many of these break from normal use. An industry standard for large gum pads is the HQ Real-Feel pad. I suggest the double-sided drumpads (one side softer for standard drumming, the other side harder for rudimental drumming.)



### Other Equipment Purchases to Consider (Cont'd)

A **Stickbag** is also a very important purchase to protect the many stick and mallet investments mentioned above. I suggest a stickbag that stores and protects sticks and mallets well, is sturdy on a number of levels (healthy, reliable stitching and a heavy duty zipper), has a good handle or shoulder strap, and features an extra pocket or two for accessories or music. Large stickbags (often called mallet bags) can cost up to a hundred dollars, so for the very young percussionist I suggest an inexpensive, smaller bag, and an upgrade when/if he or she grows more serious in percussion study.



**Metronomes** are a very important part of any musician's collection of learning tools. These can vary in price range from five dollars to hundreds of dollars. Having seen a number of students lose their metronomes, I suggest the following principle; The younger the student, the cheaper the metronome.

I am personally very fond of credit-card-sized metronomes, as they are more portable, simple to use and inexpensive, but I also have a number of colleagues who much prefer a higher end of the line metronome with more features. Good brands are Dr. Beat (Boss), Seiko, Casio and Korg. Useful features to look for are a headphone jack, meter settings, rhythm subdivisions and easy access to start/stop & tempo controls. Other interesting options to consider are the many cell phone applications and free downloads of metronome software for computers.

*The BOSS – Dr. Beat 88 (right) is very popular with percussionists.*



*The BOSS – Dr. Beat 12 (left) is a good example of the many credit card sized metronomes I suggest for young percussionists*



The additional purchases to consider are easier to address in no particular order. A large **black towel** (folded and used on music stands as an accessory tray or mallet tray) is an easy purchase to make at local stores and should be the least expensive one available. **Bell and/or Snare Drum Kits** can be rented or bought are normally arranged through the school in which a student is starting band. **Tambourines** and **Triangles** are best suited for the advanced high school student who is very active in concert percussion and considering a music major. A **pitch pipe** is very useful for young percussionists (middle school), but working from a **tuning fork** will eventually be more useful, once ear training better developed (late high school). **Hand Drums** (conga, djembe, bongos, cajon, etc.) and **Steel Drums** are a wonderful addition to a percussionist's collection, but it should be noted that these drums require just as much *study* as they do play. It is important that these instruments are approached with just as much diligence as more traditional, concert percussion instruments. Regarding the purchase of **marimba** and/or **drumset**, please see my other articles titled *Purchasing a Marimba* and *Purchasing a Drumset*.

**Recording Devices** change with technology every year, but it should be noted that video is tremendously useful as a study tool in addition to archival purposes. Functional skills on **music notation software** like *Finale* or *Sibelius* are growing more commonplace among high school students and can make for some terrifically rewarding projects at a young age. Finally, **MP3 players** are also a very useful tool to have on hand as there has never been so much access to such great music worldwide as there is now. Entire lessons can (and will) be devoted to developing appropriate listening skills. Listening, after all, is the backbone of good musicianship.

## **Black Dog Music Studio Purchasing Sticks and Mallets (Cont'd)**

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With an appropriate supply of percussion equipment at the right ages, students can enjoy music as it is meant to be enjoyed - as a powerfully moving, community-building exercise in expression. With the right tools, this journey can be so rewarding on a number of levels. Thank you for taking the time to read this article and please consider the following music stores when purchasing percussion equipment. In closing, I would like to invite you to support our local music stores whenever possible, but do not be afraid to contact nationwide vendors if you are unhappy with the service of your local vendors.

*Ben Wahland*

[www.blackdogmusicstudio.com](http://www.blackdogmusicstudio.com)

### **Local Music Vendors**

**Brookdale Music**

1550 N. Rt. 59  
Suite 120  
Naperville, IL 60563  
(630) 983-5100

[brookdalemusic.com](http://brookdalemusic.com)

**Ellman's Music**

508 West 5th Avenue  
Naperville, IL  
60563-2901  
(630) 355-5880

[ellmansmusic.com](http://ellmansmusic.com)

**Music & Arts**

1512 N Naper Blvd  
Ste #180  
Naperville, IL 60563  
(630) 577-0820

[musicarts.com](http://musicarts.com)

**Naperville Music**

636 E. Ogden Ave.  
Naperville, IL  
60563  
(630) 355-1404  
1-888-355-1404

[napervillemusic.com](http://napervillemusic.com)

**PM Music**

4411 Fox Valley Ctr Dr.  
Aurora, IL 60504  
(630) 978-9927

[pmmusiccenter.com](http://pmmusiccenter.com)

### **National Music Vendors (Percussion Specialists)**

**Steve Weiss Music**

2324 Wyandotte Road  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

Phone: (215) 659-0100  
Toll Free Fax: (877) 582-2494  
Regular Fax: (215) 659-1170

[www.steveweissmusic.com](http://www.steveweissmusic.com)

**Percussion Source**

1212 5<sup>th</sup> Street  
Coralville, IA 52241

Phone: (866) 849-4387  
Fax: (888) 470-3942

[www.percussionsource.com](http://www.percussionsource.com)

**Lonestar Percussion**

10611 Control Place  
Dallas, TX 75238

Phone: 1 (866) 792-0143  
Phone: (214) 340-0835  
Fax: (214) 340-0861

[www.lonestarpercussion.com](http://www.lonestarpercussion.com)