



# Coordination Building

## Windmills Of The Mind & Body

by Jeremy Hummel

**MUSIC KEY**

|        |      |
|--------|------|
| H.H.   | R.C. |
| T.T.   |      |
| S.D.   |      |
| F.T.   |      |
| B.D.   |      |
| H.H.   | Addl |
| w/foot | T.T. |

**I**s it possible for people who have below-average coordination to play drums well? Absolutely! Coordination is an interesting subject because much of it has to do with motor function and sequencing that develops at an early age without us ever realizing it. At the same time, there are exercises that can be designed to help one's coordination in different activities.

For example, I've had some beginning students who

weren't sure if drumming was for them because they "weren't very coordinated." However, with the help of a few exercises that I gave them—coupled with their own drive to become better—some of their problems were fixed.

In this article, I want to share some of the exercises that have helped my students. A few of them are very basic, while others are more advanced independence-building exercises. You can watch me demonstrate these examples at my Web site, [www.jeremyhummel.com](http://www.jeremyhummel.com).

### Brain To Body Connection

One of the most common coordination hurdles for beginners is the tendency for the right hand to always play the same thing as the right foot. For example, someone who hasn't had much experience with separating the limbs could have trouble with the following beat.

Learning to separate the hands and feet can be a very trying task for some people. Overcoming this obstacle has as much to do with knowing what you want to hear as it does with muscle memory. Once you get the desired sound in your head, you can be more deliberate with what the limbs are doing.

If the right foot wants to match the hi-hat on every 8th note, try focusing on the interplay between the bass drum and snare drum. In other words, instead of hearing the hi-hat as the dominant component, sing "boom-boom-ba, boom-boom-ba." If the brain tells the body what it wants to hear, the bass drum hits will become more confident and controlled. But it's only after the body understands what the brain is telling it to do that muscle memory can take over.

This technique of applying what you hear in your head to the body can be done at any playing level. I sometimes use this technique if I'm experimenting with new ideas and stumble on a challenging part. I usually know in my head how I want it to sound. Then it's a matter of applying that to my limbs. Sometimes it's about finding the right color on the drumset, sometimes it's about the sticking. Maybe I have to play two lefts or two rights to execute the idea, when initially I wasn't thinking of it that way.

### It's About Trust

A lot of success with coordination and independence is learning to *trust* your limbs. You've got to be willing to let something go. So, which limb will that be? Do you feel comfortable enough with a particular limb's part to not focus on it? If so, that's the one to let go on automatic. It's human nature to want to have control. However, the mind needs to be open in order to bring new concepts to life.

I relate the "letting go" concept to being involved in multiple conversations at a party. For example, imagine you're seated on a couch between two people. You begin by having a conversation with the person on your left. But in the midst of this, the person on your right taps your shoulder and starts talking to you. As your conversation shifts to the person on the right, the person on the left also begins talking to someone else. Even though you're mainly focused on your new dialog, you can still hear what the person from the first conversation is saying. While you aren't *focused* on it, you're still aware of it.

This is just one of many examples in everyday life when the senses have to multitask. The same concept can be applied to the drumset, where you can split your attention but still have it all work together.

### Help Yourself

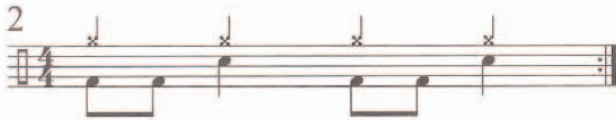
One of the most important things you can do to facilitate new coordination or independence ideas is to make sure you're physically setting yourself up for success. Any unnecessary movements could hinder your progress.

One concept to explore is paying attention to the "points of origin" in your movements. Allow your limbs to be in the moment so you can express yourself with a crazy fill, if that's what you want to do.

It's much harder to pull off that type of thing if your stick heights are inconsistent, especially if it's a repeated pattern. So the next time you play, see if your hands and feet are returning



to the same starting position after every stroke. For example, play a really simple groove based on 8th notes.



Does your snare stick return to its original starting position after each backbeat? Not only will having consistent stick heights make you better prepared for each note, it'll also make for more consistent playing. Some players unintentionally play their snare drum at varying dynamic levels because of their changing stick heights.

Most of us are familiar with the concept of not letting the bass drum beater rest against the head after hitting it. The primary reason for this is to avoid dampening the drum's resonance. Additionally, if the beater stays on the head between strokes, you're adding an extra movement before you can play the next hit—one to bring the beater back and one to return to the head. Think of it this way: You wouldn't want to slam your stick into the snare head on every hit. The same theory applies to the bass drum.

I hope that some of these concepts will help assist your mindset as you're expanding your coordination and independence. The following examples are exercises that are designed to help you separate and coordinate your limb movement. Go at your own speed as you work through them. Treat it like a car: You have to pass through ten miles per hour to get to twenty, twenty to get to thirty, etc. It's also important to maintain accurate spacing between the notes as you increase your speed.

Lastly, remember to take any exercise and expand on it to make something of your own. Challenge yourself!

The following two exercises are useful for improving your movement around the kit. Work on each one individually, then play one leading into the other. (If you don't have two rack toms, feel free to make the part work with what you have.) For a challenging variation on these exercises, add the left-foot hi-hat on the "a" of each beat while keeping the bass drum on quarter notes.



Here are a few more syncopated examples.



Once you get these exercises under control, challenge yourself further by increasing the tempo or by leading with the left side of the body.

To see Jeremy perform these examples, go to [www.jeremyhummel.com](http://www.jeremyhummel.com).



**Jeremy Hummel** was an original member of Breaking Benjamin. He helped that group achieve platinum status with their second release, *We Are Not Alone*. He has since turned his efforts to session work and drum instruction in Pennsylvania. Jeremy can be reached at his Web site, [www.jeremyhummel.com](http://www.jeremyhummel.com).



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