

Gabe Sakuma  
A Guide to a Daily Conducting Routine

Warm Ups

Calisthenics: Make sure to massage, stretch, and loosen up the appropriate joints and muscle groups before starting. Use the following checklist: fingers, hands, wrists, forearms (*carpi*; essentially the “grip” muscles; tend to get very tight), elbows, upper arms (*triceps* and *deltoids*), shoulder, neck, and pectoral muscles.

Posture: Check your posture when you first start and constantly throughout your routine. Make sure it *looks* confident but *feels* natural and comfortable. Keep your hands/baton centered at sternum level (this keeps your technique from “riding up,” causing shoulder and neck problems). Remember, if something doesn't feel right, you're probably doing something wrong.

Breathing: Practice breathing like you would before playing or singing. It relaxes the body and focuses the mind.

Technique

Flash Cards: These are a great way to keep track of all the basic techniques to be practiced everyday. Much like practicing scales or music passages, these need to be mastered slowly at first. Faster tempos may be applied later.

- Time Signatures (Basic Shapes): 2, 3, 4, 5 (2+3), 5 (3+2), & 6. Higher numbers may be added, but they usually fall under one of these shapes (5/8 uses a '2' shape, 7/8 a '3' shape, etc.).
- Tempo: no change, ritardando, accelerando, stringendo, rubato. Tempo changes may be applied to one measure or over multiple measures.
- Articulations (Basic Styles): **neutral** (no articulation), **staccato** (detached, · ), **legato** (smooth), **tenuto** (full value; slight stress or pressure on each beat; - ), **sforzando** (accented; > ), **marcato** (stressed; emphasized), **sforzando-staccato**, **sforzando-tenuto**. Beat patterns should conform to the articulation addressed (ex. modified classical is great for legato but not at great for staccato).
- Dynamics: no change, crescendo, decrescendo, fp, fp-crescendo, sfzp, sfzp-crescendo. Dynamics may be applied to one measure or over multiple measures.

Ideally, practice every combination every day, although more focus may be spent on certain cards (ex. the '4' shape is much more common than the '6' shape).

Repertoire

Whether you are practicing one passage or an entire piece, several run-throughs using the following schema train different aspects of your conducting:

Just beat time: This should be practiced but probably should not be done in front of a group. Focus on keeping the beat simple and working smoothly though all of the time and tempo changes. Do not worry about articulations or dynamics at this point.

Now add articulations: Only do this once you are comfortable with the time.

Now add dynamics: Only do this once you are comfortable with the time and the articulations.

Right hand only: hopefully self-explanatory.

Left hand only: hopefully self-explanatory.

Head & body only: hopefully self-explanatory.

Just give cues: Cues should be well prepared, clear, and style appropriate. DO NOT beat time here (AT ALL!). Hear the time in your head (or sing the piece) as you give cues.

Just conduct the melody: Melding, rubato, and singing to be used here. Once again, DO NOT beat time during this run-through.

After all these have been practiced, try a combination of all of them. Eventually, your conducting should focus more on cues, melodic phrases, and time, style, and dynamic changes rather than simply beating time. However, the time must be properly internalized (i.e. second nature) and therefore must be practiced extensively.