

Instrumentation Ratio

The ratio of the instruments is an important factor in the overall sound of any ensemble and drumlines are no exception. This will only be a guideline however because many less competitive ensemble have to deal with what members and instruments they have. That said if you are purchasing equipment this will help you to have a balanced ensemble.

The Battery

The drums that are marched are referred to as the battery. In general there should be two snare drums for each set of multitenors. This is a rule that breaks in very small drumlines, as you will see below. There should also be at least one cymbal player for every two snare drums so that the snareline can play cymbal rides.

Here is a chart for very small to very large drumline instrumentations. Over the years several drumlines have experimented with different ratios. The ratios with a "*" are the most common and recommended.

SNARE DRUMS	MULTITENORS	BASS DRUMS	MARCHING CYMBALS
1	1	2	1
2	1	3	1
* 2	2	4	2
* 3	2	4	2-3
* 4	2	4	2-4
4	3	4	2-4

4	3	5	2-4
* 5	3	5	3-5
* 6	3	5	3-6
6	4	5	3-6
7	3	5	4-7
* 7	4	5	4-7
8	3	5	4-8
* 8	4	5	4-8
8	5	5	4-8
9	4	5	5-9
* 9	5	5	5-9
9	5	6	5-9
10	5	5	5-10
* 10	5	6	5-10
10	5	8	5-10
11	5	5	6- 11
* 11	6	6	6-11
11	6	8	6-11
* 12	6	8	6-11

Most groups begin with 2 to 5 snare drums depending on budget and membership. The number of multitenors, basses and cymbals are often decided by the same two factors. Few lines exceed 9 snares, as it is more difficult to cleanly articulate fast passages and simply manage an ensemble so large. Eight-member basslines are often split into two four-member lines (basses 1, 3, 5, 7 and 2, 4, 6, 8) that can play unison parts for large impacts and fortissimo passages.

The Pit

Each pit (front ensemble) should include tympani, a concert bass, suspended cymbals, a gong, hand-held percussion and some auxiliary percussion (congas and or concert toms). In general there should be the same number of xylophone to orchestra bells, and vibraphones to marimbas. Most small schools and drum corps begin with one of each instrument.

Xylophone	Orchestra Bells	Vibraphone	Marimba	Tympani
1	1	1	1	3-4
1	1	2	2	3-4
2	2	3	3	4-5
3	3	4	4	4-5



St. Michaels College School Drumline in their debut performance.
SMCS Homecoming, September 2005.