

# How to Develop Musicality

Focusing on  
THE HOW

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of Drumming with Parameters



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**How to Develop Musicality - Focusing on  
the How of Drumming with Parameters**

Confident Drummer Series

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# How to Develop Musicality - Focusing on the How of Drumming with Parameters:

Have you ever realized you don't necessarily need to add anything new to what you already know how to play?

There are drummers out there who play the simplest, and yet they are great, amazing musicians.

Why? Because they focus on the 'how' of what they do. It's not what they play that makes them great, it's how they play it.

There was a point in their development as musicians when they became aware of the fact that doing more wasn't the way to greatness.

What was more important was the quality of what they played, the control over what they did on the drums, the nuances they were able to handle.

They noticed that when they focused on that, magic happened. This is a crucial insight, often overlooked even by very good drummers, which is the gateway to taking your art to the next level.

Of course this doesn't mean you have to stick to basic beats for then next 10 years.

It just means that unless you understand this, no matter how complex you play, no matter how much stuff you add to your repertoire, it won't mean anything.

You are investing in the wrong direction. By focusing on the how, instead, you may play the easiest thing, but it won't sound like that. It will sound deep and meaningful.

Even drummers who play very busy, if they are true masters, know this and use it all the time.

My point is that even in their case, they are not great because they play complex stuff, they are great because of how they do it.

In fact this approach is true and works at all levels, from the newbie to the master who can go even deeper in honing his or her expressive skills.

There's one effective and powerful way to focus on the how: it's the application of parameters to what you play.

Parameters are frameworks, guidelines, variables. They are layers of variations we can add to what we are playing.

You've used them already every time you played something on the drums, because you've naturally performed it at a specific tempo, at a given dynamic level, with a certain time feel and so on.

The idea here is to stop letting those things happen almost by chance, and instead isolate each aspect until we have full control over it and we can choose when and how to use it.

Because here's the key: each combination of parameters conveys a specific meaning, which means it creates a certain emotion.

Communicates something different. And since music is communication, it's expression, it's about creating emotions, we want to know the rules of the language well enough so that our message gets across.

As you've probably heard, in any language the words are not the message. The words are the data, they are the 'what', and that part has been discovered to be less than 10% of the communication.

On the drums that part is the technical part: the rudiment, phrase, beat that you are playing.

What gets the message across is the way you say it, the emotional content in it, which is located precisely in the how you say it.

You can say 'hi' in 10 different tones of voice, and with 10 different expressions on your face.

Even though the data is the same, the meaning will be radically different

each time.

That's exactly what happens when you play a beat or a phrase in 10 different combinations of parameters. The beat is the data.

What gets to the listener is how you play it, which contains the remaining 90% of the information communicated.

The reason many drummers are unmusical is that they play everything in a very mechanical and repetitive way.

There's no contrast, no tension and release, no nuances. In other words, they only care about the data, the what, and so there's no emotion in it.

That's why I recommend you start experimenting with this concept by applying the following parameters to anything you practice:

- Speed. It's the tempo at which we play, and it's the most obvious parameter.

However, even here, unexperienced drummers tend to sound good only at medium, comfortable tempos.

Also, speed can include accelerandos (gradually increasing the tempo) and rallentandos (gradually decreasing the tempo), to convey a certain emotion.

- Dynamic. It's the volume at which we play. It goes without saying that most drummers are pretty unfamiliar with lower dynamics.

Also, dynamics can include accents, crescendos (gradually increasing the volume) and decrecendos (gradually decreasing the volume), which are a beautiful, effective way to make things more intense.

- Orchestration. It's the way we arrange patterns on the different parts and sounds of our drum kit.

The drum set is like a small orchestra and we can become very creative with this.

Each sound has a character, which influences what's being communicated, even if the data is the same.

However, using this approach requires some practice and experimentation, to make sure everything flows and grooves properly, and to pick the



perfect sound (or tuning) for the situation.

- **Subdivision.** It's the cadence underneath what we play. It can be obvious or implied.

We can displace a paradiddle over any subdivision and it will sound different every time.

We can also play a basic beat and, based on the subdivision the play on the cymbal, it will mean something completely different.

- Level of swing. It's the amount of swing/shuffle feel we superimpose to what we play.

Between straight 8ths to dotted 16ths (and beyond) there's a universe of subtleties - and times feels - available.

- Permutation. It's the positioning of the phrase or rhythm, relatively to the pulse.

Starting a phrase in a different part of the measure completely changes its musical meaning.

- Time positioning. It determines where we sit on the beat. Exactly on it, or ahead or behind.

This dramatically changes the feel and the emotional content of what we play.

Imagine how far you can get even just with single stroke rolls, if you explore all of the above possibilities!

You can begin by using these guidelines:

- Start with one simple groove and one simple phrase.

- Choose one parameter and work only on that one. For instance, if you choose speed, practice from 30 to 300 bpm.

If you choose volume, practice from as soft as possible to as loud as possible, and so on.

- Then choose a combination of 2 parameters.

- Create a combination that includes all parameters.
- Record yourself and notice what each combination determines in terms of emotions communicated.
- Dedicate 30 minutes every day to this study, 15 minutes on a beat and 15 on a phrase or fill, for one month.
- Include these ideas in your music.

Pick the parameters you are less familiar with and focus on those. This routine will benefit your drumming immensely.

Related resources:

'Hands & Mechanics' - Altitude Drumming - Volume 2

'Drum Chops Mastery - Gospel Chops & Beyond'

'Groove Mastery & Formulas' - Altitude Drumming - Volume 8

'Interpretation & Arrangement' - Altitude Drumming - Volume 9