

Four Mallet Techniques

There are several commonly-used techniques for playing with four mallets. In this curriculum we will learn about one of them: the Stevens grip.

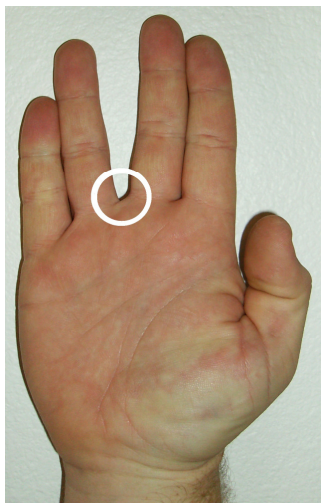
(Note from the author: I prefer teaching students to use the Stevens grip, especially in a large group, or classroom, setting. After teaching my percussion students a few different techniques it seemed that the Stevens grip was the most natural grip and seemed to 'click' with more students than other common grips. I use it myself as well. As a percussionist who is affected by carpal tunnel syndrome in both wrists I need a grip that requires the least amount of tension in the hands while playing very wide or very close intervals. The Stevens grip is very relaxing and puts the least amount of strain on my hands and wrists. This is my opinion based upon my experience as a teacher and a player. It is not a rule. Feel free to learn and use a different technique if you'd like to do so.)

Stevens Grip

Outside Mallet

Look at your palm. Spread your ring finger and middle finger away from each other. Your hand will probably look like your imitating Spock from *Star Trek* (ex. 1). "Live long and prosper." Place the mallet in the webbing between your ring and middle fingers. The end of the mallet should be about 4"-5" from where you placed it in your hand. Next, close your ring and pinky fingers over the mallet, holding it securely in place, but not holding it with a tight grip (ex. 2) These two fingers don't move when you're playing. The Stevens grip will feel a bit loose at first. As you use the grip you'll learn how much pressure you'll need to keep things in place. The outside mallet should not move around within your hand. When held properly, it is an extension of your hand. It only moves when you move your hand, wrist, or arm.

ex. 1, webbing



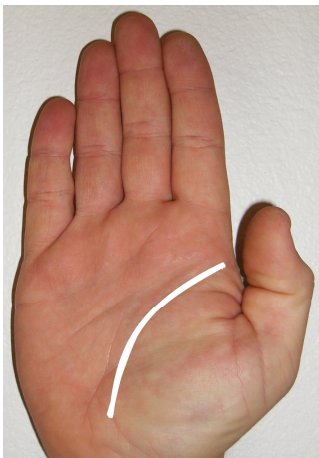
ex. 2, outer mallet



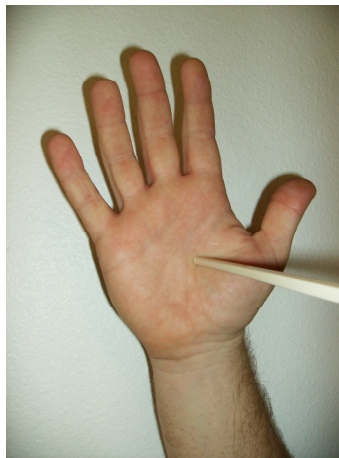
Inside Mallet

Look at your palm then close your fingers into a fist. Your middle finger should land near the center of your wrist on a curved line that frames your thumb. Hand surgeons refer to this line as the Thenar (ex. 3). Place the end of your mallet in the center of this line, right where your middle finger landed while in a fist (ex. 4). Once you place the end of the mallet on the line it should not move from that spot. That spot will be your fulcrum point, or the support point as your mallet acts like a lever. Next, rest the mallet on your index finger on the Distal Interphalangeal. That's the crease that is closest to the tip of your finger (ex. 5). Place your thumb on top of the mallet. Your thumb will keep light pressure on the top of the mallet so that it stays in that crease on your index finger. The last part of the grip involves your middle finger. Simply place your middle finger on the end of the mallet. That will help the end stay in place. Voila! Stevens grip! (ex. 6 & 7)

ex. 3, Thenar



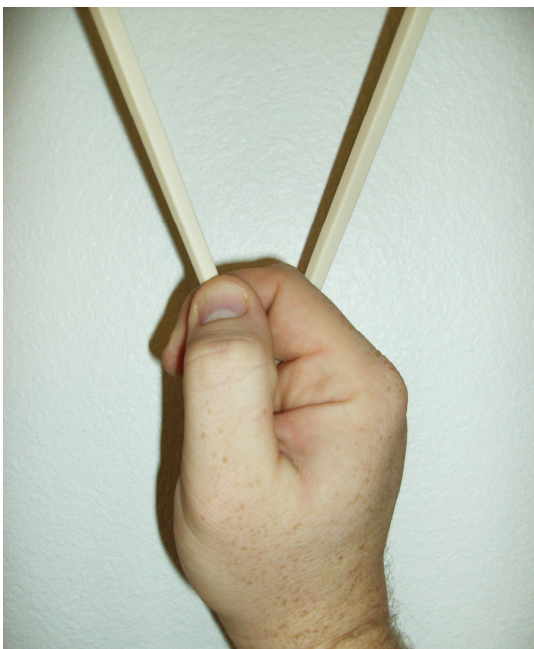
ex. 4, fulcrum



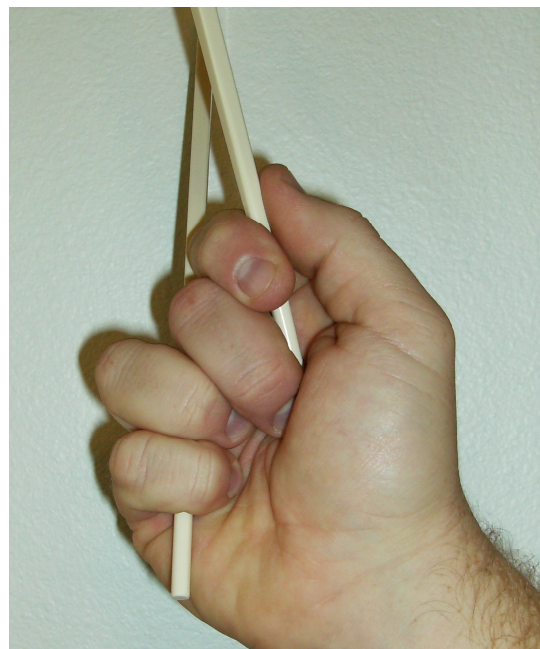
ex. 5, index crease



ex. 6, Stevens grip top view



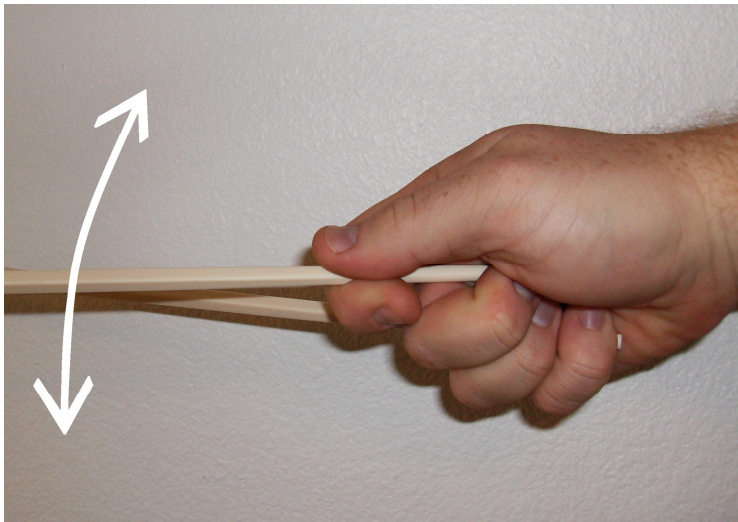
ex. 7, Stevens grip side view



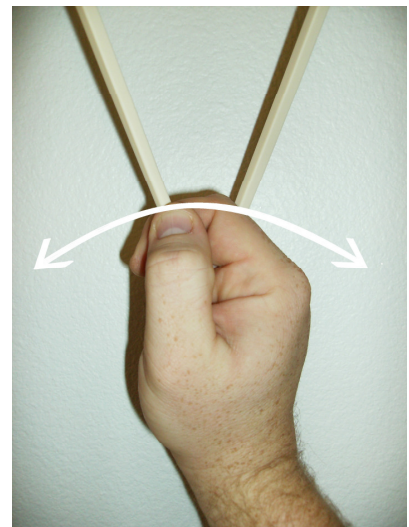
Playing with the Stevens Grip

- Keep your hands up as though you were going to shake hands with someone. Don't turn them in like a 2-mallet grip or like a matched snare grip.
- To play with both mallets simultaneously move your wrists in a vertical motion making sure that both mallets strike the keyboard at the same time (ex. 8). Watch the ends of your mallets. They should all be travelling the same distance. If one mallet is going higher than another mallet then you have either turned your wrist away from the up position or you are not moving your wrists in a vertical motion.
- To play with one mallet at a time while playing a roll, a tremolo, or an arpeggio, you'll need to use a rotating motion in your wrists. The rotating motion is the same that you would use to turn a door knob. Making sure that there is no tension in your wrist, rotate your wrist back and forth. This will cause the inner and outer mallets to strike the keyboard in an alternating manner.
- To change the interval, or distance, between two mallets in one hand simply move your index finger left, or right, while keeping the inside mallet placed in the index crease (ex. 9). You should be able to move your index finger and adjust your mallets so that they can play as close as two notes next to each other or as far as two notes that are at least an octave apart.
- Sometimes you'll need to play a part in your music where you only need to mallets, but you've already got the four mallets in your hands. Don't put the outer mallets down. Just adjust your wrists slightly to bring the outer mallet up and out of the way so that you don't accidentally strike the keyboard. You can use the inner two mallets by themselves. When you do, use the same rotating motion with your wrists. Just don't rotate out so far that your outer mallet hits the keyboard.

ex. 8, vertical motion



ex. 9, changing interval



For more information, or to see a video demo, on the Stevens grip check out VicFirth.com. There is a video lesson section with dozens of lessons from professional percussionists. Gifford Howarth has a video lesson series on how to hold and use the Stevens grip. There are many resources out there with video lessons, but VicFirth.com has world-renowned percussionists teaching the lessons.