



JOST NICKEL'S **FILL BOOK**

A SYSTEMATIC & FUN APPROACH TO FILLS

67 MP3
FILLS
AND 20
VIDEOS
ONLINE

Switch & Path Orchestration
Moving Around the Kit
Clockwise & Counterclockwise
Step-Hit-Hi-Hat
Hand & Foot Roll
Cymbal Choke
Stick Shot
Flam Fills
Blushda
Diddle Kick





Jost Nickel's

FILL BOOK

Thanks

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Beyerdynamic Microphones: Bernd Neubauer

I dedicate this book to my wife, **Mareike**, and to my daughters, Alma and Mathilde.

www.jostnickel.com

Advice

The attached CD contains MP3 files that can be used with any MP3-compatible hardware such as computers, tablets, MP3 players, most CD players, and most car stereos. Once copied onto your computer, these sound files can be imported into any MP3 player, such as an iPod.

Note: Some older model CD players and car stereos may not be able to read the enclosed MP3 data disc. If this is the case, you have permission to save these files onto your computer and use a program such as iTunes to burn new audio CDs, which will be playable on your current CD player. Incorrect handling may cause the damage of an incompatible device. In these cases, the manufacturer's liability is excluded.



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Preface

I remember clearly how, ten minutes before my audition with **Jan Delay & Disko No.1**, I sat in front of the practice room in my car and briefly collected my thoughts. It was obvious it would only come down to how the songs grooved with me on the drums. I focused on the right tempo, groove, and playing together with the band, and I deliberately decided to just play simple fills.

Why only simple fills? To be blunt, I wanted to avoid the impression that I needed to prove my ability to play complicated fills, and I didn't want the music to suffer from too many, or inappropriately placed, fills.

After Jan had chosen me, I started to reach deeper into my box of tricks for fills. On the one hand, it makes the music more enjoyable and, on the other, it is simply great fun.

Fun is the key word. I simply enjoy dealing with the instrument and especially with fills.

Whether I play these fills within a band context depends completely on the music and the circumstances. If I have a certain idea for a fill (or a groove) when I'm practicing, I don't consciously think about whether it is usable (or seems usable). If it's fun to play, then it's good.

This book should be fun and helpful so you can understand the basic theory of the respective fills and can get to a place where you can invent your own. I believe all rhythmic concepts in this book (*Chapters 1 to 6*) are current and important because they can be used universally. Some of the orchestration ideas in the last part of the book (*Chapters 7 to 12*) are quite unique, as I incorporate ideas I personally like to use in fills and solos.

As with everything else when it comes to learning the drums, decide on what and when you play according to your taste.



P.S. You can find **online video examples** at my website
www.jostnickel.com.



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How to Work with This Book

Subdivision of Fills and Subdivision of the Underlying Rhythms

With fills, the subdivision you choose is crucial. This obviously depends mostly on the tempo: at a tempo of 60 it is easier to play fills using 32nd notes than it would be at 120.

If you would like to play a very fast fill at 120, you would probably choose a subdivision of sixteenth-note triplets. When you urgently need to play a very fast fill at 80, you may choose 32nd notes instead.

The sophistication of a fill doesn't just depend on the subdivision. The difficulty of fills is essentially determined by the underlying rhythm. You can play your fill using sixteenth notes (or any other subdivision) with either a simple or a more complicated underlying rhythm. In fact, the simpler the underlying rhythm is, the simpler you can keep the fills in perspective, which is indispensable. Even with fills that use sixteenth-note triplets and 32nd notes, the underlying rhythm is often much simpler (often in eighth notes) than the tempo the fill suggests.

Being Aware of the Underlying Rhythm

You should always be aware of the underlying rhythms. They will always be, where necessary, below the fills in the notated examples of this book as a guide.

Here are two ways in which to understand the underlying rhythm taken from *Example 1* in *Chapter 1* (page 12). In this fill, both the subdivision of the fill and the subdivision of the underlying rhythm utilize sixteenth notes. First, here is *Example 1* from *Chapter 1* with the underlying rhythm in line 2:

Example 1 (3-note grouping over a bar with the underlying rhythm in line 2)

(*)



R L F R L F R L F R L F R L F L
[3] [3] [3] [3] [3] (+1)

R = right hand
 L = left hand
 F = foot

This is how to make the underlying rhythm clear:

1. Play the fill in bar 1, and in bar 2, play the rhythm on the snare drum. Just play alternating sixteenth notes on the snare drum, and stress the rhythm. At the same time, you can play the quarter-note pulse on the hi-hat (foot) to enhance your understanding even further.

(*) Because all the notated examples in this book are in $\frac{4}{4}$ time, time signatures have been omitted.

Example 1.1 (Rhythm on the snare drum)



2. Play the fill in bar 1, and in bar 2, play a groove with the underlying rhythm as a bass-drum figure:

Example 1.2 (Groove with rhythm in the bass drum)



Practice? Practice!

In my opinion, there are three distinctive phases to practicing fills:

Phase 1: Introductory Phase

Because you are dealing with something completely new, first, sort out the hands (and feet) so you get to know the movements. This phase is relatively short. After a while you don't need to think about which hand plays which instrument.

Tip

Take 5 to 10 minutes per practice session to get to know what you are playing. Familiarize yourself with the movements of one fill by playing it several times in a row without a definite tempo. It may be helpful to speed up or slow down while playing the fill.

Phase 2: Endurance Phase

The new fill is now familiar, and sticking and orchestration are sorted out. Now it's time to play the fill fluidly, to keep an overview of the pulse, to always play at a solid tempo, to play the fill in combination with a groove, to pay attention to a good sound, and to increase the tempo. This phase takes the longest.

It will be helpful to have a concrete idea of how long you'd like to work on each respective exercise per day. In this book, you'll find out how to practice, which I'll go into in more detail.

Phase 3: Completion Phase

Now you can play the fill well in practice, you are up to tempo, your sound is good, and you always know where you are.

Because the fill has now been sorted out, you can add it to your repertoire in the last practice phase.

I suggest you take 5 to 10 minutes per practice session to play without notation. Start the fill at different beats, and play the fill idea over a longer/shorter period of time than you did in the endurance phase.

In principle, you are playing a kind of groove solo with the fill idea.

How to Practice (see Phase 2: Endurance Phase)

At many points throughout the book you'll find practice instructions as to how to work on the exercises when using a metronome. They look like the following:

Practice Steps	
1. Start tempo	Quarter note = 60
2. Number of tempos	3
3. Number of rounds per tempo	Every fill 2 times per tempo
4. Musical form	2-bar groove + 2-bar fill
5. Count out loud	Quarter note and "click" Sixteenth notes when required
6. Duration of exercise	Around 15 minutes

Explanation

Point 1: The **start tempo** is merely a recommendation. If you feel it is too slow or too fast, choose another tempo!

Point 2: I suggest you play the exercise at three different tempos. In addition to the start tempo of 60, move on to the next two higher tempos from the list below.

Tempo list (bpm)				
60	62	64	66	68
70	73	76	79	
82	85	88		
91	94	97		
100	104	108		
112	116			
120	125			
130	135			
140	145			
150	155			
160	165			
170	175			
180				

Practice the exercise at tempos 60, 62, and 64. Write down the three tempos, and put the date by the highest. When you feel your highest tempo becomes easy to play, take the next fastest tempo and write it on your list. Write the date by the highest tempo, and cross the lowest off your list so you always play in *three* different tempos. The *three tempos* our examples are based on are 60, 62, 64, and 66.

**Chapter 1****Switch Orchestration, Path Orchestration, Diddle Kick, and More**

To start this book, I would like to show you some different ways fills can be expanded upon through *orchestration*^(*), *dynamics*, and *doubling* up on strokes. In this way, you can create completely new sounds from motifs you have already learned, but they will hardly be recognized in the same way. You'll play many different fills through clever modification, rather than just by changing the figure. The best way to get to know these principles is to take a simple figure; the motif for the fills in this chapter is **R L F**, which is very manageable and quite simple.

Fill (Original figure: R L F)

The original figure is three sixteenth notes long, so we'll call it a **3-note grouping**. Play this over one bar.

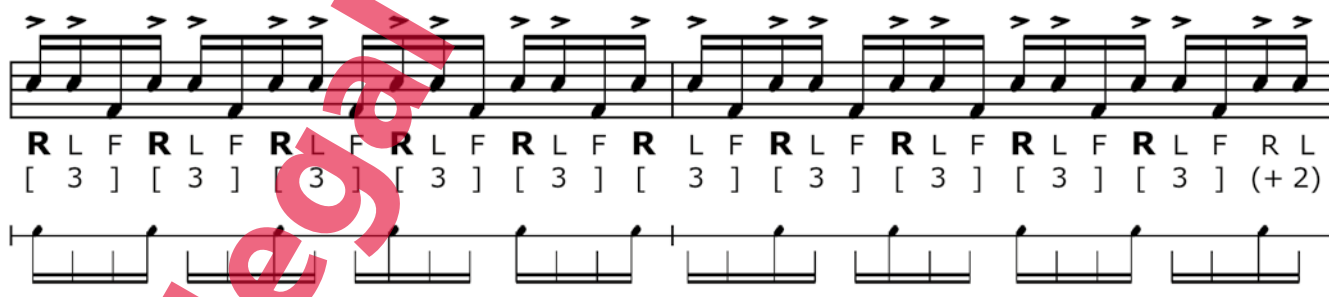
Example 1 (3-note grouping over one bar with the underlying rhythm in line 2)

R = right hand
L = left hand
F = foot

Tip

From time to time you should make the underlying rhythm clear to yourself. How this is accomplished is explained at the beginning of this book on pages 6 and 7.

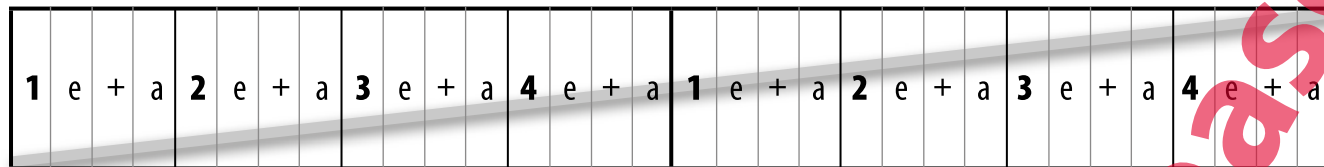
Next, play the 3-note grouping as a *two-bar fill*. The 3-note grouping continues until the end of the two bars.

Example 2 (3-note grouping over two bars)

(*) *Orchestration can be defined as spreading the beats out across the individual parts of the drum kit.*

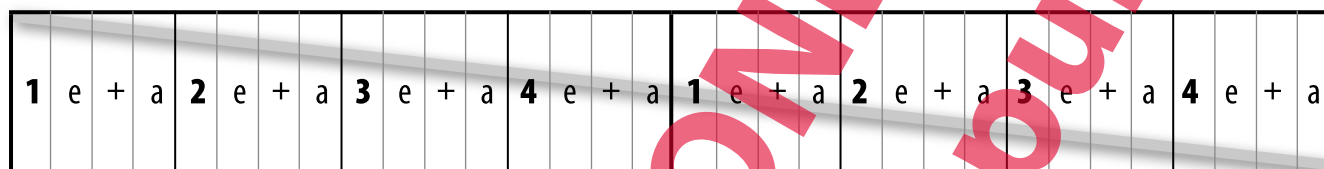
All exercises in this part of the chapter refer to abrupt dynamic changes. You should also practice gradual changes in the volume of a fill. Here are three examples:

1. Your fill starts quietly, gets gradually louder, and ends as loudly as possible:

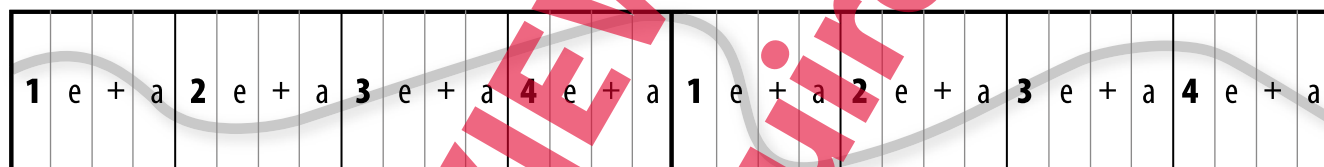


2. The opposite:

Your fill starts loudly, gets gradually quieter, and ends as quietly as possible:



3. You play wave-like dynamics. Start loudly, go louder, go quiet, etc. until the end of the fill:



Practice Tip

As dynamic-level exercises are often neglected, I recommend you include these exercises in your practice plan. *Dynamic Levels 1.1* to *4.2* can be transferred to all other fills.

If you practice daily in this way, *5 to 10 minutes* a day is enough.

If you can play the exercises well, you should also experiment with less varied dynamics (e.g., loud and very loud).

To become absolutely certain when dealing with the 4- and 3-note groupings, you should practice further combinations. As the stickings are now known, the only thing new will be to practice different combinations. To do this, you need to work with place holders (the numbers 4 and 3). The following four combinations of the 4- and 3-note groupings each represent a *two-bar fill* in $\frac{4}{4}$ time. So you know where you are, you can find the counting in the *second line*.

Sixteenth-Note Fill 3.7 (4- and 3-note groupings | Combination 5)



3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	3
1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	

Sixteenth-Note Fill 3.8 (4- and 3-note groupings | Combination 6)

4	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	3
1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	

In the following examples, 3.9 and 3.10, you will see “+2” at the end. That means two sixteenth notes will be missing until two bars are complete. You simply play R L here.

Sixteenth-Note Fill 3.9 (4- and 3-note groupings | Combination 7)

4	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	+2
1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	

Sixteenth-Note Fill 3.10 (4- and 3-note groupings | Combination 8)

3	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	+2
1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a	1 e + a	2 e + a	3 e + a	4 e + a		

Orchestration Tip: Bring the toms into play by playing the floor tom with the *right hand* and the rack tom with the *left* in all 3-note groupings. The 4-note grouping orchestration remains unchanged.

The Principle

Play the 4-note grouping using sixteenth notes. By combining them with the 3-note grouping, you will play them in all four positions.

Subdivision of fills: **Sixteenth notes**

Grid of underlying rhythm: **Sixteenth notes**

And so it continues:

Now practice all the two-bar combinations using the instructions below.

This works best with **Reading Text 4** (*6- and 3-Note Groupings Using Sixteenth-Note Triplets*).

Practice Steps	
Start tempo	Quarter note = 60
Number of tempos	3
Number of rounds per tempo	Every fill of the reading text 2 times
Musical form	2-bar groove + 2-bar fill
Count out loud	Quarter note and "click" eighth notes when required
Duration of exercise	Around 15 minutes

Moving Around the Kit 3

Now change the subdivision, and play the 6-note grouping using sixteenth notes, first as a *one-bar fill*.

Moving Around the Kit 3.1



Now try it over *two bars*:

Moving Around the Kit 3.2

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