

For many worship leaders communicating with your fellow musicians is a huge challenge. It can be very intimidating to give an opinion about an instrument you don't play. Since the drummer and the drumset play such a critical role in the overall sound of our bands, here are here are several ideas of how you can talk to your drummer.

1. Learn the Names of Drums and Cymbals

Throne – The stool the drummer sits on is called a "throne" – and no that's not a joke! Most drum thrones are adjustable and you might suggest raising or lowering the throne if you have a new drummer or someone unfamiliar with your church kit.

Kick Drum (aka Bass Drum) – This is usually the biggest drum on the drumset. It is hit with a pedal that has a beater attached. This drum has the lowest frequency of the drumset. It is a very important part of the overall sound. The bass guitar should interplay with this drum.
"Let's really lay into that kick drum on this song."
"Don't play the kick at all during the first verse."

Snare – Equally as important as the kick, the snare drum is commonly what plays the backbeat (where you want to clap). Snare drums can be tuned high or low. Snare drums can be struck in the center and on the edge of the head for different tones. You can turn the snares (the metal strings that line the bottom snare head) on or off and they can be adjusted to rattle more or less. You can hit just the rim

of this drum for a muted click sound that can be pleasing (this is technically called a “cross-stick” although some mistakenly call it a “rimshot” which is something else).
“Play the snare really loose on this section.”
“Maybe try a cross stick rim thing on this part?”

Hi-Hats – These two cymbals join together on a specialized stand that is hit with a stick or “chicked” by simply depressing the pedal with your foot. If your foot is pressed down hard these will have a quick, tight sound when struck, the more you lift your foot the louder and more wild they become when struck. How “open” the hi-hats are when hit will DRASTICALLY alter the volume and perceived volume of the drumset.
“Can you close the hi-hats a bit more?”
“What would it sound like if we just keep the hi-hat going during the chorus instead of ride?”

Tom(s) – These drums are powerful for creating transitions between song parts. They are the most melodic elements of the drumset and can create pleasing (or irritating) rhythmic patterns.
“Let’s do a tom fill going into that outro.”
“Lay off on the toms to open up space under that guitar solo.”

Floor Tom(s) – This is the larger of the toms and can be used to create low-end power and energy. If you have subwoofers in your sound system then should be rocking when this drum is hit.
“Can you play eighth notes on the floor tom instead of the hi-hat?”

Crash Cymbal(s) – These typically have shorter sustain and add an accent to song sections or transitions.
“I like that bigger crash on that intro.”

Ride Cymbal – This is a complex cymbal that can have a “ping” sound or “washy” sound. The sound changes depending on where you hit it.
“Maybe a little more wash on this part and less ping?”

Splash Cymbal – These cymbals are super small and provide a very high pitched and short sustaining accent.
“Can you take the splash cymbal home and never bring it back?”

Chime Tree, Tambourine, and Shaker – Random percussion can add pleasing elements to the song selections. It's common for a drummer to use a shaker for a verse section or for the whole song. You could use a tambourine laying on a floor tom for accents.

"You can only rake the chime tree only two times in this song… thank you."

"Let's do a tambo *hit on 2 and 4 instead of the snare for this section."*

2. Learn and Speak the LANGUAGE OF RHYTHM for Drummers

Kick, hi-hat, and ride cymbal rhythms are vital to the feel of the song sections. You might simply ask the drummer to "play busier" or "play simpler", but if you know a more specific language, it would be helpful.

"What about just quarter notes on the kick drum?"

"Can you try eighth notes on the ride cymbal?" (quarter notes are simple, eights are busier, sixteenths are really busy).

"Let's do sixteenth notes on the hi-hats."

"Let do diamonds when the bridge starts (a diamond is when a drummer simply just "hits" the crash and kick once and then lets it fade."

You can also communicate vibe through language like this:

"Play it straight."

"Can we give it a little swing."

"Let's rush the beat."

"Let's drag the beat."

3. Know the Names and Functions of DIFFERENT STICK Varieties

You wouldn't know it visiting many churches, but world-class drummers use a variety of sticks. You might suggest a different kind of stick depending on the song or style. Here are some basic options:

Wooden Sticks – the most common device for striking the drums. They come in all kinds of sizes and with plastic or wooden tips. Drumsticks have a fast attack and can add a punchy sound.

Hot Rods (Bundle Sticks) – a popular option for helping bring down the volume or perceived volume of the drumset. These kinds of sticks can drastically change the tone of the drums depending on the

player. Hotrods have less attack and “punch”. It’s common, especially with newer drummers to experiment with wooden sticks vs. hotrods to help find the right volume for a room.
“Do you mind trying hot rods on this song?”

Brushes – Mostly associated with jazz or ballads, brushes will produce a drastically different sound from regular drumsticks. In many worship contexts using brushes on one or more softer songs can be pleasing. Many drummers will be intimidated if they have not used brushes in the past, but you can always encourage experimentation.
“Let’s try brushes on this song, play them just like sticks.”

Mallets – These sticks have a soft ball of yarn wrapped at the tip of the stick and are great for cymbal swells and toms. They sound great on a snare drum if you turn the snare “off” (most snare drums have a clutch that releases the snares off the bottom of the drum head). Some songs might benefit from a groove or pattern played with mallets.
“Can we try a snare off the sound on this song?”
“Let’s do some mallet swells on this section.”
“Go to mallets on the end section.”

A Sampling of Language

The following are common phrases I will communicate with a drummer during a rehearsal.

“Drop out, but keep the hats going.”
“I like that kick pattern, but can you play something simpler?”
“Let’s start with a tom fill at the top.”
“Give me lots of energy on that bridge section.”
“Keep it really sparse and simple through this part.”

MY BEST ADVICE

This might seem like crazy talk, but consider taking a few drum lessons from a local teacher (even if you are very experienced on other instruments). Share with the instructor that you want to understand the language and basics of the instrument. For instance, if you **learn how to properly hold the stick** YOU can train up countless new drummers with confidence. Just a few lessons will increase your conviction and give you the authority to speak into the performance.

My name is Mike O'Brien and I am passionate about teaching and mentoring worship leaders and teams. My calling is to use my experience as a producer, worship leader, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist to come alongside musicians, helping them more fully worship God with their instrument and lives. Find out more about how I can help your worship leaders and teams HERE.

