

"First Things First" is a Legato exercise. Legato is an Italian word meaning "long". For musical purposes Legato means "smooth and connected" or "without breaks between notes". Make sure that you use a Legato motion while playing this exercise. This simply means to make sure that once you start moving the stick or mallet, it should remain in continuous motion until the last note of each phrase. In order to achieve this Legato motion, you must allow the stick or mallet to rebound off of the head or other playing surface. The stick or mallet should not stop in the down position between notes, but it remains in a flowing and connected motion through the entire phrase until the last note of each phrase. The last note of each phrase will stop down, and your other hand will take over the Legato motion.

Things to remember about this exercise: This exercise is a foundation for all other exercises. The faster you can play this exercise the better you will be at double beats, triple beats, rolls, anything involving stick control, and almost anything having to do with drumming.

How to use this exercise to make you a stronger player: Always play this exercise with a metronome. Start slow at 80 beats per minute, and allow the stick or mallet to rebound so it is all the way vertical. Make sure that you are hitting the playing surface hard enough so that it can rebound. Don't just tap at the playing surface, but hit through it. Perfect your technique, and then bump it up 10 beats per minute. Continue in this way. As you get faster, bring down your stick heights. Make sure as you get faster that your hands stay relaxed, because it is impossible to play Legato while you are squeezing the stick. Strive to play this exercise at 200 beats per minute. This will take time, but don't give up.