

# Drum Stick Guide

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Some of my students have been asking me about buying drum sticks and what they should need to look for when buying their first pair.

It got me thinking that there are a bewildering array of sizes and models and that it can all be a bit confusing.

This guide is for everyone not just those that are buying their first pair.

Generally, there are 3 things that you need to consider when buying a pair of drumsticks:

1. The sound that you want
2. The music that you play, or are going to be playing
3. What feels comfortable in your hands

You can break a stick down into five elements:

1. The length
2. The taper
3. The tip
4. The thickness, or size
5. The material the stick is made of

## Size/Thickness

Sticks come in a wide range of different sizes which are graded by a combination of letters and numbers.

The common sizes are 7A, 5A, 5B and 2B.

But what do all these letters and numbers mean??

In general, the higher the number and the lower the letter, the thinner the stick. For example, a 7A is thinner than a 2B.

As well as the common sizes, you'll find that each manufacturer will produce models that fit in and around the common sizes.

## Tip

The tip is one of the biggest things that will influence the sound you make.

There are four different tip shapes:

1. Teardrop – this will produce a warm and focused sound
2. Acorn – this will produce a full, rich and fat sound
3. Barrel – this will produce a loud and punchy sound
4. Oval – this will produce a wide spectrum of sound

When it comes to the tip material, this could either be wood or nylon.

Wood tips are formed as part of the stick when the dowel is turned. The wood tip produces a warm sound when played on the cymbals.

Nylon tips are moulded onto the top of the stick. The nylon tip produces a bright sound when played on the cymbals.

## **Taper**

The taper is the top part of the stick where it starts to get thinner towards the tip.

There are 3 different tapers:

1. Long taper
2. Medium taper
3. Short taper

A long taper makes the stick feel “faster” and more flexible

A medium taper makes the stick feel nicely balanced – for example a 5A or 5B

A short taper – such as on a 3A for example – makes the stick feel front heavy. This can be useful if you want a stick for big sound in a loud music situation but you don’t want to be going up in size to say a 2B.

## **Length**

Generally, sticks are around 16” long.

Manufacturers will make some of their common sizes in “Extreme” models where the sticks are ½” longer.

This extra length is designed to give the player more reach and power around the drum kit without having to sacrifice changing your stick size.

## **Material**

Generally sticks made of wood – I say generally, because they don’t have been, but typically they are:

The woods used are:

1. Maple
2. Hickory
3. Oak

Maple is a light wood and so you get a fast playing stick. This can be great for playing lighter music. For example, you might like a 5B but need a stick that isn’t as heavy, so a 5B Maple would be ideal.

Hickory is the most common wood used for sticks. It’s medium weight and durable. It can absorb shocks and it’s denser than maple so lasts longer.

Oak is even more dense and more rigid than hickory. Because it’s so dense, there are more shocks produced.

As well as these three woods, sticks can also come in Aluminium, Polyurethane and Carbon Fibre. These are extremely durable but are limited in sizes and are not as common as the wooden versions.

The wooden sticks are usually lightly lacquered. Some manufacturers have un-lacquered or nude models – these can help if you sweat a lot when you play.

There is even a special grip coating available which, again, are aimed at those players that sweat a lot when playing – the special grip coating becomes tacky meaning that you're less likely to drop a stick mid-gig.

## Summary

I hope all this information has helped you in some way.

The best thing that you can do is head down to your local drum store. Next to the stick rack, there'll be a practice pad – grab some sticks from the rack and try some out. See what you like, what feels comfortable in your hands. Also, make a point of comparing the wood tip and the nylon tip on a ride cymbal to note the difference between the warm wood and the bright nylon.

Keep drumming!!

