

Positioning: choosing the correct heights, angles, and positions for the drum set.

This is another one of those topics, as are most things related to drums and drumming, where the answers to what is best for you includes a high degree of personal preference as well as things like physics, kinesiology, physiology, ergonomics, acoustics, and technique and style of play. It's also another topic with which we could easily fill a book!

I remember reading a quote (but not who wrote it) that the choice of technique and set-up are yours, but the results are beyond your control. I take this to mean that many choices we make have repercussions that can either help or hinder our playing. It's easy to imagine placing a drum or cymbal in a position or at an angle where it is easy to play, or almost impossible to play. It's our choice to play efficiently and naturally with an understanding of how things work, or to ignore and pay the price.

Although each of our bodies are similar in most ways (arms, legs, torso, etc.), there are also many ways in which we all differ (height, weight, length of forearms, width of hands, etc.), so there is no single set of rules that will work for everyone. That said, how much, and at what angle a stick rebounds after hitting a drum or cymbal is a matter of mathematics and physics. The height and angle of the drum relative to the position of the forearm and the path of the stick dictates how that stick will rebound and how much work it will take to return that stick to a position where you can comfortably and efficiently make the next stroke. Similarly, the angles and heights of ride and crash cymbals can make the playing of them easier or more difficult, and can also result in producing the most desirable ride sound (the spot at which you hit the cymbal), and the most musical crash sound (the correct angle of the neck of the stick to the edge of the cymbal).

The greater the resistance and muscle activity you need to use, and the more you have to think about your next stroke (you arm, your hand, the stick, and the instrument are all fighting each other), the less you're hearing the music, feeling the groove, listening to the other musicians, and just playing and having fun. In this regard, set-up should be more about efficiency and comfort, how your body moves naturally, and how sound is produced than anything else. Inefficiency, fatigue, discomfort, pain, and injury are often the result of improper technique and set-up. I have had students come to me with various ailments and pains only to trace the cause of those things back to how they sit, and how they set up their drums.

Another things to remember is that sometimes a very small adjustment is all that is needed to make a huge difference in your comfort level and playing. Experiment frequently with set-up and seek the advice of a teacher or professional who is knowledgeable and experienced in these areas. Know that just because you see someone playing a certain way with a certain set-up that doesn't mean that it's the most effective way for you to play or the best way to set-up your own drums.

Remember to also factor in whether you use traditional or matched grip or play the hi-hat open-handed or crossed. Try to remember to keep whatever parts of your kit you use the most in the closest proximity (snare, ride, hi-hat, mambo bell...whatever the style of music and drumming you play helps determine this).

Two important points: 1) don't ignore seat height: the lower you sit, the more pressure and stress will be put on the lower part of your back (back problems are very common in drummers), so experiment with sitting where your hip bone is slightly above the top of your knee – this is a good starting point for seat height. Also, invest in a high quality seat that affords you the greatest support. 2) be careful of the position of your lower arm and hand when playing the ride cymbal. If you keep your hand in a position that is above shoulder height for long periods of time while playing a ride pattern, you could begin to experience numbness or tingling in your fingers (not to mention fatigue in your shoulder).

I suggest paying attention to how your body moves naturally, and to the signals your body gives you; don't fight nature, don't fight your body, and know that the laws of physics apply equally to drums and drummers as they do to everything else in our universe. Learn as much as you can about these areas, listen to and watch other professional drummers, experiment, consult a qualified teacher, and then decide for yourself.

Good luck and have fun!