



Learning methods

Most books show blue lines running from top to bottom of the page. This fits with writing the numbers in rows and joining up the numbers. Others (eg *One Per Learner*) show lines running from left to right. This fits how we talk about ringing - going 'up' to last place and 'down' to first place. It is just one example of how people think about methods differently when they learn them. There are (at least) five basic approaches.

Treble passing

This is a set of rules for what to do next, depending on where you pass the treble. For Plain Bob Doubles, these are:

- Pass treble in 1-2: Make 2nds
- Pass treble in 2-3: Dodge 3-4 up
- Pass treble in 3-4: Four blows behind
- Pass treble in 4-5: Dodge 3-4 down

Order of the work

A string of instructions tell you what to do in sequence. You can include different amounts of detail, eg Plain Bob Doubles could be any of:

- '3-4 down, four blows behind, etc', or
- 'Lead, to the back, 3-4 down, lead, to the back, four blows behind, etc', or
- 'Lead, pass treble in 4-5, 3-4 down, lead, pass treble in 3-4, four blows behind, etc', or
- 'Lead, hunt to the back passing treble in 4-5, hunt down dodging in 3-4, lead, hunt to the back passing treble in 3-4, four blows behind, etc'.

Blue line

Instead of remembering words, you remember a picture. Sometimes it is drawn over a grid of all the figures (as in *The Ringing World Diary*) and sometimes just on its own.

Place notation

You remember which places are made at each change. For Plain Bob Doubles this is 5ths and 1st alternately except at the lead end where 1st, 2nd and 5th places are made. This might not seem enough to ring the whole method, but the places do in fact determine everything else that happens in the method. Working out what to do is straightforward in principle, but requires a clear head to do it in practice. For more detail, see *The Tower Handbook* p 257.

Structure

You learn how different blocks of work fit together, partly pictorially and partly in terms of rules. May's *Learning Curve* used method structure as well as the blue line to explain how reverse and double methods worked. The structure of Plain Bob Doubles is not very complex. Below (in front of) the treble is plain hunting. Above the treble the interesting bits happen when the treble leads. Two bells dodge together in the middle, sandwiched between those making seconds and long 5ths.



A personal story

An experienced ringer recounts how he first learnt methods, and how his style of learning evolved during his early ringing. It includes going up as well as down in unusual ways!

"I learnt Plain Bob and Grandsire Doubles as a set of rules about 'what comes next'. I learnt calls in terms of 'If I was going to do X then I did Y instead, and then I did Z next time'. I remember thinking Grandsire was much more difficult because there were so many rules, and they didn't seem to follow a pattern. I had seen the methods drawn as a 'blue line', and like many people I tended not to think about the hunting between the lead ends, but just took it for granted so all I thought about were the dodges and places.

"When I learnt more complex methods, I instinctively switched to learning the blue line, and I memorised an image of it. I could recite a string of actions if required, but I was 'reading them off' the image of the line. I think if anyone had looked at me while rapidly rehearsing a complicated method in my head, they would have seen my head jerking from side to side as I mentally followed the wiggles in the blue line.

"I rang at a five bell tower, and we soon rang lots of methods and variations. My learning style switched again. I visualised triangular chunks of method that fitted over or under the Treble. I picked up the appropriate line fragments as I passed the Treble up or down. I didn't need to memorise the blue line as a whole, because I could work out what to do as I went along. This approach made conducting easy for me, since I could 'see' what the other bells should be doing around me. I knew what I was doing, and generally that meant I was 'doing it' with a 'partner', so all I needed to do in addition was to see which way round the other two working bells were.

"When I moved on to learn Surprise, I reverted to learning the blue line. I don't think this was a conscious decision, but I would probably have considered it too complicated to learn any other way. I remember thinking that the move from Doubles to Minor was a big one. I know it is only one extra bell, but compared with what I had grown used to on five, it seemed a lot, and I couldn't see things in the same way. Major was even worse, but I progressed to become a competent 8 bell ringer, and even rang the odd peal of Surprise Maximus.

No-one taught us how to learn methods. We heard about things like 'snaps' and 'fish tails', and asked what they meant, but we worked out the rest

for ourselves. We realised that 'you only have to learn half the method' because of the symmetry, and I took it literally. My picture of the blue line for Cambridge ran down the page in my mind from seconds place bell to the middle of thirds place bell (though I had never heard those terms at the time). When I got to the end of the line, my brain reversed direction and went back up the line I had just come down. Thus I rang the work of some place bells (4, 8 and 5) moving up the page while others (2, 6 and 7) I rang moving down the page.

"I don't know whether anyone else has learnt like this, but I suspect I am not the only one. I have never heard of anyone doing it, but then it is not the sort of thing you tend to talk about.

"At the time, it seemed quite natural, but I realised the unfortunate side effects many years later. I often confuse place bells when giving verbal instructions. For example, at the lead where I become 5ths place bell, my brain (in Cambridge) is moving (upwards) past the place I think of as 6ths place bell (on the way down). I also find it harder to visualise how the lines of the different place bells fit together, because half of them I see as going uphill rather than downhill. Although I now know better, it is hard to erase thought habits after so many years.

"The irony is that (with Doubles methods) I had already gone 'beyond the blue line' and could see the whole method and what everyone was doing. Some people can do that on higher numbers, but no-one explained that to me, and I never thought of it as something I should try to achieve at the time. So I just learnt the blue line which seemed to be what everyone else did. If I knew then what I know now, I would have made more effort to extend my knowledge of method structure onto higher numbers while my mind was still young and able to learn easily. But of course, hindsight is a wonderful tool!

Terminology

Blue line: A diagram showing the path of a bell through a method. It can be formed by joining successive positions of one bell when the rows are written under one another.

Place bell: A way of naming different portions of the work of a method in terms of the bell that does that work during the first lead of a plain course. If you are '3rds place bell' you are doing (or about to do) the work that the 3rd does at the start of the method.

Tail End

The book *Learning methods* is available from CC Publications.