



# The Education Column

## 1. Introductory rumblings

Originally published in *Ringling World*

This series of eight articles suggests ways in which teachers and ringing masters can help their learners, who have achieved bell control, to make the transition to simple method ringing. The articles present various ideas and practice methods, not intended to be in sequence of increasing difficulty. The 'Jargon Box' serves both to explain terms to learners and to remind teachers not to assume that their learners will understand these terms.

Most of the articles will aim to take a very practical look at a particular teaching technique or practice method, but this first one deals with teaching skills in general — suggesting some that might be missing from some ringing chambers!

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### What makes a good teacher?

There are dozens of answers to that question, but here are some of the skills that are particularly relevant to teaching ringing:

- LEVEL OF EXPLANATION:**  
Always explain at a level appropriate to the student, not the teacher.
- VARIETY OF APPROACHES:**  
If one way of getting a point across isn't working, try a different approach.
- SPLIT INTO SMALLER STEPS:**  
If the step you are asking your student to make is too big, split it into smaller steps.

These may seem obvious to anyone who has done much teaching of children, but they are too often lacking in the context of ringing. Let's think about **1 (EXPLANATIONS)**: few of us would have to rack our brains to recall a well-intended explanation of some ringing detail where we had no idea what the speaker was talking about, because they were speaking at their level, not ours. And did we then dare to communicate our total lack of understanding, or did we just nod sagely and walk away? **2 (APPROACHES)**: ever heard anything along the lines of "Look I've been teaching it this way for decades, and everyone else has understood, so it must be your fault!"? And, moving away from the bell tower for a moment, it has anecdotally always been the tactic of English speakers, when overseas and failing to get their message across, to ignore **3 (SMALLER STEPS)** and instead to say the exactly same thing again, a bit slower and a lot louder.

### Jargon

Is comparing ringing to a foreign language a bit unfair? Well, if you read Steve Coleman's article "*Je Parle Clochais*" (Ringling World 5492, 29 July 2016) you'll realise how much of our terminology is indeed foreign to non-ringers. For example when a learner starts plain hunting in the wrong direction and someone helpfully shouts "Three — hunt up! UP! UP!" that's exactly the "say it louder" tactic, and the language really is not standard English. *Three* probably means three people, but which three? *Hunting* could be something that used to be done with horses and hounds, now illegal, but definitely involves searching. And *up* involves rising vertically into the air. So some ill-defined subset of the ringers is being exhorted to seek something that lies above them?

### Which steps are too big?

The last point may be a bit of an exaggeration, but I suspect that few of us could claim to have always got points 1, 2 and 3 right. So the coming articles will concentrate on some of the steps

that we sometimes ask our learners to take which may be too big for some of them. I'm not suggesting that we *always* need to split *every* big step into smaller sub-steps for *every* student — the capable student who is making good progress may become frustrated if we slow their advancement by inserting too many extra steps. But we most definitely need exercises in our toolkit to help those many students who struggle with one of these big steps. Here are some candidates for overly-big steps:

- Starting ringing with others by going directly into rounds on 6.
- Moving from rounds and call changes directly to plain hunt on 5 or 6.
- Expecting students to cope with HOW to dodge and WHEN to dodge both at once.

As for (A), not everyone can immediately hear their bell when there are five others ringing. The initial problem when moving on from ringing by yourself to ringing with others (whether human or on a simulator) is that you have to fit in with someone else's speed and rhythm, and perhaps you are also meeting the concept of the **handstroke gap**<sup>1</sup> for the first time. Why not start with two bells? It is quite enough of a challenge to have your learner following just one other bell at first, and to try to adjust their speed to match. Moreover they are much more likely to be able to hear their bell if just two are ringing. Then move on to three bells, with the student on the 2; they stand a much better chance of then learning to hear if their bell is a bit early or late.

This may seem obvious, but one so often hears a learner, put straight onto rounds on a higher number, say "Well I could hear that it was not even, but I didn't know if it was me or someone else" or "I thought I was out, but I didn't know if I was too early or too late". We probably all know ringers who have never learned to hear their bell, perhaps through poor teaching at this early stage. It's hard enough at first to cope with the mechanics of making a speed adjustment, without the additional problem of not being sure what adjustment is needed. *What correction is needed* and *how to make the correction* are two different skills — if necessary split these steps: deliberately ring some poorly struck rounds with the learner listening but NOT ringing; ask the learner to identify (1) which bell is inaccurate, (2) whether it is early or late, and (3) if this is at handstroke, backstroke, or both.

As for (B) and (C), in the following articles we'll look at specific exercises that can help split these into smaller steps. Not every learner will need these extra steps — some cope perfectly well without them. But it is a great help for the teacher to have a range of exercises in their arsenal for those times when they are needed.

David Smith, CCCBR Education Committee

### Jargon Box

#### 1. Handstroke gap

Good ringing is evenly spaced, so in rounds on 6 there should be exactly the same interval between the 1 and the 2 as between the 2 and the 3, the 3 and the 4, and so on.

At the end of the handstrokes, the 6 is the last bell to sound, and there should be exactly the same interval before the 1 is heard again, ringing its backstroke. If the conductor says "Don't leave a gap at the backstroke lead!" it means the treble has rung too late, leaving too long a gap between the 6's handstroke and the treble's backstroke.

However in most towers a much bigger gap is left after the backstrokes have finished. This pause is usually TWICE the length of any other gap. You could think of this as leaving a big enough gap for an extra (but silent) bell to ring before the next handstroke starts. This is the 'G' below. So rounds on 6 should be spaced like this:

Handstrokes... Backstrokes... Gap Handstrokes...  
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - G - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5...

This longer gap before the treble's handstroke is called the handstroke gap. If the conductor says "Handstroke gap!" the treble has probably not left a big enough gap.