

KCACR bell handling notes

These notes were produced by the Training SubCommittee of the KCACR, and were distributed to every tower in Kent. While we don't claim to have solved all the problems, we hope everyone will find some useful ideas in them.

NOTES ON INITIAL BELL HANDLING SESSIONS

The tutor should avoid interfering with the rope when the learner is handling it except when it is absolutely necessary. He should if possible catch below the learner, to avoid almost inevitably encouraging the learner to hold the rope or catch the sally too low to keep out of tutor's way.

Make sure learners understand as much as possible. Explanations before every practical stage are important.

Tutor must however always be alert and ready to take over – learners go to pieces and accidents happen very fast.

For ringing stand with feet nearly together, right a little in front. ("Firm" stance with feet wide apart looks so ugly! – and is probably less efficient; few good ringers do it.) Space between nose and free hanging rope should be about one hand spread out.

Stages:

a) Backstroke only

Tutor first sets bell at back to see that learner will be able to reach. Establish correct place for him to hold so he can only just reach to let bell onto stay. Adjust rope if necessary, but avoid having too much.

Explain beforehand:

- hands to go up when the rope takes them, not before
- the exercise may have to be repeated several times before bell can be set again.
- aim to go just over the balance, but real control will be a lot easier at stage (c) when feedback can be experienced

Watchpoints:

Check initially before rope is ever pulled:

- feet together, with right a little in front
- hands together, normally right over left

Then check these:

- rope stays just taut
- both hands on rope for as long as possible
- long gentle pull (often just stroke it)
- hands continue down to point thumbs at floor
- correct strength of pull
- heels stay on floor
- ideally rope and hands should always be in a straight vertical line

b) Handstroke – pulling off only

then leave alone until tutor has set it again.

Explain beforehand:

- remember to let go!

Watchpoints as above plus:

- Initially start with hands as far up as can reach
- Then hands continue right down together to prevent developing habit of getting them wide apart, “shaking hands” before catching sally etc later (even though people seem to feel silly with hands together straight down in front when not holding anything!)

c) Handstroke pulling off followed by backstroke

Tutor catching handstroke and setting as soon as possible. Learner not touching sally again until bell is set.

Watchpoints all as above plus:

- Initially check tail-end in correct place under thumb on learner’s side of sally (every time).

This stage needs repeating more often than appears necessary to get positioning of tail end to become a habit – otherwise it will slip round into fingers at next stage causing left hand not to be used properly at handstroke. To achieve this give the

pupil the task of trying to set the backstroke. This will give them the opportunity to experience feedback from their strength of pull at handstroke and give them a challenge to prevent boredom.

d) Handstroke only – bell partly down

Tutor part lowers bell till sally is bobbing but bell is nowhere near the balance. Learner practises catching and letting go of sally at right moment, with right hand, left hand and then both.

This introduces a feel for the required rhythm.

e) Handstroke only – pulling and catching

Notice where reaching to when pulling off and plan to catch a little above that level on the sally, just as it starts to go up.

Watchpoints: all as above

f) Putting it all together

Watchpoints: all as above

NOTES ON TEACHING RAISING AND LOWERING A SINGLE BELL

Learner should be fairly competent at ringing a bell that is up. (Many people feel that to do it before this stage is potentially frightening, though some begin with it.)

Use a silenced bell. Check that the learner understands what the bell will be doing. Explain that aim is to keep in as much contact with it as possible and therefore rope length must be adjusted.

Lowering

Demonstrate and have learner practise making loops in rope (with a bell that's down):

1. Creep up tail end, feeding rope through thumb and first finger of left hand and keeping hands together.
2. Slide left hand down and then bring rope in right hand alongside rope in left with right hand above left and holding loops in left .
3. Increase size of loop, using left thumb and first finger.

4. When loop becomes too big to handle make another as before.
5. Repeat as often as necessary, practising to make sure that earlier loops do not creep through the hands with the current one.

Learner can then attempt a lower with tutor looking after the sally all the time. Pupil thus has time to concentrate on the backstroke - keeping the rope the correct length and making loops properly. It is best to make loops about two-thirds of the way down the backstroke pull, to avoid ringing a backstroke with one hand. This exercise will need to be repeated until it is done confidently before the learner looks after the sally as well.

During the operation above the tutor is repeatedly raising a bell for the learner to lower, which uses both time and energy (though it gives the learner a probably much needed rest!) At some stage, but without confusing learner, he can begin to do the raising too, but beware of tiring him too much.

Raising

Use a bell that is as small as possible, to avoid pupil getting overtired.

Before the very first attempt and every time thereafter make learner hold tail-end without loops and check that bell is indeed down. Pointing out what could happen if a raised bell is pulled off with loops, should be enough to make it clear why this is necessary.

Explain letting the loops tighten and loosening them. (Not so easy to demonstrate without the bell to pull the rope through your hands)

Again begin by looking after the sally for him all the time until he is competent with the loops.

By the time the bell is up two hands should be used on the sally to save strain on one arm. Never set a bell with one hand.

If there is still a loop when the bell is up then the length of rope in it must be released to fall below the hands. It is worth practising releasing it from the left thumb.

It is not good practice to set a bell with a loop in your hand - on rare occasions there may be no stay!