

# Teaching bell handling – from bell down

In providing any training you need a plan.

That plan should have some flexibility to allow for different situations and people but should include all aspects of the training.

This document is offered as a plan for teaching handling. It is hoped it contains all aspects but remember they need to be used flexibly.

As with any document or plan, it will develop, improve and change.

It has been developed over a number of years by the teachers of The Ledbury District of The Hereford Diocesan Guild of Bellringers from their experiences of teaching groups of new ringers to handle a bell using the ART Training and Learning the Ropes programmes.

It starts with the bell in position for chiming and progresses from the down position on the basis that both new teachers and new ringers find it less stressful to start from a position of safety and develop the necessary skills before there are long lengths of potentially flying rope.

The first page is a precise of the plan and can be used as an aide-memoire to the stages of teaching.

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# The Basic Components of Teaching to Handle

## Prepare yourself for teaching

- 1 Familiarise yourself with all the exercises
- 2 Review your own ringing style

## Prepare your recruit (new ringer)

- 3 Health and safety issues
- 4 Demonstrate chiming
- 5 Demonstrate ringing
- 6 View bells
- 7 Demonstrate chiming and ringing again
- 8 Check if the bell is up or down
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## The teaching process

- 1 Explain – demonstrate – ring
- 2 Hand ring exercise (bell down)
- 3 Hand positions
- 4 Developing the back stroke (bell down)
- 5 Points to watch and giving feedback
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## Practising to get it correct

- 1 If things go wrong
- 2 Use the whole – part – whole approach
- 3 Things that may help
- 4 Practise taking in rope and letting it out
- 5 Make the sessions interesting and enjoyable

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# The Basic Components of Teaching to Handle

## Prepare yourself for teaching

### 1. Familiarise yourself with all the exercises

Ensure that you are familiar with all the exercises you are going to teach, running through them by yourself or working with a mentor to ensure thorough preparation.

### 2. Review your own ringing style

Think about your own ringing style and ensure it demonstrates the best example to a new ringer. A video can provide a useful objective view (use a mobile phone).

## Prepare your recruit

### 1. Make the recruit aware of health and safety issues

- Don't touch ropes unless told to.
- Always check if a bell is up.
- Do as you are asked.
- Don't walk through the circle and by people who are ringing.
- If told to let go, let go instantly something has gone wrong.
- Keep feet on the floor, no crossed legs.
- No loose or flapping clothing, scarves or belts.

### 2. Demonstrate chiming

### 3. Demonstrate ringing

### 4. View bells – extra safety issues should be explained

- Don't go anywhere near the bells.
- Don't touch ropes.
- Risks of climbing over frame.
- Noise.
- Hygiene issues with bird and bat droppings.

### The teacher should have a talk prepared to give during the trip to the belfry

- Parts of bell and frame and their functions.
- Smallest to largest.
- Music.
- Casting and dates.
- What happens when a bell is chimed.

- What happens when a bell is rung.
- When does the bell sound.

### The following should be demonstrated

Ear muffs must be worn if the bell is untied. If access to the bell chamber is not possible, a video can be shown or the recruit taken to visit a neighbouring tower.

- Chiming a bell.
- Raising a bell and stand.
- Ringing a bell and stand.
- Lowering a bell.

The recruit should have access to pictures of a bell, both up and down. They can be directed to the SMART Ringer website. Video or CCTV may be used here.

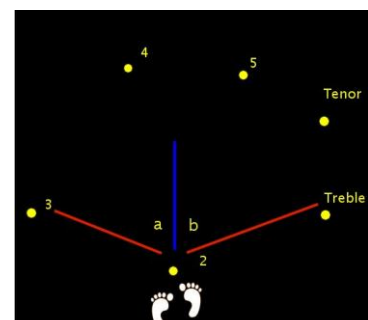
5. **Demonstrate chiming and ringing again** when back in ringing chamber.
6. **Check if the bell is up or down**

**A teacher should always check to see if a bell is up or down prior to all exercises, and should show the recruit how to check this themselves.**

- Let the recruit (now new ringer) gently pull with their finger tips the sally on a bell which is down and feel how the rope moves up and down as the bell swings (the teacher should hold the tail end).
- **Explain what happens when a bell is up and is pulled off the balance so that they know what to do if the bell is pulled off unexpectedly – let go immediately.**
- Let the ringer gently pull (with their finger tips) on a bell that is up and feel that the rope does not move as the bell is unable to swing but has a firm feel to it. Reinforce the difference in the feeling to a bell which is down (the teacher should hold the tail end).
- Let the ringer feel the different weights of bells when they are down – talk about the difference between the treble and tenor.

### 7. Where to stand

- Distance from rope – the finger span between the ringer's nose and the sally will give an approximate position but the hand ring exercise (see next section) will ensure they get the best position.
- The direction the ringer faces should be along the blue line (diagram) and the angles a and b should be equal so that the ringer can see equally well the bell on either side of them.
- Feet position – ideally slightly apart and the right foot slightly in front of left; this gives stability and the allows the body to move a little.



- The ringer should look straight ahead, so the teacher and ringer can see one another. They should not look up, as there is a risk of falling debris. Looking up also makes it more difficult to see and to catch the sally.
- The rope should move in a vertical manner at all times.
- There should be sufficient tension in the rope for the ringer to engage with (feel) the bell on both the upward and downward movement of the rope.

## The teaching process

### 1. Explain, demonstrate, ring

These three actions are vital steps that you as a teacher must follow during every stage of the teaching process. Generally people are not good at doing all three and it will take a bit of practice to ensure you do.

- **Explain** to the ringer what you are about to do and want them to do.
- **Demonstrate** what you are going to do. This may involve another ringer who acts as the new ringer for the demonstration.
- **Let them try** what you want them to do.

### 2. Hand ring exercise (bell down)

This exercise starts with the bell down.

- The ringer stands in the normal position in front of the hanging rope, and makes a ring around it using both hands, with the thumbs and index fingers touching each other.
- They stretch up to full reach and then right down as low as they can, taking care not to touch the rope as they do so.
- This action is repeated, getting progressively faster until it can be performed at full speed without the hands touching the rope.
  - Start with eyes open.
  - Speed up to a bit faster than normal ringing.
  - May continue with eyes closed.



It is useful to repeat this exercise 10 to 20 times every time the ringer is about to catch hold, but remember it should be done on a bell which is down.

### 3. Hand positions

- Right hand above left (presuming the ringer is right handed).
- Hands just touching/no gap between them/not overlapping.
- All fingers and thumbs around the sally and the thumb of the left hand should be horizontal.

#### 4. Developing the backstroke (bell down)

- The teacher holds the coils whilst the ringer controls the sally and will move their hands slowly down the rope; the teacher feeds rope to the ringer as the bell is raised; the ringer holds only a single strand of rope (no coils).
- Start with small swings, chiming and bringing the bell back to rest.
- Next chime and let some sally out (move down the rope), then take sally in (move up) and bring the bell back to rest.
- Progress this further each time, learning to:
  - Let rope out at the top of the stroke, the ringer should let the rope slide through their hands.
  - Pull straight down with the rope and keep the rope taut.
  - Let out as much rope as is needed.
  - When ringing down, take rope in (indicate how much 1-2 cm), move hands up the rope at the bottom of the stroke, not at the top, a small amount each stroke.

#### 5. Points to watch and giving feedback

The teacher should keep observing, giving feedback to reinforce the good movements and improve the inaccurate – praising, explaining and advising.

- Rope should move vertically up and down smoothly, as if, within an imaginary tube. If it does not the ringer is doing something wrong. The teacher should sort it out immediately, going back to the hand ring exercise to emphasise the need for vertical rope movement to the ringer.
- The teacher should make sure the ringer's hands move right to the bottom of the stroke and the right thumb points at the floor at the bottom of the stroke, sensing the bell until the very end of the stroke.
- If there are aspects which are not accurate the teacher should get the ringer to lower the bell, explain, demonstrate the point and try again.
- **The teacher should never just hope a problem will get better. If the ringer has a really straight action and good contact with the bell the sally should need very little control (this is a very good indicator as to whether the direction of movement is vertical).**
- The teacher should talk the ringer through what happens as the bell rises:
  - The strokes get longer.
  - The strokes get slower.
  - The hands accelerate downwards (it is not a steady speed) and slow as the top of the stroke is reached.
  - Once the bell is nearly up less effort is required.
  - The amount of rope let out becomes very small when the bell is nearly up.

- Progressively the bell is raised completely with the teacher feeding the ringer the backstroke rope. When the teacher is happy that the ringer is pulling with the right amount of effort they can let go of the tail end, so the ringer has full control of the backstroke. The teacher continues with the handstroke.
- The teacher can set the bell at handstroke at this stage or get the ringer to lower the bell, retaking the spare backstroke rope from below the ringer's hands and making the coils.
- Before setting the bell, note the position of the ringer's hands on the tail end so they can hold the rope again at the right length.

## 6 Setting a bell and pulling it off

You may wish to delay this exercise until immediately prior to exercise 9.

- The teacher should explain:
  - The need to adjust the amount of effort exerted on the rope.
  - The importance of the effort put into each pull being consistent.
  - The rope length should be adjusted up and down by small amounts (about half an inch or 1 cm or even less).
- The ringer can practise this technique on a bell which is down, starting with 'looking at their hands' and, as the skill develops, moving onto 'not looking'.
- The teacher should demonstrate the backstroke:
  - With a bell almost up, find the balance point by letting out small amounts of rope.
  - Let out small additional amounts of rope, until the bell goes over the balance. Explain that one feels some weight and has to pull a bit harder to pull the bell back.
  - This then progresses to the point when the stay and slider touch and there is a bump. Explain that that is too far but they need to experience the effect.
  - Take a little rope in that the stay and slider are not bumped and the bell is ringing around the balance. Stretch slightly so the bell is ringing over the balance and then set it. Explain the need to be prepared that it may bounce and come back over the balance.
- Let the ringer have a go. The teacher should ensure that:
  - The rope is moving vertically and coming down straight in both planes.
  - The ringer's hands are moving from top to bottom every stroke.
  - The rope is not going slack (not accelerating down fast enough or pushing rope up).

## 7. Developing the handstroke – shadowing your hands

This exercise is performed while the ringer raises the bell.

As the ringer raises the bell, the teacher asks them to shadow the movement of the teacher's hand on the sally by raising their right hand to touch, not catch, the sally and then moving up and down with the teacher's hand using it as a guide. The ringer has to:

- Learn to get their right hand back on the tail end before it starts going up (a very important point).
- Learn that the handstroke gets longer and slower.
- Make sure the backstroke pull does not deteriorate.

## 8. Pulling off the sally (bell down)

- The correct hand positions on the tail end and on the sally are best practised on a bell which is down.
- The ringer should hold the sally, right hand above left with the tail end between the left thumb and sally.
- Ensure the thumb of the left hand lies horizontally around the sally with the tail end facing towards the ringer.
- Explain where to loosen the grip of the sally just before it would go up (approximately waist level).
- The ringer then slides their hands down the sally and releases the grip and at the same time the teacher pulls the sally away from the ringer. The ringer keeps his or her hands together and tightens the grip with the left hand and holds the tail end with the right just above the left and the hands carry on down to point to the floor.
- It should be noted that the right hand starts above the left during this transfer from sally to tail end and ends up closer to the floor; it has further to travel and needs to move quicker than the left hand.
- The ringer then reverses this process by moving their hands upwards still with right above left but opening their fingers (and thumbs) as they meet the sally which the teacher has moved back to the vertical when their hands were at the bottom of the stroke, they then close their fingers around the sally, with the original grip.
- This process is started very slowly but is sped up until it is instinctive and at the right speed and in the right positions.
- The hands should be just touching throughout the whole of this process.

You may wish to add exercise 6 at this point rather than earlier.



## 9. Pulling the bell off at handstroke with a dummy tail end (bell up)

Move on to pulling off a bell that is up.

The teacher should talk about:

- “Look to, trebles going, she’s gone” and how to pull off from set, i.e. take the weight of the bell, bring to the balance and pull off, explaining to the ringer that this is a two stage process.
- The ringer should try a pull off holding a dummy tail end, transferring their right hand to the dummy tail end immediately they let go of the sally and continue to move their hands down to the bottom of the stroke. The teacher should ring the backstroke and catch the sally. The teacher should remember to tell the ringer that the teacher will ring the backstroke and catch the sally.
- **This should be repeated not just once or twice but many, possibly 20 times.**

## 10. Pulling the bell off at handstroke (bell up)

Explain that the ringer’s hands will not remain at the bottom but must go up with the tail end at backstroke and then gently pull down. The teacher will catch the sally and set the bell (hopefully).

**Let the ringer know that you might not manage to set it and they must wait until you have).**

## 11. Rejoining the sally (bell down)

When the ringer has got the hang of pulling the bell off at handstroke, the teacher should talk through the hands rejoining the sally and rising with it in preparation for ringing the handstroke, this is the reverse of pulling it off.

**You may wish to give your ringer a few practices with exercise 7 or 8 before moving on.**

**This is an optional step. Usually one can go directly onto the next exercise.**

Pulling off and rejoining the sally (ringing handstrokes alone). The teacher may get the ringer to pull off and rejoin the sally next time. The teacher should warn the ringer of what might happen if they rejoin too low or too high so they are aware of the potential and also if the teacher says ‘Let go’, they should let go immediately. The teacher should ensure that the ringer’s hands are in a low, central position holding the dummy tail end when not on the sally.

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## 12. Putting it all together

### Method 1

- The teacher instructs the ringer to hold the tail end and sally and pull off, transferring their right hand to the tail end at the bottom of the stroke and then rising to the top of the stroke, before gently pulling the backstroke down. The teacher should catch the sally and set the bell (and warn the ringer that they might not set it, in which case the rope will go back up to backstroke).
- The teacher repeats this with the ringer until:
  - The handstroke pull is the right weight.
  - The hands transfer at the bottom of the stroke.
  - The hands rise up to backstroke at the right speed.
  - They pull the backstroke with the right weight to be able to set it.
- The backstroke should be adjusted to the correct length.
- The teacher instructs the ringer to catch the sally after ringing their backstroke and repeat just once. Then the teacher sets the bell and repeats the exercise.
- When this is good and steady the teacher asks the ringer to try progressively more strokes but standing if there is a problem. The teacher will ring as many handstrokes as necessary using phrases such 'The next one is yours' and 'Handstrokes back to me'.

### Method 2

- The teacher may get the ringer to ring the backstrokes alone (**with the bell ringing just under balance to protect the stay**).
- When the backstroke is being rung with a good vertical movement and the power exerted is correct, the ringer just takes one handstroke before returning to backstrokes.
- The teacher can use phrases such as "The next one is yours". Feedback should be given until each handstroke is correct.
- Gradually the number of handstrokes taken by the ringer can be increased, first two in a row and gradually building up to half the handstrokes.
- If the style deteriorates the ringer should be returned to ringing backstrokes with words such as "Back to me next time".

## 13. Helping with the sally

- **To ensure that the sally is kept under control it is best that the teacher catches it below the ringer's hands.** The ringer will then feel the weight and control of the bell but the teacher can still put a brake on or give a little extra downward movement if needed.
- If the teacher catches the sally above the ringer's hands, the risk is that the sally will be pulled away from the ringer. The teacher will take most of the

weight and control so the ringer does not experience the weight, change of speed and movement of the bell. The ringer is thus denied feedback from the bell which is so important in improving future performance.

- The teacher may find that catching under the ringer's hands takes a bit of practice. Try it with an experienced ringer until you have got the hang of it.
- The teacher can use their right hand to catch the sally but this hand is more likely to get involved with the tail end which is in the ringer's left hand.

## Practising to get it correct

### 1. If things go wrong!

- The teacher should set the bell if things go wrong by taking the whole rope from the ringer. The ringer cannot and should not be expected to get the bell back under control at this stage. The teachers needs to have explained and practised this before things go wrong.

### 2. Use the whole – part – whole approach

- The teacher should not let mistakes continue. Look for the major ones and talk the ringer through the improvements. If the movements do not improve go back to the individual exercises and get it right there and then come back to ringing both strokes.
- Use the whole – part – whole approach.
- **It now takes hours of practice trying to get it right. RIGHT not almost right.**

### 3. Things that may help

- Keep the ringing slow – it gives more time to think and the bell is under more control.
- Don't be afraid to go back to backstroke or handstroke alone exercises to practise reaching the balance and holding the bell there and then setting it (a two-stage process).
- Pull off and set at backstroke.
- Pull off and set next handstroke.

### 4. Practise taking in rope and letting it out

The teacher should get the ringer to ring faster and slower by shortening or lengthening the backstroke. This is extremely important and should be practised on a tied bell during the teaching of handling before the ringer goes into rounds.

Taking rope in (shortening the rope) is done when the rope is slack just after handstroke when the hands come together on the tail end and just before they start to rise up for backstroke. The right hand moves up the rope the required amount and the left follows.

The rope is let out (or lengthened) at the top of the backstroke by letting the required amount of rope slide through the ringer's hands.

## **5. Make the sessions interesting and enjoyable**

The teacher should try any little exercises that break up the continuous ringing and stop it becoming monotonous. The practice must be done for as long as is necessary to get it right but try and make it fun.

- Stop and have a rest from time to time and do some theory or listening to striking.
- Check out parts of a bell.
- Have a jargon sheet to help the ringer understand the words the teacher is using.
- Don't take ringers on to the theory of call changes and method ringing as it runs the risk of them anticipating things that they are not going to be able to ring at this stage.