

just discussed in rounds, namely a lack of confidence in letting the bell rise adequately at the backstroke. The result is often that the blow in fourth place is not delayed enough, so that the bell sounds too early and clips the bell with which it is dodging.

What is the problem?

In each case the problem is that the student is not confident to let the bell rise up to the balance at backstroke. At first sight this may seem odd to an experienced ringer. Surely the handstroke is the more difficult, as all sorts of things can go wrong for a learner as they reach for the sally – they might miss it altogether, or bat it away and grab it only belatedly, or grasp it at different positions from stroke to stroke (making it hard to judge, from the position of the hands, how near the bell is to the balance). All of these tend to lead to imperfect control, perhaps even bumping the stay if the preceding backstroke was over-pulled.

We might think that, by comparison, letting the bell rise at the backstroke ought to be a doddle. The learner can't 'miss' the tail-end in the same way that they can miss the sally. They don't grab the tail-end differently each stroke, but maintain a constant grip at the same place, varying their hold of the tail-end only if they consciously choose to do so. So surely it should be much easier and safer to judge how near the bell is to the balance! But in practice this is not the case. Fear of hitting the stay often leads students to hold the tail-end too high, so that even at full stretch or on tiptoe it is physically impossible to let the bell rise enough to produce the required delay. Another factor that contributes to the problem is that whenever we set the bell, we let it rise at handstroke and carefully control it past the balance; while this is excellent practice at letting the bell rise under control, we unfortunately don't practise it equally at both handstroke and backstroke!

What is the cure?

I like the '3-and-2' exercise, and it is one that often will benefit all the band. It is a good idea to introduce the much easier '2-and-2' exercise first, to get the idea across. Ring rounds. The treble just keeps ringing throughout at a steady pace, but the other bells ring for two strokes (hand and back) then miss two strokes (hand and back) before ringing the next two, missing two, and so on. Ideally the bell will be held just over the balance for the missed strokes, rather than actually being stood.

Some bands take a while to get the hang of this, so it may help for the conductor to maintain a running commentary: *"We're ringing these two ... now miss two ... ready to ring again NOW ..."* It also helps to have good ringers on 1 and 2. The treble needs to maintain a steady rhythm whether the other bells are ringing or not, and if 2 fails to hold the bell at the balance it tends to cause the following bells to go wrong too.

Make sure your band has got the hang of this '2-and-2' before moving on. Most ringers find it comparatively easy to get the bell up to the balance at the handstroke, as it is just like setting the bell. Even so it may take a few attempts to get everything working smoothly.

Then introduce '3-and-2' where everyone other than the treble repeatedly **rings three** strokes then **misses two**. This is the real point of the whole exercise, as this time everyone has to hold their bell at the balance alternately at backstroke and at handstroke. Note that if all goes well TWO strokes are missed each time, so everyone should always ring in step with the treble (with everyone ringing a handstroke when the treble rings a handstroke, and a backstroke when the treble rings a backstroke).

Getting started can also be a problem. A good idea is to explain in advance what will happen, then start the exercise immediately at the pull-off (with the three strokes everyone rings, then the two missed blows), rather than with the normal rounds followed by a 'Go!' call to start the exercise. This is shown in Diagram 8.3.

Be prepared for lots of errors. If your band has huge problems with this, try having just one or two bells doing the exercise with the rest ringing rounds all the time, as the treble does. You may find some ringers can never get their bell high enough at backstroke, and may need vigorous encouragement to hold the tail-end lower. They may even need a box, or a bigger box, or to have the rope lengthened. If they can succeed at this exercise only with a box, tactfully suggest that maybe they should always use a box for that bell! I remember once with this exercise when a ringer, who did not strike very accurately, could never get their bell to the balance at backstroke; they decided to try with a box, and instantly achieved success and with vastly improved striking. *'Problem solved!'* I rather optimistically thought, only to be taken aback when they remarked, *'Isn't that odd. I needed a box for that exercise, but I don't need one for normal ringing.'*

I do hope you have found something interesting or useful in these articles. If you have any problem in ringing or teaching, remember that other people have probably experienced something similar and may well have help to offer, so don't be afraid to ask – and maybe these problems and solutions could be the starting point for a future *Education Column!*

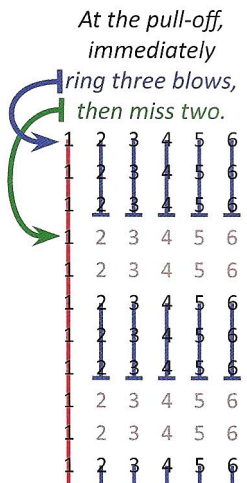


Diagram 8.3