

Tuning Your Drum

Ask your teacher, professional, or salesperson to help you tune your drum. This is the quickest and easiest way to learn! Here is an overview from start to finish:

1. Place the new head on the drum, place the rim over the head, and finger-tighten all tension rods equally.

2. Count the number of tension rods in your rim and use the illustration to the right that applies to your 8-lug or 10-lug drum. With your drum key, tighten each rod 1/2 turn (180 degrees) in the order noted. Do this until the head produces a tone.

3. Push firmly with the heel of your hand on the center of the drum. Doing this “seats” the head so that it takes the shape of your drum’s edge. Repeat step 2 if necessary.

4. Once you can hear a clear tone, place one index finger lightly in the middle of the drum to focus the sound. With the other index finger (or a stick), lightly tap the head one inch from the edge at each tension rod. Locate the one spot where the pitch is lower than the others and tighten that rod 1/8 to 1/4 turn. Repeat this process until all spots are the same pitch.

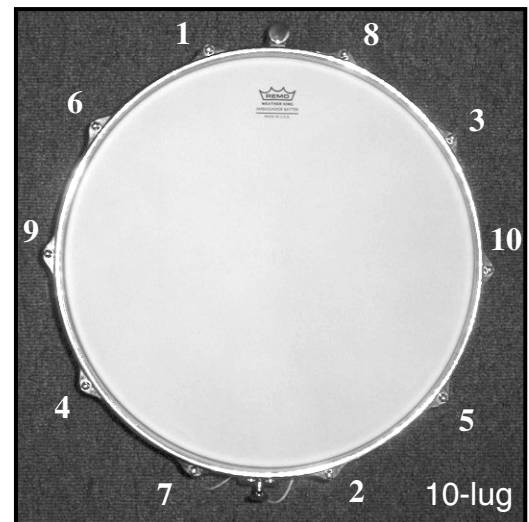
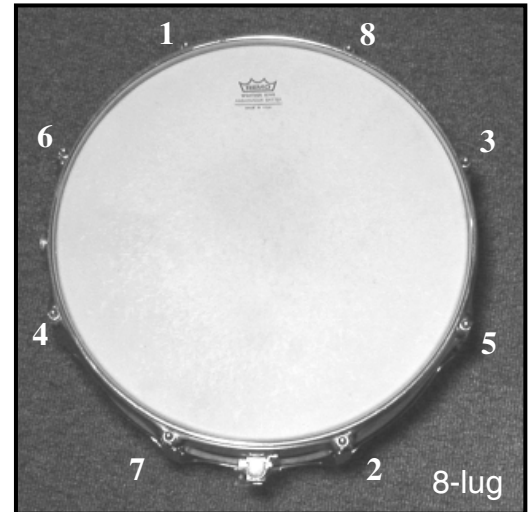
5. In the order noted in number two above, finish tightening the head to its proper tension. The top head should produce a short tone and provide your stick with plenty of rebound. The bottom head should be slightly higher in pitch than the top head.

6. Hint: When tuning the bottom head, CAREFULLY weave your stick over one side of the rim, under the snares, and over the other side of the rim. This will keep the snares off of the head while you tune.

7. Another hint: New heads will loosen slightly after a few hours of playing. Plan to go through steps 2 through 4 again soon to be sure the head is still in tune.

8. Once heads are at their proper tension, switch the snares to their “on” position and loosen until the snares produce a loose, rattly sound when the drum is struck. With one stick, play the drum softly, loudly, softly, loudly, etc. With the other hand, tighten the snares until they sound good both soft and loud.

9. If you prefer a shorter sound from your snare drum, consider muffling the drum slightly. To do this, you can use a muffling ring or Moon Gel (available at most music stores), one or more business cards placed at the edge of the drum, or even stretchy toys such as Silly Putty or Mars Mud.



Most tuning problems are due to one or both of the following:

1. Loose bottom and/or top head: Produces a long, flabby sound. Solution: Tighten the head(s) so that the bottom head is slightly higher in pitch than the top head. When played in the center with snares off, the sound should be short, but not choked.
2. Snares too tight: Produces a choked sound, especially when playing soft. Solution: Perform Tuning Step 8.