

A Short Introduction to the Art of Change Ringing on Handbells

Change ringing is the art of ringing bells in ever-changing permutations in a steady rhythm.

for example:

1st permutation:	1	2	3	4	5	6
2nd permutation:	2	1	4	3	6	5
3rd permutation:	2	4	1	6	3	5
					etc.	

There are many different sequences (or "methods") of permutations, each with their own name, which are generated by patterns that are usually memorized by the performers.

Bells are numbered from highest to lowest, and the highest bell is called the "treble".

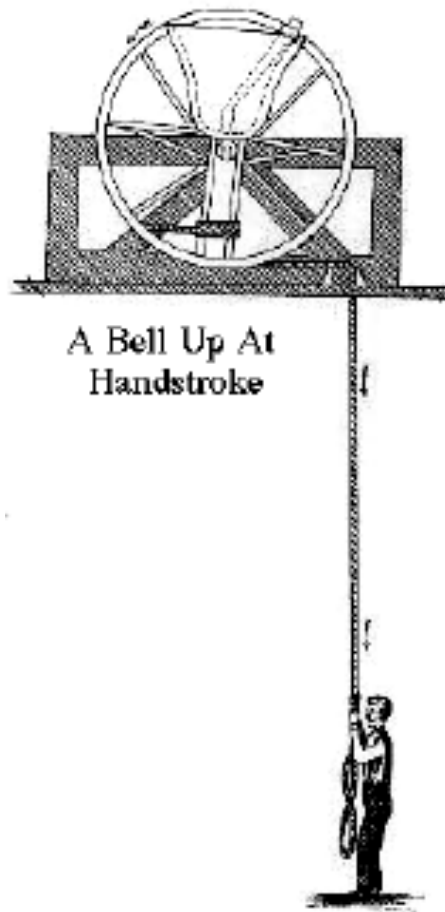


Each ringer gets 2 adjacent bells and holds the higher bell in their right hand.

Ringers sit in a circle, so that the bells are highest to lowest in a clockwise direction.

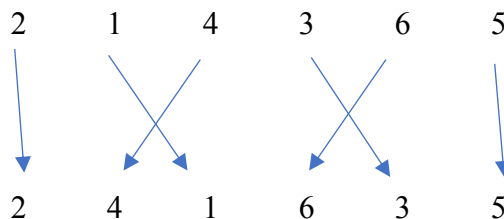
Most methods use 4, 6, 8, 10, or 12 bells in total.

The tradition of change ringing originated in the early 1600's on large church bells. It was made possible when bells were mounted on wheels, allowing for much greater control of the timing of ringing a bell (as opposed to letting it swing freely).



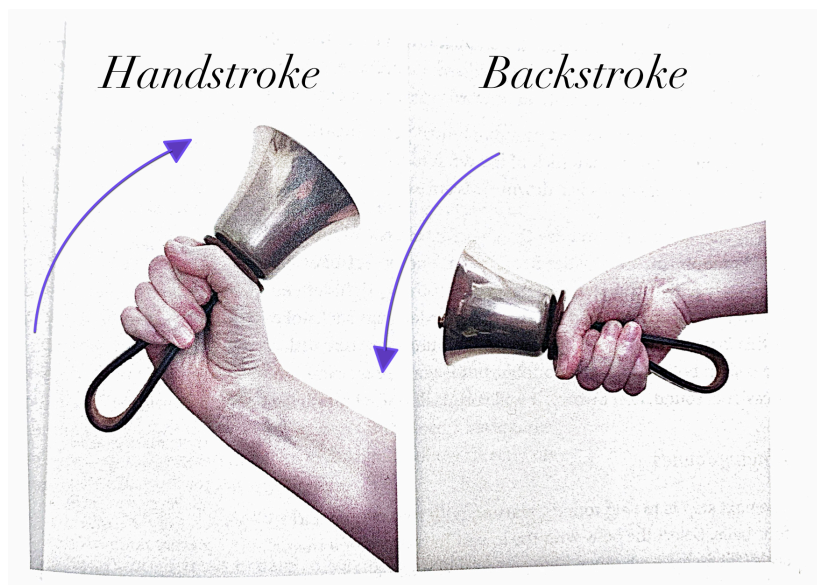
However, the timing is still dependent on making only tiny adjustments to the natural regular swing of the heavy bell, which leads to the major restriction on the permutations in change ringing: each bell can move by no more than one order-position between permutations (because if it moved farther, it would require too much speeding-up or slowing-down in the swing).

for example:



On handbells, even though we have much greater control over timing that does not physically require this rule, we copy the patterns developed on large bells.

Terminology:



On each permutation, the stroke-direction alternates: first everyone uses a handstroke and then everyone uses a backstroke.

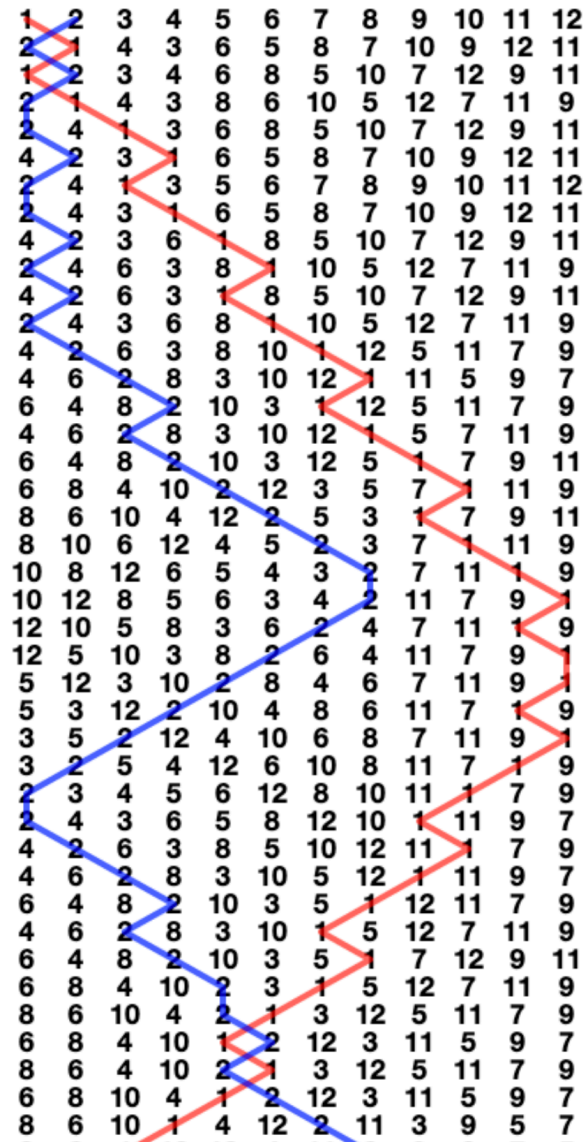
"Handstroke gap": before every permutation that is on a handstroke (when everyone's bell has returned to their lap), there is a pause of one beat:

1st permutation:	handstroke:	2	1	4	3	6	5
2nd permutation:	backstroke:	2	4	1	6	3	5 (pause)
3rd permutation:	handstroke:	4	2	6	1	5	3
4th permutation:	backstroke:	4	6	2	5	1	3 (pause)

Every change ringing pattern begins and ends with "Rounds", which is a simple descending scale. So this is a good place to start: practicing Rounds, to get a feel for the bells and a feel for ringing in a consistent rhythm with others.

1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6 (pause)
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6 (pause)
					etc.

Eventually, you will have to keep track of the path of two bells through the series of permutations.



I strongly suggest that even in simple exercises like Rounds, you count the beats in your mind ("one, two, three, four, ...") for each permutation, and keep a focus on which beats you will play on for that permutation (for example: "on this permutation, my bells are on beats 2 and 6").

Change ringing is a social activity, but if you want to practice on your own, I recommend the mobile app "Mobel".