

Teaching leading

Leading is a skill which relies on listening, timing, some ropesight and bell control, so it may be something to teach once a ringer has already begun to develop these skills and can reliably control their bell accurately when moving in basic call changes.

The handstroke gap

If you don't have an experienced band to demonstrate, it can be helpful to play a recording of well struck ringing and draw attention to the handstroke gap.

If you have a simulator or ringing software which plays samples of ringing, you can usually increase the length of a handstroke gap so that it becomes more apparent. It can also be instructive to remove the handstroke gap completely.

Clapping game

Ask ringers to stand in a circle, as they would for ringing. Start with everyone clapping together, one clap for each blow in rounds.

Handstrokes-Backstrokes <gap>Handstrokes-Backstrokes
1-2-3-4-5-6-1-2-3-4-5-6 1-2-3-4-5-6-1-2-3-4-5-6

Immediately after the last backstroke clap, there is a pause (handstroke gap) before the next round starts. At this pause, the ringers should all open their hands wide to illustrate their gap for one blow, then start clapping the next round.

Go round several times until everyone has the rhythm, counting the blows in rounds and leaving the gap. Expect laughter every time one person forgets to leave the gap and claps instead.

Using handbells to teach leading

If you have a set of handbells (even toy handbells) these can be used to introduce leading in the same way.

Ring rounds with an experienced ringer taking the treble. Everyone rings a handstroke in rounds, then a backstroke in rounds. Where the handstroke gap comes, start by everyone saying the word 'gap' or 'pause' out loud.

Once a rhythm has been established, take turns ringing the treble and leaving the gap.

Leading on tower bells

Teaching leading on tower bells does not necessarily mean the student has to ring the treble. If your tower has a light or flighty treble, pick a different bell for them to lead from to start with.

Listening

Listening for the tenor bong and the next beat is when the treble ringer's hands leave the sally on the treble's handstroke – the delay in strike of bell from pull to strike gives the handstroke gap.

Shadowing

Visually giving a hand to shadow and pointing out the relation to the tenor ringer's hands then listen to adjust.

Alternate strokes

Start by ringing rounds, with bells on alternate strokes. This enables a new ringer to get used to following a bell on a different stroke, just as if using the tenor stroke as a visual aid to leading. This can be difficult. Listening skills are also developed.

Call changes

Ask an experienced ringer to take the treble but invite the new ringer to ring bell 2. Start ringing rounds steadily, then call the 2 into the lead. The treble ringer can maintain a steady rhythm in seconds place so that the remaining bells can follow them if the ringer who is leading loses the rhythm.

Once the rhythm of leading is steady, call them back to seconds place, then back into lead. Repeat this a few times for practice at being called in and out of the lead.

More ways to practise leading

To increase confidence and skills of timing, ringers could practise leading from different bells, including the treble and heavier bells.

Once leading at handstroke has been perfected, try a new challenge of leading at backstroke, going in and out of the lead

Calling a new ringer up into fifths place, then back down again and into lead using successive handstrokes provides an opportunity for them to get used to the feel of moving down to lead – a step towards plain hunting.