A FREE GUIDE FROM COLLINGWOOD CYMBALS

Buying your first cymbal blanks

What I wish I'd known when I started



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01

Why I wrote this

I taught myself to make cymbals. That meant years of costly, frustrating mistakes, and I made every one of them. It's also why I understand how to teach this, and why I'm confident doing so.

A lot of cymbal making is counterintuitive. It takes trial and error, and learning from what goes wrong. You can repeat the same technique on two blanks that have been ordered identically, and they probably won't turn out the same. You'll meet confusing results, and sometimes opposing ones. There are fundamentals to learn before success is really even an option.

Choosing and buying your blanks well is the first of those fundamentals. Get it right and you give yourself a fighting chance. Get it wrong and you can lose months before you've really started. This guide is what I tell people who ask me, written down.



At the anvil in my Bristol workshop

GOING FURTHER

If you'd like help as you go, I'm happy to be contacted. I also run a Patreon where cymbalsmiths from around the world share what they've learned.

02

How a blank is made

It helps to know what you're buying. This is how Turkish foundries generally make B20 blanks. Videos of cymbal production are easy to find on YouTube.

1	**Melt**	Copper and tin are melted together at a set ratio and cast into ingots.
2	**Roll**	The ingots are heated and rolled through huge industrial rollers, again and again, until they reach the right size.
3	**Press**	If you ordered a bell (cup), it is pressed in while the metal is hot.
4	**Quench**	The blank is heated to a set temperature and quenched in water. This locks the bronze into a state ready for cold work.

Ready for cold work

Cold work means everything we do after that: hand hammering, lathing, burnishing and trimming. Expect your blank to arrive ready for it.

DON'T REACH FOR HEAT

With B20, unless you're extremely well set up and skilled, we don't use heat. Plenty of people try it, or suggest it, and quickly find out it's a bad idea. There are several important factors at play here.

Which alloy?

- **B20** (roughly 80% copper, 20% tin) is what I use and recommend. Everything in this guide is about B20.
- Turkish foundries rarely supply anything else. Some offer **B25 or B27** and call it superior. I'd question that.
- Chinese foundries especially may offer different alloys, for example **B8, B10 or B15**.
- For learning, B20 has enough in it to keep you busy for a lifetime.

GOING FURTHER

Why heat and B20 don't mix is covered in depth on my Patreon.

03

What to order first

My usual advice is simple: **buy at least four blanks, in the medium to medium-heavy range. A couple of 18s and a couple of 20s.**

What I mean by medium to medium-heavy

I think of it in terms of density (more on that in section 4). A 20" blank at 2,500 g has a density of about 7.96 on my Cymbal Density Calculator. The same density in other sizes:

Size	16"	18"	20"	22"	24"
Weight at density 7.96	1,600 g	2,025 g	2,500 g	3,025 g	3,600 g

Density is a rough guide only. It compares weight against surface area, and nothing else: profile, bell size, taper, thickness distribution, hammering and lathing can all make a big difference to how a cymbal feels and behaves.

That's the medium side of medium-heavy, and it's about the lightest I'd suggest for starting out. You could also order two 20s, one medium and one a bit heavier, and use the conveyor belt of learning (below) to your advantage.

Not thin

Many people start with thin blanks. They're cheaper, and lots of us like thin cymbals. But thin blanks can be harder to work with than heavier ones, for some in-depth reasons. They get frustrating fast, and they can quickly go past the point of rescue.

A medium to medium-heavy blank is kinder to learn on. Each hammer stroke means relatively less on a more solid piece of metal, so mistakes are less severe. It also arrives strong already, so you aren't working from a weaker starting point. Even so, a perfect heavier blank can take a long time to understand.

Not tiny, not huge

- **Small**, such as an 8" splash, can be challenging. You need to understand what you're doing before you can change the scale of your work for such a small canvas.
- **Big**, such as a 22" or 24" ride, is a lot of tiring, labour-intensive work. Problems still arrive, but on a larger canvas they can be harder to spot. Again, you need to change the scale of your work for the size of the canvas, and that takes a while to understand.
- **Hi-hats** are very desirable, but they bring their own challenges: the stability and control needed in the build to make two cymbals work together.
- **18" and 20"** sit in the middle. Once you've learned on them, you can take that thinking bigger, smaller, thinner or thicker.

Why four, not one

- Shipping from Turkey or China has a high minimum cost, so one blank is poor value. More blanks spreads the shipping and import costs. It depends on your budget, of course.
- **Share an order.** See if any cymbal makers near you, in your country or your part of the world are placing an order, and whether they'd let you add a few pieces to it. You could split the shipping cost. My map of cymbalsmiths of the world shows who is in your area: collingwoodcymbals.com/cymbalsmiths-of-the-world

- Some foundries will sell a single blank, or any number. Others have a minimum order, by quantity or by weight. Ask before you plan your order.
- Don't expect success from your first batch, or your second, maybe even your third or fourth. Follow the conveyor belt of learning below, and keep going. It's very easy to go wrong very quickly without knowing why, and then the only option is a fresh blank.

THE CONVEYOR BELT OF LEARNING

With a few blanks on the go, do a little work on one. Notice what frustrates you, and what goes right or wrong. Put it down and start the next, and you'll find you have a bit more of an inkling. Then the next. Learning keeps moving, and no single blank carries all the pressure.

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Choosing the weight

You usually order by **diameter, weight and quantity.** The weight you order decides, to some degree, what you can make.

- You can't add metal. A 2,000 g blank will never become a 2,500 g cymbal.
- Lathing takes weight away. If you're aiming for a lathed cymbal at around 2,000 g, a 2,000 g blank won't get you there. Order heavier.
- Trimming the edge loses weight too. On a larger cymbal it can be as much as a couple of hundred grams.
- How much extra to allow is a skill that comes with experience.
- Weights vary a little because of the way blanks are made. Order 2,500 g and it's very often within 20 g, but it can be as much as 70 g either way, depending on the foundry.

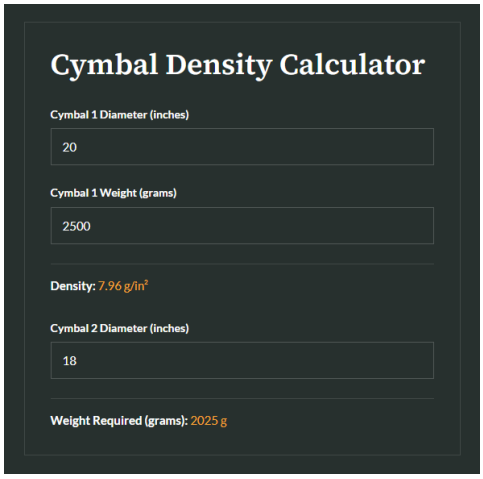
It depends on the cymbal

Say you want a 2,000 g, 20" ride. Is it thin? Wavy? Washy? Chunky in one part and thin in another? Depending on the answer, you might order 2,200 g, 3,000 g, or something else entirely.

THINK IN DENSITY, NOT JUST WEIGHT

I prefer to work with density. I created a free **Cymbal Density Calculator** for this, and it gives me a much clearer idea of where I'm aiming: collingwoodcymbals.com/cymbal-density-calculator

If you're just learning, stay in the medium to medium-heavy range and err on the side of caution.



My Cymbal Density Calculator at collingwoodcymbals.com

GOING FURTHER

What these numbers mean in practice, and how much weight to allow for each kind of cymbal, is something I go into on my Patreon.

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Flat or bell, hole and edge

Flat or with a bell

- Foundries sell blanks **flat** (with or without a mounting hole), or with a **pressed bell**. Each has its own range of bell shapes, and some will send pictures and measurements.
- Flat rides, of course, need flat blanks.
- Planning a hand-formed bell from a flat blank? It's very tricky early on. It takes **a lot** of practice to learn what it does and what it means for the rest of the build.
- There are pros and cons to building a bell by hand with or without a mounting hole. I prefer without, and I only drill the hole once I'm happy with the shape of the bell. My reasoning is covered in depth in my teaching.

The mounting hole

- Pressed-bell blanks usually come with a hole, and it's often undersized. You'll need to drill it out to the right size.
- Chinese blanks often have only a small dimple where the hole should be. That needs drilling out too.

The edge

Blanks are cut by a circle shear at the factory, so the edge is often **very sharp and ragged**. How tidy it is depends on the foundry. Some offer smoothed edges. I prefer them in their raw, ragged state, because blanks are often a bit wavy or kinked, and once the cymbal takes shape the edge can need work anyway.

Blanks often come a little oversized, and you can order them oversized to be sure. Personally, I like to trim the edge down. If you need exact whole-inch sizes, that takes skill. I don't always aim for whole inches, and plenty of my cymbals go out at in-between sizes, 21¾" for example. That's fine by me.

PRE-HAMMERED BLANKS

If you ask, some foundries will pre-hammer a blank for you. Some will hammer and lathe to your design. It costs very little. It does raise questions about what it means to call yourself a cymbal maker, and those questions are worth asking.



Raw, ragged sheared edges (left), and drilling out a mounting hole (right)

GOING FURTHER

My Patreon covers how to drill out a mounting hole and how to trim the edge, safely and accurately. It also has a detailed image bank of Amedia's bell shapes and measurements.

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Where to buy

Contact a foundry directly if you can, and build a relationship with them. Some sellers are individuals or middlemen, and it's hard to know where their blanks really come from, or who is making money along the way. Most foundries can be contacted through their websites.

	Turkish foundries	Chinese foundries
Alloy	B20 (some offer B25/B27)	B20, and often others (B8, B10, B15, for example)
Bells and mounting holes	Mounting hole usually drilled, often undersized	Bells tend to be larger; often just a dimple to drill
Price	Anything from US$35–50 per kg at the time of writing	Some only produce set diameters and weights. Contact them for their price list.
My recommendation	Amedia amediacymbals.com.tr	Aisen aisencompany.com

These are broad impressions from my own buying, not rules.

MY RECOMMENDATION: AMEDIA (TURKEY)

Amedia is who I buy from. Contact is friendly and the quality is good. Service and delivery are quick too, and each blank is made fresh to my order. That matters: sometimes you get the feeling a foundry has just picked out something close to what they think you want. I send a lot of business their way, so tell them I sent you and you should be looked after. I get nothing for recommending them.

Tell them you are serious

A lot of foundries assume you're a hobbyist. If you're serious about it, tell them so. It's getting better as more people take up cymbal making, but sometimes they need reminding.

Language

Some foundries have staff who speak several languages, but the language barrier can be very real. Keep your messages short and clear, and put the key numbers in writing. The checklist in section 9 helps.

Be clear about what you want

One maker I know ordered blanks from a Chinese supplier, and when they turned up they had all been hammered into shape already. It wasn't what they wanted. Some companies will try to persuade you to buy blanks pre-hammered, or even pre-lathed, on the assumption that you want to build a business: it saves you the work, and you just add your own logo. Some companies work that way and that's fine, but it might not be what you want. Say exactly what you want, and if sending pictures helps, send pictures, so you both know what you'll receive.

Other sources

- There are also sources in Canada and Brazil. Contact me for details and to talk them through.
- You can now find cymbal blanks on the big online marketplaces too, such as AliExpress and Temu. These generally come from Chinese foundries, so the same advice applies. Be sure of what you're buying: the alloy and size are usually listed, but the weight may not be, so ask before you order.
- Why Amedia is my supplier of choice: the quality control, the tight tolerances, the communication, the shipping time, and an overall feeling of care in the process. With some suppliers, whether Turkish, Chinese or elsewhere, it can sometimes feel like quality control is a little lacking.

GOING FURTHER

Not sure about a supplier? Ask experienced cymbalsmiths, me included. On my Patreon, members share direct foundry contacts that we can vouch for.

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Paying, customs and import duty

Paying

- Blanks usually ship once your payment has cleared.
- Payment is often by services such as Wise, PayPal or bank transfer. Each foundry has its preferences, such as euros or US dollars.
- There's been at least one scam where a cymbalsmith paid for blanks that didn't exist. Luckily, they got their money back. This trade is still young and finding its feet, and there's room for people to abuse that.
- **Check a supplier before you pay.** Ask cymbalsmiths who have bought from them. I can vouch for some.

Customs and import duty

Expect to pay **import duty, VAT and tariffs** (or your country's equivalents) when the blanks arrive. Budget for it from the start.

THE VALUE ON THE PAPERWORK

Some companies automatically declare a low commercial value on the shipping paperwork. If customs check your parcel and want more information, that is your responsibility as the buyer, not the seller's, and it can get unpleasant. Before you order, ask your supplier how they declare shipments, and agree on it with them. You are responsible for your shipment. If you're uncomfortable with what you're offered, you either take the risk or, my advice, walk away and deal with someone else.

How long it takes

Delivery times vary by foundry and destination, and on how often the foundry makes blanks. In my experience, ordering from Amedia to the UK, the blanks are usually with me within a couple of weeks, from casting the metal to arriving at my door. In some cases it can take months. Don't be afraid to ask when the next casting day is and what lead time to expect, and get it in writing.

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When they arrive

Blanks usually come stacked in a strong box, perhaps in bubble wrap, packed with dense foam or polystyrene. It can be rough and ready, and some companies take less care than others.

Check them straight away

STAY SAFE

Heavy boxes: a box of blanks can be very heavy. Have help if you need it, know how to lift safely, and plan where you'll take delivery. **Edges:** wear gloves when handling raw blanks. **Ears:** hammering is loud, so always wear hearing protection. **Eyes and lungs:** wear eye protection for lathing and grinding, and a mask with good ventilation against bronze dust and factory soot.

A TIP FOR LATER

Never wear gloves while lathing. I cover lathe safety in my teaching.

- Look over every blank as soon as it arrives.
- If one is damaged, **photograph it** and send the photos to your supplier. Say which blank it is and when it arrived.
- **Don't start working on it** until you've heard back. Amedia, for example, are good at owning up when something's wrong, and in my experience will offer a free replacement on your next order. Money back is rare in my experience.
- Some faults only show once you've started. As soon as you see one, or think you do, ask an experienced cymbalsmith or contact the company.

What's normal, and what isn't

- **Some waviness** is expected. There are tolerances, and new makers sometimes mistake them for faults.
- **Tong marks.** Hot blanks are often handled with tongs, so you may see tong dents. That's normal, but in extreme cases they can cause distortion that's hard to work around.
- **Bends and kinks.** Some blanks look as if they rested awkwardly as they cooled. That's normal too. Some are worse than others, which is one reason a slightly more expensive, more careful foundry can be worth it.
- **Soot and dust** from the factory, which will fly into the air when you hammer. Ask your chosen supplier what to expect when your blanks arrive.
- **Surface impurities.** Some impurities in the surface of a raw blank are normal, and rarely anything to worry about beyond cosmetic considerations. Often they won't affect the cymbal once it's lathed, or won't be visible once the crust is removed. Check more severe ones with an experienced cymbalsmith, or raise them with the supplier. Occasionally it is poor quality control, so it's worth getting an opinion before working on it.
- **Splits and cracks** are not normal. Report them.

Once you really understand cymbal making, you can deal with almost anything a blank throws at you. Until then, buying cheap thin blanks and expecting quick results is a false economy.

09

Ordering checklist

Print this page and have it next to you when you email a foundry. The first part is what you ask for. The second is what to ask them.

What you ask for

☐	**Alloy**	e.g. B20 (what I recommend)	
☐	**Diameter**	e.g. 2 × 18", 2 × 20"	
☐	**Weight per blank**	medium to medium-heavy; allow for lathing and trimming (see section 3 for suggested weights)	
☐	**Quantity**	at least four	
☐	**Flat or bell**	and which bell shape	
☐	**Mounting hole**	drilled, or none	
☐	**Edge**	as cut, or smoothed	
☐	**Oversize**	how much extra diameter, if any	

What to ask them

☐	**Minimum order**	by quantity or weight?	
☐	**Price per kg**	and the total, in which currency	
☐	**Payment method**	Wise, PayPal, bank transfer or other	
☐	**Shipping cost**	to your door	
☐	**Casting day and lead time**	get it in writing	
☐	**Customs paperwork**	agree how the shipment will be declared	
☐	**What's in the box**	soot, dust, packing	
☐	**Damage policy**	what happens if a blank arrives split	

Before you pay

☐	**Who has vouched for them?**	ask other cymbalsmiths	

The right-hand column is for your notes or the foundry's answers. Mention that I sent you if you order from Amedia.

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Next steps

Sometimes, walk away

Once your blanks arrive and you start working on them, one of the most useful things I can tell you is this: when it isn't working, stop and walk away for a while. Come back with fresh eyes, or pick up the next blank on your conveyor belt.

Buying blanks from me

If you'd rather order a small number, or want blanks I've checked, you can buy them from me. There's a small markup, because I pay shipping to me and then post them on to you. Contact me to discuss this.

Learn with me

- **Patreon:** techniques, insights, tutorials and a worldwide community of cymbalsmiths: patreon.com/collingwoodcymbals
- **One-to-one sessions** and training: collingwoodcymbals.com/training-mentorship
- **Make Your Own Cymbal** with me in Bristol: makeyourowncymbal.com
- **Free resources:** collingwoodcymbals.com/cymbalsmith-resources
- **Cymbal Density Calculator:** collingwoodcymbals.com/cymbal-density-calculator



Finished cymbals, with a raw blank on the right

Good luck, and enjoy it. It's a lifetime's worth of learning.

Dave Collingwood

Version 1.1, October 2026. I'll update this guide as things change; check collingwoodcymbals.com for the latest version. Photographs by Shotaway, shotaway.com.