Basic Thoughts On Bell Control

Each time we pull a bell over the balance and set it in motion we are imparting energy to the bell and its fittings to overcome friction and air resistance; if we don't pull hard enough (insufficient energy) the bell falls back at the end of its swing – effectively we've lost control and lost our place. If we pull too hard, we have to 'kill' the excess energy before the next pull or we break a stay. Thus pulling too hard wastes energy twice, first from the excess pull, and again in stopping the bell at the end of its swing. This makes ringing tiring

Some ringers 'make it look so easy' and, in general, they are the ones to copy. When ringing one should be relaxed. Not an easy thing for learners because in any strange situation it is natural to tense up. This should be corrected, because tense arms take energy from the swinging bell – energy that you have to replace by pulling harder. Let the rope lift your relaxed arms so that you can feel what is happening, only using muscle power to stop the bell at the top of its swing. This takes practice and confidence. If you have judged the pull correctly only a little effort is needed to hold the bell balanced. If you have to use a lot of effort to stop the bell, try pulling less. The more you can relax your arms, the less you have to pull, and the easier it becomes to control the bell, to control its 'terminal energy'. Of course, if the bell falls back on you, pull a little harder next time

If you are ringing a light bell in a tower with long ropes you may need to pull noticeably harder on handstroke than on backstroke, due to the weight of the rope. As the bell swings from handstroke to backstroke the rope is lifted through several feet. This absorbs energy, extra energy that you have to put into your pull. When you pull from backstroke the weight of the rope is working with you, thus less pull is needed

Different techniques are needed for ringing light bells or heavy bells, due largely to the difference in their swing times. Large bells swing slower than small bells. So, ringing at the front end, it is necessary to hold your bell balanced for a moment on each stroke to keep in time with the back bells

But, when you ring at the back end, unless the ringing is very slow, you do not have to balance your bell. When a heavier bell is swung up near to the balance there is a noticeable pause before it swings back, and this 'pause zone' is where you can best control a heavy bell. The closer the bell is to the balance, the longer the pause. When the previous pull is just right you can feel the bell pause at the moment you want to make the next pull. At the back end, trying to balance the bell often makes for late striking and wasted energy. If you find that you are fighting the bell to keep in time, pull less. If you are clipping the bell in front, pull slightly more, to lift the bell a little closer to the balance – this slows its swing fractionally

But – ringing heavier bells below the balance, when 'Stand' is called, pull the last backstroke a little harder to restore the bell to the balance!

In summary…

- Keep relaxed – it makes for easier ringing
- Experiment with your pulls to ring with the least effort
- Vary your ringing technique for light or heavy bells

Something to consider: Each time you pull, not only are you endeavouring to strike your bell correctly for that blow; the strength of pull is also positioning the bell for the next pull