

Texas Bandmaster Association Convention
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Methods and Strategies for a Winning Marching Band

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General Considerations

- Find some mentors that you trust! Pick the brains of those that have done the job for a long time and have been successful. They can save you a lot of heart ache if you are willing to listen.
- Rehearse outside as much as possible. I generally only use indoor rehearsals to learn new music.
- Have a clinician out to work your band. I am a proponent of having only one or two clinicians teach my band. Too many teachers talking to the same kids will only confuse the students as to what is expected.
- Remember that marching band is your biggest marketing tool. For the most part, a community does not associate concert band with the identity of your school band. Put in the time that it takes to be successful and promote your band!!!
- Try your best not to teach to the test. Statements such as “to get a first division you have to.....” or “you better not do that when a judge is watching” will teach the students that contest is the only thing that matters. We must be advocates for our craft. If students learn to love music, value team work, sacrifice for the greater good, and execute at a high level on a daily basis.....the ratings and rankings will take care of themselves.

New Diana Rehearsal Structure

The New Diana Eagle Band rehearses from 7:35-8:35 a.m. every week day and from 7:00-9:00 p.m. on Monday nights through UIL Region Marching Contest. Rehearsal schedules vary as needed after UIL Region Marching Contest.

1. We start each rehearsal with a fundamental marching block. Using this block to review specific elements of posture, carriage, and execution of maneuvers provides a great foundation which we can refer back to during the portion of the rehearsal that focuses on our contest drill.
2. Rehearse playing fundamentals through appropriate warm up materials. While the ensemble sound that I listen for is vastly different than in concert band, most playing concepts remain the same.
 - a. I use the various formations that occur during the drill for our playing warm up. This helps to get the students used to listen for each other while in that specific formation.
 - b. ****MARK TIME during your playing warm up!!! This helps everything.
3. Work the drill.

- a. I make sure that my drill can be taught, and rehearsed, in segments.
- b. I give each segment a name such as Texas Turn, Follow the Leader Countermarch, Diamonds, Mighty Mite Trio, etc.
- c. I ask students to remember their starting coordinates for each segment of the drill in order to facilitate efficient rehearsals. A student should be able to tell me which yard line they are on, or near, as well as how many steps from the sideline, or hash mark, they must be for the starting point of each drill segment.
- d. Rehearsals are “drill segment” oriented. We generally only run through longer portions of the drill at the end of a rehearsal so that we can accurately assess our improvements.
- e. Drill should be rehearsed just like individuals should practice their instrument. Spend the most time practicing the segments of your drill that sound and look the worst. Always do something better.....never just “run it again”. Constantly guide your students’ ears, eyes, and brains during repetitive work on drill segments.

Music

- The most important aspect of ensemble success is the ability level of individual players. Hold everyone accountable for their level of contribution to the band.
- We do music pass offs for a grade. Please contact me through email if you would like to have a copy of my band handbook that details the manner with which students are graded on their music.
- I try to pick music that will push the students beyond their current playing ability but that also will allow them the chance to succeed.

Communication

- Send your parents a copy of the marching band calendar at least seven or eight months prior to the first summer rehearsal.
- The use of a band website, band facebook page, mass emails, etc. are usually the best way to communicate schedules and logistics in today’s culture. However, I also send the most important bits information home by “snail mail” for those few families that don’t use the internet.

Student Leadership

- We do our best to have all student leadership positions filled before we leave for summer break.
- Make sure you give your student leaders the chance to lead. Set the parameters for your student leaders, clearly identify a task, and get out of the way. Even though continued guidance will often times be necessary, students love to feel a sense of ownership in what their band achieves and will often times surprise you with the high level at which they achieve.
- New Diana student leadership positions include Drum Major, Majorette, Loading Crew, Uniform Crew, Band Council, Section Leaders, and Squad Leaders. I will be happy to email anyone an in depth description of expectations for our student leader positions.

Summer Band

- If possible, hire enough summer band staff to where you can split your band into section rehearsals every day for the first week of rehearsals. Retired band directors, college music majors, and even former standout players are good resources for hiring sectional teachers.
- Start slow. Rote teaching in order to get the music and drill learned as fast as possible will yield less than desirable results.
- Expect perfection from day one but be realistic about the amount of time that it takes to achieve at a high level. A marching season is much more a marathon than a sprint.

Drill Writing

- Uniform and high level execution of playing, carriage, and marching maneuvers are what judges are looking for when deciding ratings and rankings. Be careful not to set your students up for failure by trying to have the hardest drill in order to “win”.
- My drills begin with the hardest music and maneuvers and end with slightly easier music and maneuvers.
- I like to teach and perform the “easier” ending of my contest drill for the first few football games so as to set up my students for success early on.
- Benefits to teaching the “harder” beginning portion of the contest drill last:
 - Students will have longer to practice and pass off their “harder” music and drill before they must perform it for an audience.
 - Students perform the hardest part of the drill while they are fresh at contest.
 - Students finish strong at contest because they have been performing the end of the drill the longest.

Performing

- Every performance opportunity must be taken seriously by everyone in the organization.
- Focus on aspects of performing every day. Bands *will* perform how they practice.
- When all of the emphasis is on contest results, students and directors experience a letdown after the “big one” is over. Make it more about the journey. After all, if we don’t enjoy what we do every day, what is the point of doing it?
- Always provide positive and negative feedback on performances. Students need to know what they have done well and what needs to improve.

I can't possibly list all of the sources that my teaching methods have come from. I steal from everyone! The appropriate band director mentality on getting new ideas is summed up by the following quote.

“It is better to take what does not belong to you than to let it lie around neglected.” – Mark Twain