

The OCD Approach to Taking a Band to UIL Contest

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The following information was presented by John Benzer at a “standing-room only” clinic at the TBA Convention/Clinic in July 2009. While this information will be helpful to all band directors regardless of experience, it will be a life-saver for young directors, especially first-year teachers. To print a complete version which includes information for sightreading room procedures, go to: <http://apps.texasbandmasters.org/archives/pdfs/clinic/2009-benzer.pdf>.

Should my band go to UIL Contest?

- Trust your mentor to help you decide whether or not your band would have an educationally positive experience by going to UIL Contest.
- After eligibility kicks in, there must be enough students left in order for the ensemble to have an educationally beneficial experience.
- If your mentor/clinician suggests that you switch to a more appropriate “named” selection for your contest program—whether it be 2 months prior to or 2 weeks before your contest date—listen to them and trust that their recommendation will create a more positive experience for everyone involved.

Checklist of UIL Contest-related tasks

- Consult the C&CR, which is the Constitution and Contest Rules. You need to refer to any new information each time it is revised.
- Submit the appropriate UIL forms—preferably a few days before the deadline.
- Send a letter to the faculty (with principal’s signature) about students missing class and possibly getting their work early.
- Order scores at least one month prior to your contest!!!
 - ◆ Before dealing with out-of-print or out-of-stock scores, contact your colleagues to see if you can borrow scores from them.
 - ◆ If you have to use photocopies, you MUST attach a permission letter from music company publisher to each of the three scores.
- You must bring a numbered score of each selection for each judge with your school stamp on them. If a particular piece has dual staves on any given page, it would be a good idea to highlight the second staff. On each page, it would be helpful to neatly circle the first number.
- Previous judges’ markings must be completely erased from “used” scores. Have a coworker go through

the scores and double-check. Many times, big circles and words can still be seen even if they have been erased. You are encouraged to use an art gum eraser. Post-it notes should not be found on any scores with eligibility information, etc. You should not call attention to anything that may not be a factor in the judges’ final rating.

- If your eligibility has changed in any way since you submitted your original forms, you may need to bring an updated form with you. **Check with the contest chair regarding this issue.
- Set up transportation WEEKS in advance, following all protocol in your district.
 - ◆ Allow time for traffic.
 - ◆ If the bus drivers know back roads, they need to take them.
 - ◆ In larger districts, you may have to charter buses.
- Arrange to pick up and utilize a truck for your large equipment.
- Assign a loading crew.
- Arrange for meals if needed. Put organized and efficient parent volunteers in charge of this.
- Setup charts will need to be submitted to the contest chairman prior to the contest.
 - ◆ If you use risers, make sure the site is providing them.

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- ◆ If they do not provide risers, you must bring your own and bring band parents to move them.
- Find out the instrumentation and percussion requirements of the sightreading piece you will be reading.
- Percussion equipment and personnel decisions must be made.
 - ◆ You need to know what percussion equipment is being provided.
 - ◆ As much as possible, bring your own equipment and setup crew.
 - ◆ A percussion checklist must be created by your percussionists prior to your contest day. This must be double-checked by either you or your percussion specialist.
 - ◆ Depending on the contest stage, you may need to bring very thick blankets and/or carpet strips to put underneath your battery percussion instruments. A towel may also be brought to place over your bass drum head.
 - ◆ You need to bring some sort of felt-covered “surface” for placement of triangles, various mallets and other small color instruments so no accidental textures will enter your program performance.
- Someone on your staff needs to travel to contest with you in order to be on stage to assist with and check the setup before the students enter the stage.
- When going to UIL contest, you must bring another director from your staff, your percussion specialist (if applicable), your moving crew and parents to assist with supervision, uniforms, and meals (whether students eat on/off the bus or at an eating establishment on the way back to the home campus).
- Make sure you bring a medical form for every student, including contact phone numbers for parents as well as alternate emergency contacts.
- Before departing your campus, it would be a good idea to have a brief “inspection” of uniforms, instruments and related maintenance items, folders/binders, etc.
- It may be necessary to have assigned seating based on individuals or instrument “families”.
- Students should already be in their uniform when they get on the buses. Male students should be allowed to put on their bow ties, cummerbunds and tuxedo coats once getting off the bus. This time needs to be taken into consideration when planning the itinerary.
- You are encouraged to have students begin a “silent study time” of their music when you are halfway to your contest site. This means that their music folders/binders need to be with them on the bus. Some sort of a verbal “signal” should be given to students to begin this time. This “no talking” mode should continue as students get off the buses.



- Unique equipment that must be brought with you includes towels for mutes, flute/piccolo stands, B-flat and utility clarinet stands, etc.
- If students are ineligible, they cannot go to the contest—even as part of the moving crew.

When you get to the contest site

- Send someone from your staff inside to check-in and drop off your scores (and updated eligibility form if applicable). Male students should exit the buses first—with their instruments and music so they can report to parent volunteers who are assisting with bow ties, cummerbunds and tuxedo coats. Make sure there

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is access to sewing equipment and/or pins, etc. After getting completely dressed, they should then assemble their instruments.

- After all male students are off the buses, female students should exit with their instruments and music. They should then assemble their instruments.



- Students should assemble their instruments outside the bus and then put their cases back on. No instruments should be assembled on the bus!

- Make sure all students are in their full uniform before they enter the building.

- Before entering the building, it is strongly recommended that you have students form a “close” setup around you. It is during this time that you can make sure that everyone is there and has their instruments, music, reed guards, water bottles, valve oil, etc. with them.

- The students must file in and out of the warm-up room, stage and sightreading room in order of the setup for your first piece. You also need to know and identify which “end student” will lead the group from one location to the next.

- Once the warm-up has started, there is not time for students to use the restroom, get a drink, etc. These things need to be taken care of PRIOR to students entering the warm-up room. Be prepared to make an exception regarding the use of the restroom.

Warm-up Room procedures

- It is a very good idea to have a few parent volunteers in the warm-up room.

- As students are sitting down, remind them to put their music in whatever order you plan to review. Also, remind students to set their instrument lengths correctly—just like they do in the band hall.

- Do not have students over-play in the warm-up room. Bands that “over” warm-up usually have weak performances due to fatigue.

- Positioning, articulating with air, saying note names, etc. are great “non-playing” techniques you can utilize during your warm-up time.

- Be cautious in tuning and/or changing student’s instrument lengths. Tuning sometimes takes more time than you think.

- Students must be trained to move quickly and efficiently in between pieces.

- A monitor will send for your percussionists before your warm-up time has ended. The monitor should lead them to the stage with their equipment.

- When the monitor says your time is up, that means it is time for your group to report to the stage. You need to stop warming up! If you exceed the time allowed for performance, you can be disqualified.

- You should lead your students from the warm-up room to the stage. A few parent volunteers should be the last to exit the room. Students should walk very seriously and quietly to the stage.

Transitioning from Warm-up Room to Contest Stage

- While you are in the warm-up room, a director from your staff should be on stage to make sure that the setup crew is building the setup correctly—exactly like it is done at the home campus. This director should make sure the chairs, stands, risers, shells, director podium and director stand are all in place.

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- Since the percussionists have been setting up while you were still in the warm-up room, they should have time to play a few sounds on various instruments to become aware of volume, heights of instruments, etc. Percussionists should be given strict parameters as to what they should play—and for how long.
- Lead your students on stage. Students must be taught how to walk with their instruments (especially French horns, saxophones and bassoons). Many times judges are watching to see where bassoon bocals have been placed, how instrument bells and slides are protected, etc. Positive first impressions can be made by this entry procedure.
- While students are filing on stage, parents should be “pre-encouraged” NOT to shout out their child’s name, wave, or take pictures either on the stage or at the foot of the stage. This is inappropriate and will be heard/seen by your adjudication panel.
- Approve the set-up (including risers and shells) before the students sit down. You give a signal for each and every row to sit down, with the assumption that there are not missing or extra stands, chairs, etc.
- Replace any “sinking” stands.
- Discuss with the announcer the order and pronunciation of your name, pieces and composers.
- Perform a short warm-up:
 - ◆ Short articulation sequence
 - ◆ F concerts
 - ◆ Chorale
 - ◆ Do NOT tune individuals or perform intervals past concert D
 - ◆ DO NOT EXPOSE THINGS THAT YOU KNOW DO NOT SOUND GOOD. Your warm-up creates the first impression of your judges.
 - ◆ Students should stay in “ready” position following the warm-up.
- The director stays on stage, slightly off to the side, and looking at the judges.
- Do not chew gum during your stage or sightreading process. Set a good example for your students.
- After the band is announced, be prepared for little or no applause. Make sure you have told your parents this ahead of time. It is perfectly acceptable for them to applaud at appropriate times.
- You are strongly encouraged to conduct through the first few measures of each piece “off the podium” with your students. They should of course be positioning and mentally preparing to have a successful “start” to each of your pieces.
- After each of your three pieces has ended, students’ instruments stay in playing position until you give them a signal to go to ready position.
- There should absolutely NO rustling of music during applause. Students should be already trained to wait for a signal from you. Similarly, percussionists should not move music or ANY equipment until this signal is given.
- Do not have sections or soloists stand after playing any pieces at UIL Contest. This would, however, be appropriate at a festival.
- It is not necessary to make eye contact with any of the three judges between pieces and wait for a signal to go on to your next piece. Proceed from piece to piece, allowing time for your percussionists to move equipment, change timpani pitches, etc. During this time, students should be studying the beginning of their next piece.
- After your last piece, you may choose to have your entire ensemble stand at the same time. Students should stand square to the audience and smile. Remember that this is UIL Contest, not a Winter or Spring Concert.
- After applause has ended, tell your students that they did a good job, but still have another

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performance (Sightreading) to complete their UIL Contest experience.

- Remind students not to leave anything on stage—ESPECIALLY percussion equipment.
- Allow the percussionists to exit the stage first with their equipment. You may have a few parents come up on stage quickly to assist. Percussionists must take everything from the stage out into the hallway and to the sightreading room.
 - ◆ All percussion equipment needs to be brought into the sightreading room, regardless of whether it is going to be used or not.
 - ◆ Equipment that is not needed is to be simply put off to the side.
- If you have students sitting in different sightreading chairs than your last prepared piece played on stage, make sure your students exit the stage in their sightreading order.

Before leaving the contest site

- Someone from your staff needs to go inside and check out, pick up the comment sheets and trophy (if applicable).
- With assistance from chaperones, students should return to buses with their belongings and wait for the director. All uniform and loading-related activities can take place during this time.
- When you return to your students (whether on or off the bus), do not project your personal opinions of your ratings and/or the quality/competence of the judges to your students or parents. If your ratings are not pleasing to you, do not become emotional and cry.
- Double-check that all equipment has been properly loaded, and that students have their personal instruments, music and accessories loaded or with them.
- Double-check attendance of all students before leaving the site.

Contest dress for directors

- Ladies
 - ◆ Pant suit
 - ◆ Long dress
 - ◆ Sleeves ****no sleeveless ANYTHING!!!
 - ◆ Shoes that are closed-toed and have a closed back as well
 - ◆ Appropriate hosiery
- Men
 - ◆ Tuxedo, regardless of the students' uniforms
 - ◆ Black socks and black shoes
- When you are getting dressed, be sure not to just look in the mirror from the front, but also from the back!

John Benzer is on the music education faculty at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music where he teaches undergraduate instrument pedagogy classes and band director methods classes. Through the band department, Mr. Benzer assists the Wind Ensembles and is the camp coordinator of the Cougar Band Camp. Before moving to Houston in 2000, he taught for twelve years at Griffin Middle School in The Colony, Lewisville ISD. He served as Associate Director of Bands for two years before being named Director of Bands in 1990. During his ten years as Director of Bands, the Griffin MS Symphonic Band was twice named the Texas Class CC Honor Band (1993 and 1997). In 1997 the band program was awarded the Sudler Silver Cup.

Mr. Benzer is a cum laude graduate of North Texas State University, where he received his Bachelor of Music Education degree in 1988. He completed his Masters in Applied Music degree in 2004 at the University of Houston. Mr. Benzer is co-author of Essential Musicianship-Ensemble Concepts, a published band method textbook that is on the Texas state-adopted textbook list. He was named the 1995 Texas Young Bandmaster of the Year and was inducted as a member of Phi Beta Mu in February of 2001. He is an active clinician and adjudicator throughout Texas presenting workshops in several school districts as well as for TBA and TMEA. He has presented clinics at the Midwest Clinic, the Arkansas Bandmasters Association Convention and the New Mexico Music Educators Association Convention. Mr Benzer's professional affiliations include TMEA, TBA, TMAA and Phi Beta Mu.