

# The Art of Selecting a Successful Contest Program

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This is the outline of their presentation given at the 2009 TBA Convention/Clinic.

## General Considerations

### Timeline

- Contest date
- Look at your school calendar - holidays, TAKS, other performances, etc.

### Rehearsal Schedule

- Daily rehearsal schedule
- Length of class period
- Sectional rehearsal schedule

### Strengths and Weaknesses of Your Ensemble

- Grade level of students
- Playing level of students
- Returning members
- Complete and balanced instrumentation
- Student solo capabilities
- Student technical development
- Student tonal development

### Director's Experience and Knowledge

*This is probably the most important aspect in the process of selecting music. It is important to assess the student's current skills, but your success in the music selection process will largely be determined by your experience at guessing/predicting what the individual students, sections and entire ensemble will be able to do in several months.*

- First year teachers or first-time head directors:
  - ☛ Ask for guidance and help from more experienced, successful directors.
  - ☛ Don't try to "set the world on fire." Select music that you know will be successful at first and then build upon that success year after year.

**Selecting music for contest or any performance is an ART and not a SCIENCE. Experience and knowledge make the process more accurate, but it always involves a certain amount of guesswork.**

- Experienced teachers are often more accurate at predicting what the students will be able to do because they have learned from their previous mistakes and successes.

- Use all the resources available to you in order to familiarize yourself with the pieces on the UIL Prescribed Music List.

- ☛ Go to the music store or conventions to study scores and listen to recordings.

- ☛ Use the Internet to find recordings.

- JW Pepper has many recordings available on their web site ([www.jwpepper.com](http://www.jwpepper.com).)

- On [www.UILforms.com](http://www UILforms.com) you can find links directly to recordings on the publisher's web site and this availability will continue to be expanded. The current direct link is <http://www.UILforms.com/pmlb.asp>.

- ☛ Go to contests and listen to other groups to familiarize yourself with the literature, and what works for bands within your category. Attending contests, as well as being familiar with the Concert & Sight Reading Rubrics (<http://www UIL.utexas.edu/music/ConcertSRRubrics.html>) will help you develop an awareness of the performance standards expected for superior, excellent, good, fair and poor ratings.

- ☛ Look up UIL Contest programs on the region web sites (<http://www UILforms.com/links.html> or at [www.tmea.org](http://www.tmea.org)) to see what groups in your classification have played. Look for any correlation between pieces performed and ratings received.

- ☛ Use the TMEA/MERN Mentoring Network - More information at [www.tmea.org](http://www.tmea.org).

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### Specific Considerations

*Evaluate each section in your ensemble; determine what they are capable of handling pertaining to the following skills.*

- Range
- Endurance
- Rhythmic Understanding
- Articulation Demands
- Technical Demands
- Solo Potential
- Musical Maturity

*Look at the scoring to determine possible challenging or problematic sections.*

- Scoring that features ensemble strengths
- Scoring that exposes ensemble weaknesses
- Evaluate rhythmic complexity (which could create precision problems)
- Look for thinly scored sections—these can be a major obstacle for inexperienced players
- Use caution when selecting music with lengthy slow sections for less experienced groups

### Programming

*Characteristics of a piece*

- Slow/lyrical
- Fast/energetic
- Multi-movement
- Age appropriate style
- Musical variety

*March selection*

- Key consideration
- Length/endurance
- Rhythmic challenges
- Age appropriate

### Performance Order

- Program march first or last
- Consider endurance, tuning, concentration skills/focus
- First and last impressions

### Short List of Recommended Marches (Grade 1 & 2)

Brainstormer March - Len Orcino  
March Zuma - John O'Reilly  
Captain Dane - William Owens  
Big Circus - Bob Foster  
Home of the Brave - David Shaffer  
Lexington March - Edmondson  
Kentucky Pride - Edmondson  
Command March - Edmondson  
Calgary March - Feldstein/O'Reilly  
Normandy Beach - Edmondson  
Monterrey March - LaPlante  
Domingo Ortega - Ledesma & Oropesa/Wiley  
Invercargill - Lithgow/Custer  
The Tahoka Galop - William Owens  
March to Castle Rock - Steven Hodges  
Honor Roll March - Mark Williams  
Mighty Mite - Ted Mesang O'Loughlin

The complete handout from this clinic which includes an overview of Grade 1 & 2 pieces can be found on the TBA web site along with many other useful handouts.  
[http://apps.texasbandmasters.org/archives/convention\\_handoutslist.php](http://apps.texasbandmasters.org/archives/convention_handoutslist.php)