

Making Efficient Use of Your Warm-up Time at Marching Contest

Kathy Johnson

When planning how to best use your warm-up time at contest, there are several things to remember. This is not a rehearsal time; you will not necessarily be able to make last minute changes that will be effective on the field for the immediate performance. This is time for mental and physical focus; a time to reinforce the breathing process, the amount of air it will take for a successful performance, how to bring all elements together in order to manage physical endurance and stamina throughout the upcoming performance.

Be Organized

At most contests, there are areas not designated for official warm-up that may allow room for stationary silent warm-up activities. More than likely there are open areas around or near the contest venue that can also be occupied for silent warm-up activities. It is always a good idea to follow the guidelines for each contest and make sure you are not infringing on the area of another band or are in a forbidden area.

Before moving to the designated warm-up area, there are some things you can do to get more out of your warm-up time. This time should be filled with activities that you would normally do with your students and for which the designated amount of warm-up time might not allow.

Breathing – spend time going through a well thought out breathing exercise. This can be director or student lead and can be done as a full band or in individual sections. Everyone should be held accountable for using proper technique; directors can monitor this as student section leaders take their sections through the process.

Stretching – this is an essential activity prior to the performance. Simple shoulder, arm, upper body, and lower body stretches can help stave off the effects of adrenaline, performance anxiety, and nervousness; all things that can make controlled movement more difficult and less efficient. Once again, this can be led by students or directors, just continue to monitor individual technique and execution to insure students are doing what needs to be done to prepare for the upcoming performance.

Student Leadership – this is a perfect time for student leaders to speak to their sections. Many sections have traditions in which they like to engage prior to a performance.

These traditions are motivational in nature, are meant for the younger marchers to benefit from the experiences and be inspired by the upper classmen, and are great for team building and student ownership.

Be Punctual

Don't waste time; be in position to take the warm-up area slightly ahead of your scheduled start time. You may take the warm-up area as soon as the previous band vacates the field. Have your students lined up in order for the first activity you have planned for the official warm-up area; make it routine so that students know to go directly to the first activity.

Remain calm throughout the entire process; your students and staff are a direct reflection of your

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leadership, attitude, focus, and emotional state. Making sure that your staff and students know the “game plan” before you even leave your band hall will make for a more enjoyable and rewarding experience for everyone.

Have a plan and communicate that plan. Each staff member, student, and parent has a job to do for the success of the event. Live this plan every day when you rehearse and don't add anything “new” during your warm-up as it will most likely not be the best use of your time. All warm-ups or exercises that you do should be something you do on a regular basis and only things that you use in your field production.

Be Courteous

Expected marching contest etiquette should be employed at all times. Be respectful of all bands

and their families, but in particular to those in the surrounding warm-up areas and the bands before and after your scheduled warm-up. Good manners and good sportsmanship always come first. Maintain a respectful distance from the band in the warm-up area before you and show them the courtesy of being quiet. Do not try to take the area before your scheduled warm-up time. Stick to your plan, but be flexible; many times things happen that are out of your control—weather, other bands, sick students, etc. Be prepared for the worst and hope for the best.

Adhere to the Contest Schedule

Generally, you will have approximately 25 minutes for your warm-up. The schedules can vary, but most schedules are fairly specific. If a move time is not listed, you can assume the times listed are the move times, not the start and end times. Be punctual and leave the designated warm-up area on time so the band following you will get their full allotted time. Most contests have a student or parent host assigned to your band; ask them for a “count down” so that you can plan your time and stay on schedule.

Use of Staff

As previously stated, everyone has assigned responsibilities. These responsibilities should be assigned according to the strengths of the individual. There are some things that only the directors can do, such as marching warm-up, music warm-up, checking sound levels, troubleshooting electronics, and monitoring students. Students can take responsibility for their sections' stretching, breathing exercises, and tuning. Parents can help out with props, front ensemble equipment, water, food, medical first aid, and uniforms. It takes commitment and assistance from the entire band family to keep everyone healthy, productive, and happy.

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Warm-up Breakdown

Body – 5-8 minutes are spent on marching and fundamentals. All staff members are on deck for relays that isolate specific movement used in the field production. Only do the things that you will use in your show, which might include forward and backward marching, slides, choreography moves, foot isolation, stride, and body carriage. These should be fundamentals that you do regularly so the students are comfortable and are truly warming up for the time they will spend on the field during their performance.

Music – 13-15 minutes are spent on tone, articulation, listening levels, tuning, and excerpts from the production music. This might include long tones, any specific articulations we perform in our field music, balance, blending, individual listening responsibilities, and tuning exercises. Musical excerpts might include spot checks on solos, small ensembles, technical passages, dynamic palette, and any ‘special effects’ passages that may be in the music.

During the music warm-up, staff members and students can check on the sound levels in the front ensemble, microphone levels and

functionality make sure all batteries in electronic devices are fresh.

FINAL WORDS – 2 minutes

Traditions are important and contribute to student ownership and pride of their band program. Speak to your students about shared experiences; students have personal reasons for why they do things and have emotional attachments to their marching shows. Allow student leaders to express those feelings and offer up a motivational tidbit. Speak about your collective musical and visual goals; there seems to always be areas that need improving, be clear on expectations in this area.

The most important part of sharing the journey of the field production is to have fun and create lasting relationships with one another. Students continue to want to come out into the blazing hot sun when the temperature is 100 + and repeatedly go over and over the music and drill. They do this because you make it worthwhile by modeling patience, strong work ethic, self-efficacy, high standards, and pride in what you do. Have a great season!

Kathy Johnson is in her ninth year at Argyle High School where her responsibilities include directing the high school Marching Band, Wind Ensemble and Symphonic Band, teaching the beginner flute class and overseeing the instrumental music program in both middle school and high school. She is privileged to have on her staff Michael Lemish, Asa Burk, Evan Fletcher, Bojan Gutic, and James McNair. Under her direction, the Argyle High School Band earned the honor of performing at the Texas Music Educators Conference in 2009 as the TMEA 3A State Honor Band. The band is the reigning 3A State Marching Champion and earned this title in 2008, 2010, and 2012, and 2014. In addition, the Argyle Wind Ensemble performed at The Midwest Clinic in Chicago in 2007. Both high school bands for which Mrs. Johnson is responsible consistently earn Superior ratings at the UIL Marching and Concert and Sightreading Contests and Superior and “Best in Class” awards at the various festivals they have attended. In 2009 the Argyle Band program was awarded the Outstanding Band Program Award by the Texas Chapter of the American School Band Director’s Association. Other Argyle Band accomplishments include ATSSB Outstanding Performance Series Winner and National Wind Band Honors Winner. Mrs. Johnson is a founding member and has played flute in the Dallas Wind Symphony for the past 30 years. She is an active clinician and adjudicator in the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex area and teaches at several summer band camps throughout Texas. She attended The University of North Texas, where she received both her Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Music Education. Her professional affiliations include the American Bandmasters Association, Phi Beta Mu where she is on the board representing the small schools of Texas, TMEA, TBA where she is the representative for Region 2, the Association of Texas Small School Bands, Women’s Band Directors International and the Texas Music Adjudicators Association. Mrs. Johnson resides in Flower Mound, TX.