

Two Million Reasons Why Marching Band Kids Are So Responsible

Gary Gribble

We have all watched a marching band at half time. We have all marveled at the quality of music and the complexity of marching, but have we ever considered how much responsibility is placed upon a marching band member?

Mr. Gary Gribble, director of the Alan C. Pope Bands, has created some mind boggling facts which should make us more than marvel at what happens on the field during half time. Gary writes:

Let's assume, for simple math, we have a moderate to above average-sized marching band of 100 wind players, 20 percussion, 20 color guard, and two drum majors. Now, while it seems fairly straight forward...just play your music and march to various spots on the field... here's what REALLY is facing them.

In an average production of two minutes duration, there will be somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 notes played per student (some parts will be less, some more). For each note played, the student must be responsible for:

- correct fingering of note
- proper tone quality
- proper pitch
- correct beginning articulation
- correct release/ending
- correct duration/timing
- balance to other players
- blend with other players
- appropriate volume

This means at least nine responsibilities per note times 300 notes...understand that sometimes the student will not play during segments, so this is an average...2,700 responsibilities per student...times 100 players = **270,000 musical responsibilities for the wind section.**

Percussion will have more notes in snare/mallet parts, perhaps fewer in bass drum and accessory parts, but on average, about the same number of musical concerns ...substitute stick heights for pitch correctness, since it is not typical to tune drums as you go. This adds 2700 responsibilities...times 20 percussionists = **54,000 musical responsibilities for percussion.**

The Color Guard must be concerned with:

- timing
- hand positions
- equipment angles
- speed of spins
- height of tosses
- direction of spins...not to mention holding on to or catching equipment!

Number of counts roughly parallels musical notes, so assume 300 beats times 6 responsibilities, or 1800 items per guard member...times 20 members = **36,000 more things to do.**

So far, we are up to 360,000 responsibilities, and we haven't touched marching. With marching, there are at least the following considerations:

- posture
- direction of facing
- instrument position

- staying in step
- staying in form
- size of step
- tempo
- style of movement (Toes up? Knees straight? Shoulders square?)
- control of space between members

On average, there will be one step per beat of music, or approximately 240 steps. This means 240 times 9 responsibilities per member,...times 140 members ...302,400 more things to think about.

The drum majors must be on top of:

- tempo, beat pattern
- dynamics
- communication of style/energy to band
- poise/showmanship or approximately 1200 items... times two majors...

2400 more responsibilities.

Keeping up so far? We're up to 664,800 things that have to be done correctly... AND WE'RE JUST TALKING ABOUT THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF THE SHOW!! Assume there are three segments in the average show, our grand total jumps to a staggering **1,994,400 responsibilities on the members for a single performance.**

The next time you watch a marching band show, examine the level of

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expectation and delivery that occurs with each student. It is truly remarkable, and it will help you appreciate even more the feeling that comes from a well performed show. When they are done, stand up and cheer their efforts...they are truly at the top of the “responsibility pyramid” when performing in marching band.

Gary D. Gribble has been Director of Bands at Alan C. Pope High School in Georgia's Cobb County School District since the school opened in 1987. Under his direction, the Pope High School Band has earned more than 400 awards of excellence and has been a Bands of America regional champion, a regional finalist 19 times, and a Grand National semifinalist twice. The Pope band received the Sudler Shield from the John Philip Sousa Foundation in 1992. The school's marching band has participated in parades across the continental U.S., in Hawaii, and in London, England, and its symphonic bands have performed in state, regional, and national concerts.

Mr. Gribble earned his bachelor's degree in music education from Georgia State University. He has served as an adjudicator, guest conductor, and clinician in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Illinois, Tennessee, and Florida. In 1996, Mr. Gribble choreographed a portion of the opening ceremonies for the Paralympic Games in Atlanta. In 2008, he was named a Claes Nobel Educator of Distinction by the National Society of High School Scholars. Mr. Gribble was also selected for inclusion in the American School Band Directors Association and is currently on the executive board of the National Band Association.