

# The New UIL Marching Band Adjudication Sheets

Gerry Miller

Starting in February of 2017, Mark McGahey and Brad Kent gathered a group of marching band directors from across the state representing different classifications to discuss the possible revision of the adjudication sheets utilized for the UIL Region, Area, and State Marching Band Contests. After three years of meetings and deliberations, the new sheets were revealed at TMEA in 2020 and are set to be implemented at contests across the state this fall. A list of changes, and the philosophy behind those decisions, is explained level-by-level to assist the band directors of Texas in preparing their programs for the upcoming season.

## UIL Region Marching Band Contest

At the Region round, the new adjudication sheet retains three judges evaluating the show from an upstairs vantage point and commenting on the entirety of the production—music, visual and movement, and content. The sheets that have been in place for many years featured 43 separate descriptors that judges were asked to comment on over the course of approximately seven minutes. If you're doing the math, you realize that one descriptor every ten seconds. With the Region round, one of the main objectives of the committee was to simplify the sheet to ensure that the adjudicator could focus on the student-performers on the field—their areas of strength and opportunities for

growth. Additionally, the committee sought out wording that would be inclusive of the variety of styles we see across our great state.

The resulting Region Marching sheet contains twenty descriptors—nine for music, six for visual and movement, and five for content. All of the old terms have been “rolled up” into the new descriptors, but have been done with respect to the rich diversity of marching band styles in mind. For example, the old Region box that used to be called “Marching” is now called “Visual and Movement”, and where we previously had descriptors like “ranks”, “files”, “diagonals”, and “arcs” along with “intervals, stationary and marching”, we now have one descriptor that encompasses all facets termed “Control and Achievement of Form/Interval”. It is our hope that adjudicators can invest more time speaking to the ensembles on the recorder and less time circling plus and minus indicators. Additionally, we hope that the new Region sheets encourage dialogue between the content (what is being

asked of the performers, musically and visually) and how well the performers execute the assigned content.

## UIL Area Marching Band Contest (and 1A-4A State)

Advancing to Area, the five-judge system is retained, with three

adjudicators evaluating music and two evaluating visual and movement. Based on the vote of directors in classes 1A through 4A, the five-judge system, with the aforementioned sheets, will be utilized at both the UIL Area and State rounds. Early in the committee's work, Dr. Kent

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shared that he was once approached by a superintendent asking why marching bands were adjudicated with different sheets (and seemingly different “rules”) at every round. It's a valid question. The rules for UIL football or UIL One Act Play don't suddenly change from Region to Area to State. As a result, the committee worked to ensure that each new round of sheets retained the descriptors from the previous round while offering the adjudicator an opportunity to “zoom

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in” a little closer as the competition process advances. As a result, the Area sheet doesn’t feature too many new descriptors. Most of the Region descriptors exist on the Area sheets, and are divided between ensemble, woodwind, brass, percussion and content on the music side and individual movement, ensemble movement, and content on the visual side. We see a few new descriptors like “Poise”, “Presence”, “Communication” and “Coordination and Staging”. It is the committee’s hope that these new descriptors will help provide a dialogue for our state’s most-outstanding marching ensembles as they advance from Area Prelims to Area Finals and on to State.

The other major change to the Area sheets involves the division of the scoring boxes. UIL has always valued scoring-specific descriptors, where a first division equates to a “consistent” or “superior” performance, and a third division is earned by an “average” performance that “sometimes” achieves the intended content. In this same spirit, the new Area sheet adds a top-level descriptor—“always” in place of “exemplary”. Thinking as a judge considering a single descriptor like intonation, how many ensembles will we hear that “always” play with superior intonation? “Always” is a high benchmark—potentially unattainable—but it allows Area adjudicators to have that extra bit of room at the top to separate the best of the best from an already stellar field at Area.

Additionally, the scoring boxes are divided into five divisions: always, consistently, usually, sometimes and rarely; and each of those boxes is separated into an upper-third, a middle third, and a lower third. Judges and directors

should think of these divisions as a helpful guide to not just say that the performance was “consistent”, but that it was “consistent, bordering on always” or “consistent, with some moments only usually well-executed”. One will also notice that the full set of Area scoring is widest at the center, and

thinner at the edges. Assumedly, an adjudicator will see very few groups who are in the “always” box, but also very few ensembles who venture into the “seldom” range.

Lastly with regard to Area, it’s important to focus on the placemats on the back of the sheet. The committee wanted to retain the traditional Texas marching band rubrics, but wanted to make the process more expedient for judges. As a result, the placemat asks a series of questions on the back of the sheet aligned with each descriptor on the front. The answer to each question results in a scoring-specific term, and from there, the band will earn its score at Area. Consider, for instance, the Area Music placement question, “To what extent do the performers demonstrate balance and blend that is clear and appropriate throughout the presentation?” If the answer to that is “always”, then the adjudicator can mark the “always” box on the number line. If the answer is “consistently”, the judge can decide how close to “always” the ensemble was with regard

to balance and blend, or if they were closer to “usually.” As the band exits the field, imagine an adjudicator making small marks on the line as each question is answered. The cumulative placement of all those marks should result in a score that is evidenced by the performance and justified through the adjudicator’s specific commentary. As a band director, consider using the placemats to work with student

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leaders and staff members over the course of the season, asking individuals to evaluate the performances and that of their sections with questions like, “Did [the trombones] demonstrate appropriate, characteristic tone quality during tonight’s performance?” With discussions like these in the ensemble, individual accountability becomes a priority as the group advances from Region to Area to State.

### UIL State Marching Band Contest (5A-6A)

Finally, the UIL State sheets for 5A and 6A “zoom in” even closer to the ensemble, moving from a 5-judge Area system to a 7-judge panel at State. Four of the judges are adjudicating music (ensemble, woodwind, brass, and percussion), two of the judges are evaluating the visual performance (individual and ensemble), and one judge is looking at the whole performance from a content and design perspective. All judges will be discussing both what is asked of the performers visually and musically (content—the “what”) and how well they perform it (execution—the “how”). The State sheets are split through the center. All of the descriptors on the left side refer to the content assigned to the student-performers—how well the show is paced, the level challenge, and the coordination of the whole production. The right side of the sheet references the execution of the content in performance—how well the performers realize the content assigned to them with regard to concepts like dynamic contrast, precision and timing, and transparency. In an ideal setting, the best bands in Texas will perform the challenging content assigned to them at the highest possible levels, and the

left and right sides nearly match with high scores in both content (“what”) and execution (“how”). Through the use of the 7-judge system at 5A and 6A State, the hope is that the ensembles who perform the best-constructed shows at the highest levels will finish on top. And in the end, the student-performers on the field determine the score, not the directors, arrangers, and drill writers. It’s up to the students to deliver the “performance of the year” to the Alamodome to ensure the best representation of their program, campus, and community.

One added change for 5A and 6A State is that the panel will feature two adjudicators at field level—evaluating percussion as well as individual visual performance. The field-level judges will be sampling performers from the front sideline, and will only be allowed to travel six feet onto the marked football field. There will be five judges upstairs evaluating music ensemble, woodwinds, brass, visual ensemble, and content and design.

### In Conclusion

It is our hope that the band directors of Texas finish this season having accomplished all they hope for with their students during this challenging year. Texas marching band judges are the activity’s biggest fans. Every band who steps on the field this fall deserves an opportunity to succeed, and it is our hope that these new sheets bring forth a positive dialogue between adjudicators and programs to continue to develop bands in Texas to the highest musical and artistic levels.

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