

# **A STRAIGHTFORWARD APPROACH TOWARD TEACHING, DEVELOPING, AND MAINTAINING SOLID MARCHING TECHNIQUE**

A "HANDS ON" PARTICIPATION CLINIC

Presented by Frank Troyka

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention

Sunday, July 27, 2003

10:45-11:45 a.m. CC-Exhibit Hall 'D'

## **Guiding principles in developing and implementing a marching technique program**

- Consider rehearsal time.
- Build on the body's natural movement tendencies and stylize those tendencies.
- Be economical in the movement vocabulary.
- Use a select few fundamental drills to reinforce skills and concepts.
- Develop further fundamental exercises as suggested by the drill itself.
- Be consistent in the application of technique.

## **Essential Basic Skills (see attached).**

1. Posture and body alignment.
2. Step-offs, forward and backward.
3. Mark time; Step-outs.
4. Forward/Backward march.
5. Slides.
6. Change of direction.
7. Reversals (hip shifts).

## **Technique Exercises and Ensemble Drills**

These exercises are used to develop technique after a basic working knowledge of forward and backward march has been taught.

### **1. Spiking**

Purposes: To isolate the back edge of the heel as the part of the foot that touches on the beat when marching forward; to develop strong pulse control.

- a. Keep tempo relatively fast when first learning.
- b. Use a 16-5 step, but this is not critical. Focus on technique, not step size.
- c. Straight legs. No bend ever.
- d. Execute no more that 32 total counts at a time to minimize fatigue and joint stress.

### **2. "Tube of Toothpaste"**

Purpose: To establish style on count 1 and to roll through the center of each foot through to each step's completion.

- a. Keep tempo relatively fast to aid with posture and balance.
- b. First count is identical to Forward March ("Pull and Touch"). Relate to "spiking."
- c. Roll through on counts 2, 3, 4. Front foot is flat on count 4, back leg is fully extended.

### **3. Slow Motion Forward March**

Purpose: Develop style, strength, balance, stamina.

- a. Keep tempo relatively fast to promote success early on.
- b. Vocal sequence: "Pull 2 3 4, Reach 2 3 4, Touch 2 3 4, Release 2 3 4."
- c. When repeating the above sequence, the "Pull 2 3 4" occurs only once.
- d. Isolate count 4 of each segment.

### **4. Stair-step Drill (Left)**

Purpose: Introduce/isolate prep steps.

- a. Begin at a moderate tempo.
- b. Forward 8/Left 8 (repeat as indicated)
  - Right foot prepares 45 ° on count 8, platform first
  - Upper body remains flat to the front
- c. Same procedure for Stair-step Right.

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### 5. Zigzag (to be introduced in two parts)

Purpose: To develop consistent step size and direction changes when traveling forward to backward and vice versa. NOTE: May be taught with "touch-and-go" ("kill step") or as a true change of direction. The following instructions do not employ touch-and-go.

#### **PART 1**

- a. Begin at a moderate tempo.
- b. Forward and to the right on a 60° angle for 8 counts. Upper body home, right foot preps home with platform first on count 8.
- c. Change to backward and to the right on a 60° angle for 8 additional counts. Upper body home, right foot preps home on count 8.
- d. Close home or repeat as indicated.

#### **PART 2**

- a. Backward and to the right on a 60° angle for 8 counts. Upper body home, right foot preps home with platform first on count 8.
- b. Change to forward and to the right on a 60° angle for 8 additional counts. Upper body home, right foot preps home on count 8.
- c. Close home or repeat as indicated.
- d. Combine Parts 1 & 2 for a total of 32 counts (results in a 16-count diagonal path)

### 6. Diamond Drill

Purpose: To develop consistent step size with multiple direction changes; to develop consistent upper body placement. This exercise combines

- a. Begin at a moderate tempo. Isolate each of the following segments before linking.
- b. Forward and to the right at 60° for 8 counts; platform prep home on 8.
- c. Continue backward and to the right at 60° for 8 counts; prep home on 8.
- d. Continue backward and to the left at 60° for 8 counts; prep home on 8.
- e. Continue forward and to the left at 60° for 8 count; prep home on 8 and close (or repeat without stopping).

### 7. Reversals (Hip Shifts)

Purpose: To develop consistent upper body placement while shifting the lower body from forward to backward and vice versa.

- a. Begin at a moderate tempo. Isolate each of the following segments before linking.
- b. Face home, feet closed. Keeping upper body home, slide left for 8 with feet in a forward march; right foot preps 90° (or 45°) home on 8.
- c. Continue in same direction for 8 with feet in a backward march; prep 45° home on 8; close on 1 (9).
- d. Reverse exercise to return to starting position.  
NOTE: When preparing to reverse the exercise, it may be desirable to execute a prep step on count 4 (8) immediately before the step-off to avoid stress on the knees. In this case, the right foot slides back slightly to a 45° angle with the right instep touching the left heel. This permits a more comfortable step-off from the halt position to the right slide.

### 8. Maypole Drill

Purpose: To develop strong upper body placement while shifting the lower body from forward to backward to forward again.

- a. Begin at a moderate tempo. This exercise is best introduced in smaller groups (preferably 30 or fewer).
- b. The instructor represents the Maypole and the marchers scatter loosely at distances of 12-16 steps from him/her.
- c. The students march in a circular path around the circle with upper bodies remaining locked to the instructor at the center of the formation.
- d. On a designated count (or vocal command from the instructor), everyone executes a reversal (hip shift) and continues marching around the circle, working to keep the upper body motionless throughout.
- e. Students are not concerned with interval or alignment. The sole focus is individual achievement and skills development.
- f. Variations to this exercise include reversing the direction of the circle, expansion and contraction to the center and back out, changing horn angles, etc.

# BASIC MARCHING TECHNIQUE

Cypress Falls High School Band

REV: Summer, 2003

Frank Troyka

The information that follows is offered as a general outline of common marching techniques currently in practice at Cypress Falls High School, Houston, Texas. It is not a comprehensive description nor is it intended to suggest the ideal approach. There are many valid and successful styles in practice and just as many ways to approach marching technique. The specific circumstances of a marching band (rehearsal time, experience, drill requirements, etc.) must dictate the content and approach used. The demands of the drill often determine how a particular technique is actually used and adapted.

## POSTURE & BODY ALIGNMENT

OBJECTIVE	RATIONALE
1. Feet together in closed parallel position.	1. Promotes uniformity and ease of technique when marking time, stepping off, and halting.
2. Knees slightly flexed, but not visibly so.	2. Slight flex prevents hyperextension of the knee, facilitates blood flow, and reduces fatigue.
3. Lower abdominal muscles held in with shoulders down and relaxed. Ankle, hinge of the knee, hip, shoulder, and bone behind ear all vertically aligned ("Five Points of Alignment").	3. Use of lower abdominal muscles helps lift rib cage and promotes proper breathing.
4. Arms at side with elbows slightly rounded (when no equipment is used).	4. Rounded elbows reduce muscle tension and help project "relaxed confidence."
5. Chin elevated 10° (avoid compressing neck).	5. Promotes a look of confidence and permits proper breathing.

When standing correctly, the performer should feel:

- As if his weight is focused slightly forward, centered at the insteps.
- As if his legs extend into the ground through the heels (promotes stability).
- His hips directly under his shoulders, lower abdominal muscles pulled in.
- Energy moving upward through the sternum, then outward and down through the shoulders (similar to a fountain).
- Like the top of the sternum leads the way.

**FORWARD MARCH****OBJECTIVE****RATIONALE**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Knee pulls slightly forward on the preparatory count.   | 1. Coordinates with breath on preparatory count. Consistent method and count structure at extreme tempos.          |
| 2. Foot "peels" off the ground from heel to toe with the platform of the foot leaving the ground on the "and" of the beat.         | 2. Discourages leaning into step-off. Highly rhythmical which helps with pulse control.                            |
| 3. Back edge of the heel touches on the beat (vocalize "PULL-AND-TOUCH" to combine these movements).                               | 3. Specifying the back edge of the heel reinforces style and is more easily coordinated with the pulse.            |
| 4. Both legs fully extended on the beat (avoid hyperextension of the knee).  | 4. Straight legs convey strength. Pulse control improves and uniformity of style is more readily achievable.       |
| 5. Foot flexed at the ankle (somewhat exaggerated).  | 5. Aesthetically pleasing and conducive to strong upper body control which also permits better embouchure control. |
| 6. Heel of trailing foot is off the ground (approx. 1") on the first count of the step-off.  | 6. Lifted heel permits fluid forward motion and may reduce excess muscle tension.                                  |
| 7. Feet share a common line of travel on the instep, as opposed to "tightrope" style with one foot directly in front of the other. | 7. Promotes balance and helps preserve the line of travel (routing or path).                                       |

## BACKWARD MARCH

### OBJECTIVE

### RATIONALE

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Knee begins to pull slightly forward on the preparatory count (same as FORWARD MARCH).   | 1. Coordinates with breath on preparatory count. Consistent method and count structure at extreme tempos.  |
| 2. Foot "peels" off the ground from heel to toe with the platform of the foot leaving the ground on the "and" of the beat (same as FORWARD MARCH).                    | 2. Discourages leaning into step-off. Highly rhythmical which helps with pulse control.  |
| 3. Leading foot touches the ground with the platform of the foot on the beat (vocalize "PULL-AND-TOUCH," just as with the FORWARD MARCH, to combine these movements). | 3. Specifying the platform of the foot as touching on the beat (as opposed to the toe) permits a higher degree of consistency at extreme tempos.   |
| 4. Feet share a common line of travel on the instep (same as FORWARD MARCH).  | 4. Promotes balance and helps preserve the line of travel (routing or path).   |
| 5. Legs bend slightly as they pass each other, however the performer works for extended lines.  | 5. The legs naturally bend permitting a more natural feel; coordinates with the forward march as legs are also slightly bent.                      |
| 6. Heels remain slightly off the ground (approx. 1").   | 6. Permits strong upper body control which permits better embouchure control. (At very slow tempos, the heel may touch the ground as appropriate). |

**NOTE:** On both the forward and backward march there is no transfer of weight on the step-off until after the "and" of the preparatory count. For example, when vocalizing "pull-and-touch" on the step-off, only the knee and heel move from the beginning of the word "pull" until the word "and." There has been no traveling nor transfer of weight forward or backward. The performer transfers weight forward or backward beginning with the word "and" into the first step on the word "touch."

### MARK TIME

The MARK TIME is used as a rehearsal technique as opposed to a performance technique. The constant display of pulse plus the physical demand placed upon the performer help reinforce the successful presentation of those skills in the drill. Careful attention to the technique and timing of the MARK TIME will promote strong ensemble skills throughout the ensemble.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

#### **RATIONALE**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knee pulls forward on the preparatory count. The knee and heel are at the end of the range of motion on the “and” of the beat.</li> <li>2. Heel rises to the ankle of the opposite leg while the platform of the foot remains on the ground.</li> <li>3. Feet/legs return to starting position (closed parallel position with legs straights) on each downbeat.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordinates with breath on preparatory count. Consistent count structure at extreme tempos. Consistent with step-off technique of FORWARD and BACKWARD MARCH.</li> <li>2. Allowing the platform of the foot to remain on the ground promotes uniformity of technique for sustained periods (fatigue is minimized when compared to raising the foot entirely). This technique remains consistent at extreme tempos.</li> <li>3. Pulse is more easily maintained as the rhythmical motion of the legs creates an easily perceived subdivision.</li> </ol> |
|--|---|

### STEP-OUTS

While marking time and playing the show music, the performer actually takes the first step of each new drill phrase and then returns to the mark time until the next drill phrase. This reinforces the performers knowledge of the musical/visual phrases and how they relate to each other.

Suggestions when rehearsing step-outs:

- Insist on correct mark time technique (uniformity).
- A step-out must convey the same qualities any first step in the drill would be expected to convey: STYLE, DIRECTION, DISTANCE, and TEMPO. Whatever direction and step size the drill calls for is the direction and step size the performer must take when doing step-outs.
- Eliminate any upper body motion as a result of the step-out.
- There is a tendency to bend the back leg when doing forward step-outs as well as a tendency to push the hips forward out of alignment. This must be carefully monitored and corrected.

**CHANGE OF DIRECTION (“TOUCH-AND-GO” METHOD)****FORWARD TO BACKWARD**

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>RATIONALE</b>
1. On the count prior to the change of direction, the right foot will touch platform-first as opposed to heel-first.	1. Aids in stopping forward motion and permits a smooth transfer of energy from forward to backward.
2. The left leg (trailing leg) remains straight with the platform of the foot on the ground.	2. Minimizes abruptness of change of direction and aids in defining and arriving at set points.
3. A momentary pause (“kill step”) is created as body weight is transferred from front to back.	3. Straight legs convey strength and are more aesthetically pleasing.
4. Any step size and direction changes occur on the second count of the new drill move.	4. Permits a softer turn and minimizes bouncing of the upper body.

**BACKWARD TO FORWARD**

1. Just as previously described, the right foot will touch platform-first on the count prior to the change of direction to absorb and redirect the energy from backward to forward.
2. The left leg remains straight with the platform of the foot on the ground and there is a momentary pause as body weight is transferred from back to front.
3. Flex on the forward march occurs on count 2 of the new direction.

**SLIDES**

A slide is a maneuver that permits the upper body to project in a direction other than the line of travel. Slides are achieved by employing one of two basic techniques:

1. The upper body remains stationary in relation to the line of travel as the lower body changes direction laterally.
2. The lower body maintains its orientation while the upper body rotates in the desired direction. This maneuver is referred to as HORNS-TO-THE-LEFT or HORNS-TO-THE-RIGHT.

**A NOTE REGARDING SLIDES:**

The difference in angle between the upper and lower body should not exceed 90°. In the event that an angle greater than 90° is required to achieve the necessary shoulder orientation, the lower body will perform the slide with a REVERSAL (“hip shift”).

**REVERSALS (HIP SHIFTS)**

A REVERSAL allows the performer to reposition the lower body while continuing to move in a given direction. Reversals are most useful when employed during slides as they permit the upper body to remain fixed while the lower body shifts from a forward march to a backward march (or vice versa). There are four primary techniques used when executing a reversal from a slide:

**FROM A FORWARD MARCH WITH HORNS TO THE LEFT**

On the count prior to the reversal, the right foot prepares 90° in the direction of the upper body (left in this case) with the platforms of both feet aligned in the direction of travel (the left foot may rotate slightly in response to the position of the right foot). On the next count, the lower body rotates to the left on the platform of the right foot. The upper body remains fixed with respect to the line of travel. The performer is now in a right slide while marching backward.

**FROM A BACKWARD MARCH WITH HORNS TO THE LEFT**

The right foot prepares 45° to the left with the ball of the right foot directly behind the left heel. On the following count, the lower body rotates to the left while the upper body remains fixed with respect to the line of travel. The performer is now executing a right slide while marching forward.

**FROM A FORWARD MARCH WITH HORNS TO THE RIGHT**

On the count prior to the reversal, the right foot prepares 45° to the right with the ball of the foot in a line with the left heel. Then the lower body rotates to the right while the upper body remains fixed. The performer is now in a left slide while marching backward.

**FROM A BACKWARD MARCH WITH HORNS TO THE RIGHT**

The right foot prepares 135° (90° + 45°) to the right with the ball of the foot in line with the left heel. On the next count, the lower body rotates to the right while the upper body remains fixed with respect to the line of travel. The performer is now in a left slide while marching forward.



# MARCHING BAND FROM THE INSIDE OUT

## REHEARSAL TECHNIQUE FROM THE PERFORMER'S PERSPECTIVE

Presented by Frank Troyka

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention

Sunday, July 27, 2003

3:45-4:45 p.m. CC-Exhibit Hall 'D'

### General Guidelines

- Go into each rehearsal with a well thought-out plan.
- Maximize time-on-task by minimizing unnecessary procedures.
- Expect students to rehearse quietly and quickly.
- Rehearse the process when procedures break down.
- Be generous with enthusiasm and appreciation for the students' hard work and achievement.

### Before Teaching Drill

1. Mark permanent 4-step grid dots ("zero points").
  - a. Reduces/eliminates need to step off sets.
  - b. Allows for accurate execution of marching fundamentals.
2. Teach students about field markings and how to use them.
  - a. Yard lines
  - b. Inserts and conversions (see Yard Line Conversion chart)
  - c. Numbers and other permanent markings
3. Coordinate sheets
  - a. Teach students to identify each component of the coordinate sequentially.
    - FIRST: Side A or B (Side 1 or 2)
    - SECOND: Yard line distance (X ordinate)
    - THIRD: Sideline/Hash distance (Y ordinate)
  - b. Teach students that coordinate sheets only get them in the vicinity of the set point.
  - c. Have students live by coordinates early on; emphasize form and interval to transfer to performance.
4. Review rehearsal procedures/rehearsal etiquette.

### Teaching Sets

1. Locate the set BEFORE going to it.
2. Wait until instructed to mark sets.
  - a. Chalk
  - b. Shoe polish/spray paint
  - c. Chips
3. Students study the coordinate sheet to locate the next set while the staff adjusts the current formation. This keeps the pace of the rehearsal fast and efficient because students always know where to go next.
4. Mark several sets before marching any.
  - a. Provides a goal.
  - b. Allows staff to anticipate any interpretation issues (pass-throughs, reshapes, etc.) before students actually attempt them.

### Rehearsing Sets

1. Establish procedures for starting segments (metronome, vocal command, drum taps, etc.) Make these procedures adaptable when adding music (metronome placement, etc.).
2. Establish a protocol for all staff members to follow in coordinating instruction.
  - a. Suggested procedure when preparing to march a drill segment:
    - FIRST: Primary instructor announces the segment along with any special instructions. (e.g., "Sets 9 to 12, marching only, count aloud.")
    - SECOND: The drum major gives a command to prepare to march and repeats the instructions as he/she feels necessary to minimize student error. (e.g., "16, plus 16, plus 8, plus 1. Count out loud.") The drum major may interrupt the rehearsal if the band fails to follow instructions satisfactorily.

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- b. Suggested procedure following a drill segment:
  - FIRST: Drum major gives command to adjust; puts students at “check” following adjustments. As a general rule, the staff does not comment during the adjust period.
  - SECOND: Primary instructor addresses concerns to the entire group (from tower or field).
  - THIRD: Primary instructor allows/invites comments from other staff.
  - FOURTH: Student leaders may address individual concerns while the band returns to march the segment again.
3. “Calculate” the step size before marching. Allow students to practice their first step (or first 2 steps) several times.
4. March and freeze on the final step of the segment.
5. Do several “rapid-fire” reps before making corrections so students can learn step size and path. Follow the established protocol so that students see how procedures expedite achievement.
6. Learn the next set, then link with the previous set.
7. Add music once the desired number of sets have been linked.
  - a. March the segment (with front ensemble playing; front ensemble and battery).
  - b. Play the segment in the arrival set while marking time with step-outs.
  - c. March and play the segment.
  - d. Use recordings to link multiple sets.

### **Establishing And Maintaining The Pace Of The Rehearsal**

1. Begin by having a plan before going into the rehearsal (sample rehearsal plan attached).
  - a. Confer with all staff members to prioritize and address concerns.
  - b. Assign specific times to begin and end each objective.
  - c. Split segments of the rehearsal as time and personnel permit so that everyone is engaged in meaningful rehearsal time.
  - d. Build in a contingency (10-15 minutes) to allow for unforeseen delays and extensions.
  - e. Tell students what the day’s objectives are up front so they have goals to reach as well (be careful about telling students the specific schedule as they may become anxious if things get behind).
2. Shift ownership to the students.
  - a. Practice the procedures when necessary. Insist on moving quickly when resetting (ironically, the more active the rehearsal, the more energized it tends to remain).
  - b. Treat rehearsal etiquette like any other skill: Practice stillness and silence without making it a punishment.
  - c. Empower the drum major to address concerns:
    - By reminding students of procedures and instructions;
    - By stopping the group when they fall short of expectations.
3. Water breaks
  - a. No sitting. Students move quickly to the sideline and take a drink from their personal water bottles, then return quickly to the rehearsal. (Allow student leaders to monitor this).
  - b. Take split water breaks (allow half the band to get a drink while the other half repeats the previous segment. (Often, students will rush back onto the field and cut short their breaks to participate in the next rep).
4. Return briefly to a “basics block” to work on a specific skill required in the drill. This can help break up the rehearsal and reinforces the importance of fundamentals and how they transfer to the show itself. (Treat any “spontaneous” basics rehearsal as part of the scheduled block of time assigned to whatever part of the show being rehearsed).
5. Commit to a specific number of repetitions on a given segment and stick to it.
  - a. Tell the students so they share in the goal.
  - b. Even if achievement is lower than expected, move on after the specified number of attempts to reinforce the need for the students to take ownership.

### **Acknowledgements**

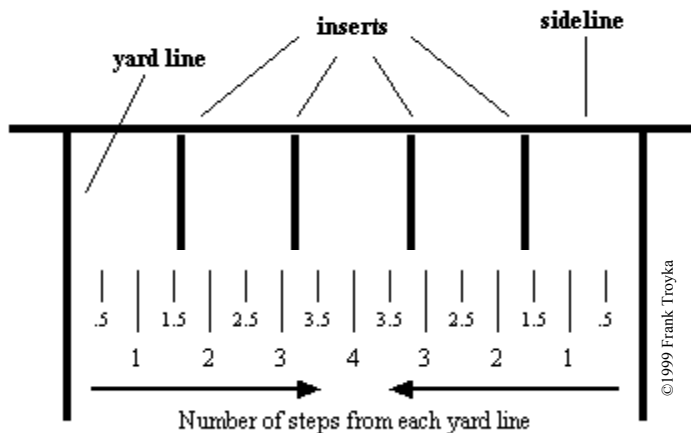
Mike Brashear, President, *Texas Bandmasters Association*  
Al Sturchio, Executive Director, *Texas Bandmasters Association*  
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## Yard Line Conversions

4 steps from a yard line.....	2-1/2 inserts.....	(2.5)
3 steps from a yard line.....	1-7/8 inserts.....	(1.875)
2 steps from a yard line.....	1-1/4 inserts.....	(1.25)
1 step from a yard line.....	5/8 of one insert.....	(.625)



## Sample Rehearsal Plan



### CMB Rehearsal Plan

Thursday, October 31, 2002 3:30-6:15 p.m.

- 3:30 **SPLIT REHEARSAL: Stretch; Marching/Playing Fundamentals**  
Winds/Percussion on 50 yard line  
CG on Side A
- 4:00 **ENSEMBLE REHEARSAL**  
Priorities:  
MVT II (30 min total)
- Sets 40-41, play to end
  - Sets 33-40, stop as needed
- 4:30 MVT IV (45 min total)
- Set 69 (15 min)
    - WW visual w/ Troyka
    - Perc w/ McAnear
    - Brass w/ Morrison
    - CG w/ Lopez
  - Sets 66-71
  - Sets 71-77: pulse
- 5:15 MVT III (30 min total)
- Large segments
    - 41-57
    - 57-64
    - 41-66
- 5:45 MVT I
- Run it; check problems for next rehearsal.
- 6:00 **Run through/contingency**