



**Texas Bandmasters Association
Convention/Clinic July 25-27, 2019**

**Maximizing Efficiency in
Fundamentals and Rehearsal with the
Vista Ridge Band**

CLINICIANS:

**Bryan Christian, Reid Atkinson, Hector Gil,
Erin Kosman, Zach Santos**

Demonstration Group: Vista Ridge HS Band

Maximizing Efficiency in Marching Fundamentals and Rehearsals

Tips and Strategies for Student Engagement

Vista Ridge High School Ranger Band
Bryan Christian, Reid Atkinson, Zach Santos - Directors
2019 Texas Band Masters Association Convention
Friday, July 26th, Exhibit Hall 4B: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

THE IMPORTANCE OF "THE WHY"

If you ask students why marching fundamentals are important, more often than not, they will say "to look uniform." While certainly true, this is not the most important reason. The primary reason to emphasize a high achievement of marching fundamentals is, first and foremost, to SOUND GREAT! Because of this, all fundamentals should be taught with a musical focus.

- Posture = Great Tone
- Uniformity of technique = Uniformity of articulation
- Learning Drill = Learning how to phrase = how you navigate from one moment to another

Students need to be constantly reminded of the WHY to take ownership in the process. There is no better why in a music activity than to sound great.

If visual responsibilities have musical intention, it will allow you to rehearse with the same level of detail as you would in a concert band setting. By doing this correctly in the beginning, it will train students to be detail-oriented at all times, be diligent in rehearsal procedures, and value the importance of quality repetition. All of these can be directly applied to concert band at the end of the season.

THE HOW

Setting the Rehearsal Environment

All students have at least a few years of ensemble experience by the time they reach high school. The more we can draw on that experience, the better! An environment with similar expectations to a concert band setting is something with which young members can instantly feel comfortable.

- *Front Sideline Rule: Once across the front sideline, students are expected to be silent unless they have their hand raised and a staff member is interacting with them. (Equivalent to the podium procedures you find in concert band.)*
- *All cases and water bottles should be lined up. (Equivalent to getting cases and stands in a concert band setting.)*

Establishing Concert Procedures in a Marching Band Setting

The podium procedures in concert band are one of the greatest assets for any ensemble director. Students have clear signals for when they should be relaxed in their chair (director off the podium), when they should be sitting up and paying attention to instruction (director on the podium), and when they should be playing (director is conducting). Similar procedures need to be established and PRACTICED in the marching setting, using verbal commands.

Verbal Commands

- *RELAX: Students in 3rd position, upper body relaxed*
- *STAND BY: Students in 1st position, hands crossed over. All information is delivered in this position including immediately after a repetition.*
- *SET: Students go to attention and metronome is immediately started.*

IMPORTANT: This should be practiced with the same insistence that you'd practice these procedures with a beginning band. Your early insistence of adhering to procedures will drastically improve your rehearsals later in the season.

MARCHING FUNDAMENTALS

Concepts should be kept simple. Work for a common vocabulary that can be repeated by staff and student leaders. Take things slow. This is a GREAT opportunity to teach students that quality reps are important in practice. Students should be asked to repeat vocabulary and point to the hinge they are focusing on for maximum engagement.

Posture (Tone Equivalent)

- Five Points of Alignment: Ankles, Knees, Hips, Shoulders, and Ears should all form a line at profile
- Diagnosis and Treatment
 - Hips too far forward: Put hands on hips and push hips back.
 - Ears too far forward: Push Chin Back
 - Shoulder caved in: Keep down and relaxed and move behind sternum

Forward and Backward Marching:

- Standing Leg: Leg touching the ground
- Swinging Leg: Leg moving in a pendulum motion
- Three Focus Points
 1. "Long Legs": Students should focus on keeping a long leg line from the hip to the ankle. This is an important distinction from "straight leg" which will lock the knee and ankle and prevent fluid motion.

2. "Low Heels": Students should focus on keeping heels (both standing leg and swinging leg) as low to the ground as possible. (Analogy of sliding heels on top of an air hockey puck.)
3. "Tall Toes": Swinging leg toes as tall as possible to articulate the ground with back heel and provide maximum area for weight transfer.

- *Diagnosis and Development*

- *Almost all bent knee issues stem from heels being too high off the ground.*
- *Frankenstein marching is a result of locked knees. Ask student to "soften" knees.*
- *Slow feet are usually a result of students focusing on moving with the swinging leg rather than pushing from the standing leg*

Slides (Either approach works, just stay consistent)

- 30/60/90: Hips at 30 degree angle, rip cage at 60 degree angle, shoulders at 90 degree
- 45/45: Hips at 45 degree angle, sternum at 90 degree angle

- Teaching Tools

- "Pistol Position": Students extend arms out, hands interlocked in a pistol position. During slide exercise this will help them determine if their shoulders are staying relaxed and parallel to the front side line

- *Diagnosis and Development*

- *Shoulders not flat: "Rotate hips"*
- *Shoulders still not flat, relax shoulders and focus on sternum*

A Note on Winds Choreography and Dance Fundamentals:

If you choose to install dance motion (visuals) they are judge-able to the same extent as marching and music technique and execution. A lunge, for example, needs to have the same foot turnout, the same thigh to shin angle, the same upper body posture, etc. Almost everything you need can be achieved with a limited dance vocabulary, but it must be taught with the same attention to detail as you would when teaching marching and music fundamentals.

MARCHING FUNDAMENTAL EXERCISES

Less is more. The fewer exercises they have to learn to navigate, the more time you can focus on execution. Remember, EXCELLENCE IS AN EFFECT!

Across the Fields:

- Students in single file lines and step off every 8 counts for 20-30 yards
- Isolates forward, backward, and slides in small groups while emphasizing equal step sizes.
- Able to use staff, techs, drum majors and/or student leaders

- Provides opportunity to evaluate small groups
- Provides an opportunity for multiple repetitions and adjustments.
- Easy to set up in small
- Variations:
 - 8x8: Move 8, halt 8
 - 8x4: Move 8, halt 4
 - Continuous: Move without halt
 - NOTE: Concert F can be applied to all variations

Donkey Kong Drill:

- Block or in an Across the Field setting (for additional independence).
- Isolates all marching fundamentals including direction changes
- Provides a “situational” drill setting that works students through extended count structures
- Works through phases that increase demand
 - Phase 1: FM 8, LS 8, FM8, RS8, FM8
 - Phase 2: FM 8, BLS 8, FM8, BRS 8, FM 8
 - Phase 3: BM 8, LS 8, BM 8, RS 8, BM 8
 - Phase 4: BM 8, BLS 8, BM 8, BRS 8, BM 8
 - NOTE: This is a season long project!

FM = Forward March BM = Backward March RS = Right Slide LS = Left Slide BLS = Back Left Slide BRS = Back Right Slide

Circle Drill:

- Most successful if there is big, medium, and small circle on asphalt
- Develops form awareness and interval awareness
- Students expand, contract, and rotate circles
- Variations are endless and follow Across the Field structure
 - Example: FM 8, rotate right 8, rotate left 8, BM 8

MUSIC FUNDAMENTAL EXERCISES

Like the visual fundamentals package, the music fundamentals package is kept very basic so that time is spent on mastering ensemble skills such as tone and intonation, entrances and releases, articulation, and balance. All exercises are expected to be played while marking time. “Step-outs” occur on each entrance of the exercises. All exercises are approached with “In Tone & In Time” emphasis. All exercises can be combined with the marching fundamental exercises.

Breathing Block

- 5 to 10 minutes maximum in early part of season
- Works on moving maximum air and/or steady air over time
- Introduces “10% Rule”
 - Air should crescendo by 10% the last two counts.
 - “Push to the end.”

Long Tones

- Focus includes:
 - Metered Breathing ("Breathing Plan") for entrances: 4 count and 1 count
 - Ensemble entrance
 - Resonance across time
 - Ensemble releases
- Includes ascending and descending variations

Long Tone Example #1

Great Tone #1 UP - "8 Count Tones Ascending"

Long Tone Example #2

Great Tone #3 DOWN - "F-Descending"

Articulation

- Defines firmness of entrance, length of note, shape of note
- Works to standardize non-marked notes, staccato notes, accents, and marcato accents across the ensemble
- Works tonguing speed through 8th notes, triplets, and 16th notes

Articulation Example

Articulations #1 - "Quarter Note Style"

Non-Marked Note: Notes Touch, Tongue Firm, Written Dynamic	Staccato Note: 1/2 Note Length, Tongue Firm, Written Dynamic	Accented Note: Notes Touch, Tongue 10% Firmer, Add 1/2 Dynamic at start	Marcato Note: 1/2 Note Length, Tongue 10% Firmer, Add 1/2 Dynamic throughout
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Articulations #2 - "Eighth Note Style"

Articulations #3 - "Triplet Build Up"

Articulations #4 - "Sixteenth Build Up"

Technique

- Works flexibility in brass and dexterity in woodwinds
- Allows for range extension
- Builds on tone and metered breathing concepts from long tones
- Works entrances and full value releases

Technique Example

Tech #2 - "2-Note"

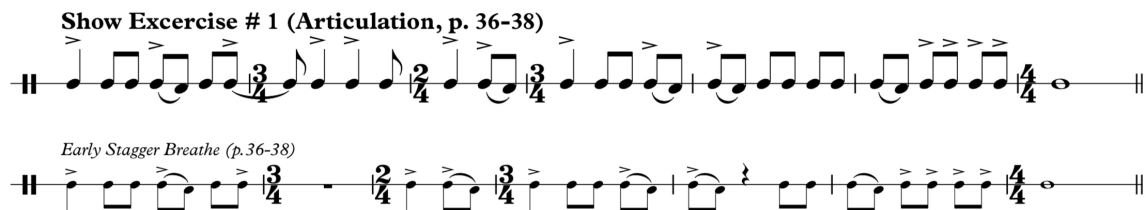


Show Exercises

- Provides contextual exercises derived from the fall production score. Often a composite of similarly articulated passages (see example below).
- Primarily used for intense articulated passages or passages that need staggered breathing defined
- Students play exercises on unison note. Once uniformity of timing and articulation is achieved, the phrase is played in context (as written in the part).
- Provides an environment to work foot timing and drill set count structure

Show Exercise Example

Show Exercise # 1 (Articulation, p. 36-38)



Context for Exercise



REHEARSAL STRATEGIES

Below are a few of the cornerstone strategies present in the Vista Ridge rehearsals. The strategies can be used in music rehearsal, visual rehearsal, or ensemble

Half-time/Quarter-time met

- Met is set to half tempo or quarter tempo
 - If written at 160 bpm, then 80 bpm or 40 bpm respectively
- Begins to establish internal pulse
- Allows students to feel the “big beats” with their feet
- Helps to diagnose phasing issues on the field

On the Hands

- All execution is done with drum major’s hands, including starting and stopping
- Important that drum major has an in-ear metronome
- Forces students to process hands to feet
 - In drill, everything should be done in silence
 - In music, work the metronome in and out at random to check internal pulse stability

Bopping

- Students play on the entrance of each note as a staccato note
- Especially helpful in lyrical passage to draw attention to internal pulse
- Helps to diagnose phasing issues on the field
- Variations: “Black Note Game with a White Note Bop”
 - Students play all black notes as written and bop all white notes
 - Helps to establish clarity in melodic lines
 - Helps students to understand their role within the score