

Dynamic Marching - "Translating Marching Fundamentals Exercises to Your Show Performances"

Contributed by Jeff Young
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It is October. The end of the season is near. The entire field show is on the field. You have had three or four competitions and some football game performances under your belt. You have a general idea how you stack up musically and visually against your competitors. But nothing is set in stone and each new performance brings with it the opportunity to show a new set of judges and fans just how close you can come to your potential.

Remember, judges are taught in training not to look at scores from previous weeks and to judge each show in-and-of itself as a new performance. I can't tell you how many times I have watched or judged a band or drum corps show that is measurably better than it was just one week before. Next week, I leave to judge Colorado State Finals and I have no idea who is "good" this year, nor have I looked at any re-caps of previous Invitationals or State Qualifiers. I want to walk in there with a clear mind and let the shows come to me. Having said all of that, what can you do as a performer to make your show look better in one week?

One: Know Your Dots! If you are still coming to practice with an unorganized wad of coordinate sheets or drill charts, you have not done your homework. As a director, I always wish that I could assign homework grades to marching band students just like I do in my science classroom. Hopefully, you would never go to Biology class without finishing the nightly homework assignment... so why would you come to marching band without your drill book being spotless and up-to-date? Make sure each page of your drill book has the basic information like side-to-side and front-to-back coordinates and how many counts the set is. Beyond that, you should by now understand what counts you pass yard lines during the drill set, what foot you start with, what horn moves you have, and any landmarks to watch out for on the move. Who do you guide to? Who do you dress to? What count does the horn come up or go down? Write these things down and it will help you to remember it when you are in the drill set. In addition, it never hurts to write down in your own words the counts and body positions of any movement or "body" that you have during that section of drill. Put it all in one small notebook and hand it from your neck for easy access. Many people paste copies of the music in these books as well, but this is something that is more helpful the first month of the season and not as helpful now. You should know where the music fits with your feet by now. Have you seen Chris Previc's guide to dot books? Oh, and one last thing... now that you know where your dots are... GET ON THEM!

Two: Review Your Fundamentals! (Especially direction changes) In order to look as refined as possible (see Dynamic Marching Article, "Define, Then Refine") you must excel at performing the beginnings and ends of sets. Do you use straight leg "prep steps"? (Think Blue Devils Drum and Bugle Corps style) Do you use "roll-throughs" or "touch and go's"? Do you shift your feet with aggression at the beginnings of sets? Do you have "knee pops"? (Think Blue Knights Drum and Bugle Corps style) Whatever style you were taught that you should transition between sets with is the style you should be using in the drill. Many groups have individuals who do this well and others who go through the motions and just get through the show any way they can. The more marchers that use the style that was explained in the summer the more the band has a coherent and readable style from up in the box or especially to judges on the field.

Three: Get Your Feet in Time! (or your flag work, or your rifle work, or your body movement, etc.) Need I say more?

Four: Enjoy The Season! Don't get caught up in competition, scores, judges, critics, lazy band members, section in-fighting, silliness, etc. Just do your job, "flush your own toilet", and enjoy being a part of an activity that is so special to so many students around the world and teaches you important life lessons. After Carmel High School won Grand Nationals in 2005, our staff and students enjoyed our moment briefly, thought about how hard we worked and how lucky we were that our students performed up to our potential and then we immediately started working on having a great concert band and jazz band year and started planning our next marching season. A former principal of mine once said, "Trophies should be made of bananas. They look great for a few days, but then after that time period you would not want to keep them around." In other words, enjoy your successes (even small ones), celebrate them, learn from them, and then move on to your next big thing.

Good Luck The Rest of Your Season.

Publisher's Note: Dynamic Marching is the latest in our series of columns written by leading educators - providing expert information on the marching band activity. Jeff Young is a respected educator, clinician, adjudicator, and consultant - specializing in the art of marching and movement. We're excited that he's agreed to be one of our regular contributors on Marching Band Planet. You may send your questions to AskJeff@marchingbandplanet.com. Jeff Young teaches science at Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana, has a degree in Biology from the University of Notre Dame, and a

Masters degree in Curriculum & Instruction from Indiana University. Jeff is the visual caption head for the 2005 BOA Grand National Champion Carmel Marching Band. He is also honored to work with the Colorado State Champion-Pomona High School from Arvada, Colorado. Jeff is a visual caption judge for Drum Corps International and enjoys being a judge, designer, and instructor for marching band programs across the country. He has also been the visual instructor and drill arranger for the Bands of America Summer Band Symposium Marching Band for the past four years. Jeff is also the co-founder of Dynamic Marching and Movement.