The Drum Major

Roles and Responsibilities

The Drum Major of any High School Band program has five basic responsibilities that will help the program grow and achieve success. None of these should be approached lightly as a lapse in judgment or in one’s action could cause more harm than you think. The bottom line, as a leader, you must ready and willing to promote the ideals of excellence and success at all times – on and off the field.

I. **Conductor** – conveying the music being performed; leads and prepares the next musical moment

II. **Leader** – confidence in making fair and equitable decisions

III. **Disciplinarian** – taking the success of the program seriously and knowing when to be a friend and when to be a leader

IV. **Role Model** – the ability to follow those in charge while being an example for others to mimic

V. **Motivator** – the ability to inspire

Do you have what it takes? Being a leader is a full time commitment because you someone is always looking at you and observing what you do. The one minute you let your guard down, you could lose the admiration and respect of those who are expected to follow your lead.

I. **The Drum Major as Conductor**

Despite whatever others say, you are not a human metronome. Yes, our job is to keep accurate time and help the ensemble stay together, but if you want the performance to have more, you must give more. Mastery of the basic patterns and the ability to have hand/arm and head independence will make your job easier. You must be clear with what you and the music wants to say. If the mechanics are not satisfactory, the nuance of refined musicianship will never be an option. Whether or not it is the composer’s intention, all music evokes an emotional response. From the loud and powerful, to the soft and lyrical – regardless as to the type, you have the responsibility to convey that feeling to the band. Just as music communicates to every person who hears it, you must be an effective **communicator** to your band. Know what you want and how best to explain it to others. Sometimes, words get in the way so try and visually communicate your desires.

- It starts with you!
- Know your limitations, then work to expand them
- No two people will feel the same thing and be able to communicate it identically.
- Develop your own style just remember that it must be clear and understandable by your fellow band members.
II. Leader
As a leader, it may not always be possible to be a friend. In order to gain the respect of all who are your subordinates, you’ll need to be fair and honest to everyone. Showing favorites or excluding “different” people from your social group can be damaging to that person’s psyche. Sometimes, we will have to work with people who are not our friends, the only way to make the situation feasible is to agree that there is a greater goal that both want to work for and achieve. If you are able to set your differences aside long enough to work together for general improvement, you will discover that eventually it will not be a task to work with them – it may become a pleasure and a bond between new friends. Never close your mind or your heart to anyone just because they do not fit into your scheme of things.

III. Disciplinarian
Refer back to the previous section about being a leader. Friendships can not take the place of effective leadership. If your friend wants you to be more lenient to them “just because” they are jeopardizing your reputation. In many situations, it may be the Director who must handle discipline, but you should be fair in your involvement. Again, if you wish everyone to respect you, you must show respect. Respect goes two ways and so you must be willing to show as much respect as you want from others. Remember, you should command respect and never demand it. Commanded respect is when people see your actions and learn to develop admiration for you and what you stand for, demanded respect is an attempt to take what does not always belong to you.

IV. Role Model
Even when you do not think so, someone is watching you and observing. What you do, what you say even what those around you do and say will all influence someone’s opinion of you. Whether it is right or wrong, a leader is always being scrutinized by others. Some will be critical of you – waiting on a flaw to peak so they can use it against you. Others will just look to you because they are new and you have been around. Let’s face it, being the drum major is somewhat a big deal and people will know who you are. For an incoming Freshman, the “almighty” Drum Major is someone who knows what they are doing and will do everything to help and protect that Freshman. That’s their mentality, can you live up to it?

V. Motivator
As someone who seeks to be a leader, you must ask yourself why you want to undergo such scrutiny. More than likely it is because you knew someone who influenced you and inspired you to work harder. What was it about that person that made you work even more? Whatever the reason, you must admit that had it not been for their guidance and motivation, you might not be where you are. The most effective leader is the one who makes a lasting impression on the future of the organization. Yes you are an upper classman, you have worked and undergone years of frustration but you are still hear because you enjoy it and you want to be successful. In order to maintain that success, you must be willing to pass the motivation to future generations. Don’t let greatness end with you, let it begin with you so that others may build upon it.
Summary:
In conclusion, do not ever try to force these roles and responsibilities on others because you’ll find that they will never completely respond. Take the time and earn the RESPECT of your peers because in the end, you’ll become a better person. Do not be afraid to make mistakes and take the initiative to own up to them. It is sometimes hard to balance the compliments with the chastising. When you need to, correct a mistake but always remember to praise when it is warranted. Positive reinforcement is another way to help others know that you truly care about what is going on.

Conducting is the physical way of communicating music and it starts with you. What you feel, what you desire must all be the driving force in your body movements. You must be clear and confident if you want the band to do the same.

“You are the physical representation of the music being performed.”

If you want them to give 100%, you must to give 110%. Never ask for more than you are willing and capable of giving.

P.R.I.D.E. = What every group must have in order for success.

P  Persistence to never give up, even when things are difficult

R  Respect for everyone and everything involved with the Program

I  Integrity – the ability to discern from right and wrong and choosing to do what’s right

D  Devotion to the success of the ensemble and not you as an individual

E  Excellence – the goal that is reached when everyone is giving there best

“Don’t just say it, DO IT and MEAN IT!”

A leader who does what is needed while others just sit and watch is a leader everyone else will follow.

You must be a person of action if you want to achieve success.
Basic Conducting Patterns

IN ALL CONDUCTING, BEAT ONE MUST BE CLEARLY DOWN!

If the first beat is straight up and down, the last beat (not matter what time signature) comes from the outside and goes up.

Two  Simple V or check motion

Three  Down, out and up

Four  Down, in, out and up

Five (2+3)  Down, in, out, out more and up

Five (3+2)  Down, in, in more, out and up

Subdivision of the beat is sometimes effective, but the more you do it, the less effective it becomes. Each beat is emphasized along with the “&” of the beat. Can make you look like you are out of control so again, use it wisely and sparingly.

Styles:

Legato – smooth and connected with fluid motion (as if moving through water)
Staccato – crisp and short movements
Marcato – emphasized and ‘weighted’ beats

Posture and Stance

Feet (comfortable but stable, don’t rock and sway because it creates a distraction)
Standing up straight and tall with ideal posture
Arms about shoulder width
Hands should be slightly cupped (don’t let fingers splay out)

You are communicating the musical ideas, if the music is asking you to be more emphatic and forceful, use your face. Part of your communication tools is your face. Do not rely on your hands for everything because sometimes a facial expression can communicate twice as much. Conducting is meant to be as musical as actually performing. Remember that the music is in the sound, and not in the printing.

What you must first consider:
1. Tempo
2. Style
3. Dynamics
4. Melodic content
5. Intensity
Preparation of the Modern conductor:

**Physically:**  STRETCH AND WARM UP – your body will thank you later!

Just as a musician warms up prior to playing, you too must prepare your body for the rigorous demands you want to place on it. Conducting is more than just waiving your arms but it is still a major factor and can cause a great deal of fatigue. You must prepare your body to undertake an intense physical activity.

**Mentally:** Leave your worries on the sideline because as a leader, you cannot afford to have others see you upset. The band is a reflection of its conductor. If you are not yet in the proper mindset to perform, you should not and can not expect the band to perform at a high level. You do not always have to say a word but your body language will convey a lot to the ensemble.

**Musically:** Do you know what you want the music to convey? Start thinking ahead about tempo, style, phrasing, dynamics, and intensity. The best performances are carefully planned out. Music lends itself to be a journey full of different experiences and the more prepared you are, the better the experience will be for everyone involved.

**Conducting Basics:**

**Preparatory Beat (Prep Beat)** – how we prepare the ensemble for entrances. It is the beat given prior to the first sounding pitch. This one motion must be clearly understood because it communicates:

- Tempo (slow, moderate or fast)
- Style (legato, marcato, staccato)
- Emotional content (mournful, pompous, ferocity etc…)
- Dynamics (soft or “in your face” loud)

What should you do to give a confident prep beat?

Consider what you want to communicate

Breathe and move at the same time as you would with your instrument. Whether on the podium or on the field, you are still a musician and therefore should treat the experience as a musician. What would you like for a conductor to do to help you play better?

Anticipate and prepare the band for what’s next- don’t just react to what you hear. A **proactive** conductor and leader is one who is prepared for the next event and works to help others get ready. Remember that conducting is a **process** and not an **event**. A process is one where there is continual thought and development and an event is a one time affair.

**Pattern:** The patterns are covered in a series of diagrams found within this packet. Just realize that pattern size can be a factor in communicating dynamics, style and can help you avoid fatigue during fast tempos. Think about using a smaller pattern to bring the ensemble’s focus to you. Bigger is not always going to get there attention and it makes for more work on you.
**Cues**: Cues indicate to performers that they are about to bring something different and should be given the opportunity to be heard. In other words, cues are specialized prep beats.

Types off cues: pointer, inviter, responder and visualizer (and as many as you can imagine).

There are three parts to any cue. Remember what a cue is used for and do not feel obligated to cue every thing every single time.

1. **Look** – who needs to be heard
2. **Prepare** – use your body to get them ready
3. **Deliver** – actual presentation of the cue in tempo and style (remember it’s a specialized prep beat)

Cues can come on any beat of any time signature of any measure. What you need to do is to follow the three parts (in time).

**Example**: First determine the measure where the cue is to be delivered. Since the cue is meant to prepare a group for an entrance, the following steps are done in advance.

1. A cue on beat one in four/four time
   a. **Look** on count three of the proceeding measure
   b. **Prepare** on count four
   c. **Deliver** on count one

**Releases (Cutoffs)** are a way of indicating that it is time to stop playing, either momentarily or at the end of the piece. Just as the prep beat and cues are given in the tempo, you must communicate the release in time. *Circle releases* are the most common where the hands move in contrary motion (left hand moves clockwise and the right hand moves counter-clockwise).

- 3-count and 5-count cutoffs
- One handed releases (left hand)
- Two handed releases (size can indicate a great deal)

**Expressive gestures with the left hand** (check you hand position – what does it say?)

- Crescendo
- Decrescendo
- Sustain

Intensity versus volume – are they the same?

Cues
Communication 101: The Basics

Do not rely on your mouth to communicate every time. Too often the mouth is trying to fix problems that it causes. There are other effective means of communication including your body (hands, arms and even the face). Facial expressions can convey a great deal and should be used more often. Remember that you are at all times a musician and must use every available option to make music. You should remember that in building and maintaining a program with loyal and dedicated members, communication will also be required away from the podium. You are a conductor and a leader who must be able to relate and inspire your fellow band members to work for the success of everyone involved. It’s easier to arrive at the same destination/goal if you have planned out route for your journey. The only way to plan out this path, is to communicate with everyone involved so that we are all on the same page.

Common Conducting Vocabulary:

**Ictus** – The actual placement of the beat. This is the point where you wish your beat pattern to fall every time so that the ensemble can understand. All ictus points can be in the same spot or in different spots depending on the music.

**Arsis** – The motion after the ictus is defined commonly called the rebound.

**Conducting plane/box** – The general area where you should have all beat patterns. This area can be visualized as a box frame from which you conduct. Each frame will be different as each person is different. The box determines height and length of the pattern and extra musical expressive ideas.

**Prep beat** – Indicates style, tempo and even phrasing. The prep beat is given before an entrance and can therefore be used at any point of the music. This beat is like an initial cue and should be considered very important for communicating correct beginnings of musical ideas.

**Gesture of Syncopation (GOS)** – When you give a strong beat and the band plays on a syncopated rhythm. Example below has a GOS on beat three and beat one.

![Gesture of Syncopation](image)

**Release (cutoff)** – how a note or phrase ends. Releases must be given in the tempo or else they are not effective. Just as a cue, it should be prepared before it happens.

**Ambidexterity** – the ability to use the left and right hands/arms independently of each other.
DRUM MAJOR AUDITION SHEET

Name _______________________________ Grade________________

1) Interview 30pts. ____________

2) Basic Patterns
   a) 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 5 count cut-off
   b) Pick two contrasting patterns and styles
      (Legato, staccato, marcato) 10pts _______
      ______

3) Commands
   Commands 10 pts. ____________
   *Band Ten Hut
   *Band Horns up
   *Mark Time Mark
   *Forward March
   *Backward March
   *Band Halt

4) Prepared Selection 30 points ______

5) Salute 10 pts. ______

TOTAL 100pts. ________________