

#CleanDrill – The Top 10 Tips

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The following tips are suggestions that will help you clean the visual portion of your marching band more efficiently. They're listed in a chronological order rather than order of importance. This is to help ensure that you have the correct approach set in place prior to simply cleaning the drill.

THE LIST

Tip 1 – Keep your marching technique simple

When introducing your marching technique, don't overanalyze the skill of walking. Work to keep your approach as natural as possible so that the students don't have to adjust or overthink what you're teaching. Marching is just a stylized way of walking. The less they have to change, the better and faster they'll be at it.

Tip 2 – Teach visual fundamentals in a circle

When introducing basic movement or dance fundamentals, have your students setup in a circle around you. This ensures all students can see you, and you can see them. There is no hiding. Student leaders can create a middle circle to mimic you and analyze the other students.

Tip 3 – Only teach what you will need AND only at the tempos you need

When learning visual fundamentals, you don't need to teach them everything. You only need to teach them everything they will actually need in the show. If you're unsure if they'll need it, then don't do it until you are sure. After the basic introduction of the skill, only work on it at show tempos. If your show tempos are 80, 116, 144 and 168, then those are the only tempos you should do fundamentals at for the season. Spend most of the time at the tempo you do most frequently.

Tip 4 – Do visual fundamentals in actual drill sets

Once your season is in full swing, be more efficient with your time by working on visual fundamentals in actual drill sets rather than a block or circle. This will allow you the ability to clean both the individual technique as well as the ensemble picture. This will also allow the student the opportunity to know how to directly apply the technique.

Tip 5 – Always move your feet

Whether you're doing music fundamentals or working on show music, ALWAYS move your feet. Have your students mark time at all times, preferably with either one-step or two-step stepouts. Stepouts should occur at phrase or set changes. Music fundamentals should also be done only at show tempos.

Tip 6 – Non-negotiables of drill design

When working with your drill writer at the beginning of the design process, give your drill writer a list of your non-negotiables of design. Examples are:

- No 90 degree slides (especially while playing)
- No mid-set direction changes (often happens in a follow the leader)
- Step-size limits (forward – 6 to 5, backward – 7 to 5)

Tip 7 – Use click tracks

Click tracks allow the learning and cleaning process to become much more efficient. They allow the student to hear the music that occurs while learning or cleaning drill. In turn, the students are able to hear what should be occurring during crossing counts or other mid-set check points. Students can either count out loud or do air/fingers during sets.

Tip 8 – Go outside during band class

If you have access to your rehearsal field during band class, going outside will allow more opportunities to discover areas for improvement and holding students more accountable. If you don't have access to your rehearsal field, then setup a parade block and march around the parking lot. The important thing is that the students are outside, marching, and playing their instruments.

Tip 9 – Do the Math

When cleaning, do the math to figure out relationships or crossing counts to yard lines, hashes, or yard ticks. Once the math has been figured out, you can use click tracks to help the students understand where the important check points occur musically.

Tip 10 – Edit the drill

More than likely, there are some sets that will either never be clean, or the payoff is not worth the amount of time that it will take to clean. The audience and adjudicators do not know what each set is supposed to be, they only know whether it looks right. Feel free to adjust your drill for better student achievement. It may take some creativity, but rather than fighting a losing battle, save time by making adjustments to the drill.

Bonus Tip – Use Ultimate Drill Book

UDB is an incredible tool that will give you and your students a wealth of knowledge about the marching show in the palm of their hands!

What About Bob?

Bob Chreste is an active music arranger, consultant, and adjudicator across the United States. He spent 16 years as a high school band directors at several prominent Texas high school's including Cedar Park HS, Stephen F. Austin HS, Berkner HS, and Weiss HS. Bob has an extensive background in drum corps and is currently on the brass staff for the Bluecoats. He is currently an educational clinician for Conn-Selmer, an educational rep for Ultimate Drill Book, and an adjudicates for Bands of America, Winter Guard International, Texas Music Adjudicators Association, and many other competitions across the US. Bob has his own small business BC Band Solutions and can be reached online at: www.bcbandsolutions.net.