

MARCHING BAND WARM-UP

"We don't have enough time to warm-up properly."

WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO NOT WARM-UP !

The overwhelming amount of material to rehearse in an always limited amount of time tempts band directors to get to the music or marching problems as quickly as possible. The rehearsal too frequently begins with no warm-up or a quick run through the Bb concert scale. **It is a simple fact that an individual musician or an ensemble will make only minimum progress without proper daily warm-up at the beginning of a practice session.** However, a group or individual who does warm-up religiously will develop and improve at a much faster rate. A director often hears a student say, "I'm just not getting any better even though I practice every day." Ask the student about his daily warm-up, and the answer will usually reveal a minimum warm-up or none at all. Of course, a student may have other poor practice habits and still not improve.

Playing a band instrument is a very muscular activity. No one would think of running a race without carefully stretching and warming up. Severe muscle damage can occur if the muscles have not been properly prepared. Playing an instrument, especially brass, is also very dependent on carefully preparing the muscles for a vigorous workout. Therefore, a daily warm-up is essential to properly prepare the muscles and to avoid physical damage.

Secondly, the music that must be played in any situation is of course based on a solid foundation of tone, intonation, balance, and blend. The warm-up period is the perfect time to focus on these aspects of good musicianship. When these become automatic in every note and phrase that is played, then good tone, intonation, etc. will be present in everything performed - a chorale to a rock tune. Conversely, it is very difficult to develop a good **foundation** when the first music played is rhythmical and needs a focus on technique and rhythm.

Finally, the warm-up at the beginning of the rehearsal usually helps establish a more **focused attitude**. It starts the rehearsal off in an atmosphere of concentration and relaxation. Self-discipline is also more likely to occur by beginning in this mood.

The percussion section can warm-up with the winds or separately if another instructor is available. The percussion and wind warm-ups should fit together so they can be played together when necessary. The percussion need to warm-up on simple rhythms first, concentrating on grip, wrist and arm motion, and sound production (yes, tone!). They should gradually move towards more technical material including dynamic exercises and patterns of rhythms from the music to be performed. The remainder of this article will deal primarily with the wind section warm-up.

There is no perfect warm-up that fits every situation, but there are some common characteristics in the approach taken by most professional brass performers. The brass warm-up is probably the most critical and the other sections can benefit by a good symphonic brass approach. The first step should be a few simple breathing exercises. Start in a standing position with good posture and do some breathing exercises stressing a relaxed air flow and gradually expanding the volume of air taken in. For example, breath in four counts and out four counts, followed by five and five, six and six, etc.

The remainder of the warm-up should contain exercises that develop tone, articulation, rhythm, intonation, and dynamics. An exercise may incorporate several of these areas of concentration. A successful approach is to work progressively from long tones to faster rhythms, from slurs to legato to shorter articulations, from soft to loud gradually, from unison to harmony, and most importantly from low to high range gradually. The warm-up can be divided into three sections that can be interspersed with stretching exercises or warm-up marching maneuvers to maintain interest.

SECTION ONE

1. Low chromatic long tones, slurred, moving gradually from low Bb concert up an octave.
2. Bb concert scale in half notes, then quarter notes, then eighth notes-slurred.
3. Legato quarter notes up the scale, eighth notes down the scale.
4. Simple lip slurs in a comfortable range. These are great for woodwind fingers.

SECTION TWO

5. Eb concert scale, slurred, half, quarter, and eighth notes. Try to imitate the relaxed feeling and sound as in Bb concert.
6. Legato triplets followed by staccato quarter notes. Try to imitate the relaxed tongue action of the legato when playing staccato.
7. Interval tuning exercise, starting on Bb, down a half step, back up, down a whole step, back up etc. This can be followed by a Bb unison, to a third, to a dominant seventh chord and tonic in Eb. The musicians then begin to work on harmonic tuning as well as balance and blend.

SECTION THREE

8. F concert scale, slurred, in half, quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes.
9. Rhythms on the F concert scale, choose two rhythms from the music to be performed, one up the scale and the other coming down.
10. Half step tuning/Dynamics-whole note half steps moving up chromatically, each half step combination is played at a different dynamic level (pp to ff) This can be followed by A to Bb major triads at different dynamics. It has been said that if a player can learn to play a half step interval correctly, everything will be played with good intonation.
11. Simple whole note chord progression going from soft to loud to soft.
12. A more complex chord progression, perhaps from the music to be performed, going from soft to very loud.

This type of warm-up will prepare the players for the rehearsal as well as improve their basic playing skills. If used religiously, these skills will automatically carry over into the music being rehearsed. Even though ten to fifteen minutes will be needed, once it is learned, the time will be worth every second as the overall quality will improve over a period of weeks at a much greater rate than if little or no warm-up is used. For those bands that have concert band in the school day and marching band after school, it works very well to play some of a warm-up in each session. Generally a thorough warm-up will last a player throughout the day. When a period of time elapses without playing, a few exercises will generally be all that is needed to get the muscles ready.

Remember whenever you are tempted to skip the warm-up, "You don't have time to NOT warm-up."