



MARCHING BASICS: THE DAILY ROUTINE

By Bryan Scheidecker

The exercises outlined below are intended to incorporate a wide variety of marching fundamentals into an efficient and effective daily basics routine. Similar to practicing fundamentals on an instrument, marching fundamentals are something that must be a part of the daily routine to ensure concepts are able to be replicated with ease.

To begin, create a “Basics Block,” where every member of the ensemble has a dot on a 4-step grid, allowing them to know exactly where they are supposed to be for fundamentals every day. It is worth spending more time on these exercises at the beginning of the season so that they are performed correctly and reinforce good marching habits.

BASICS 1: POSTURE BREAKDOWN (Hindu Exercise)

Focus: Identify and isolate the different parts of our stance that make up a strong posture.

Rationale: Proper posture is reliant on various points in our bodies being aligned. This exercise helps students become aware of these points by breaking down this posture and to develop consistency for when we have instruments in our hands.

Exercise:

- Without instruments, begin by standing in a natural, relaxed stance with your arms to your side.
- We are going to be breaking down our posture starting from our **head**, then **shoulders**, **chest**, **lower back**, and **legs**. As we go through each of these, it is important to focus on only allowing the isolated zone to move – For example, don’t allow your shoulders to start moving when you are moving your head.
- **4 counts:** Bring **head** forward, bringing your chin to your chest.
4 counts: Roll **shoulders** forward.
4 counts: Bring your **chest** forward, imagining the top half of your spine curving forward. It is okay to let your arms cross here.
4 counts: Allow your **lower back** to relax and lean forward from your hips.
4 counts: Relax your knees and slowly bend your **legs**. You can either go all the way down into a crouching position or stay hanging, as long as your knees are slightly bent.
- Stay in this position and focus on breathing. After a short amount of time, we will reverse this collapsing process and build our postures up from scratch. Again, focus on only allowing the isolated zones to move as we come back up.
- **4 counts:** Straighten **legs** so we are standing with everything from our hips up are still hanging forward.
4 counts: Bring our **lower back** into alignment with our legs, keeping our chest and head collapsed.
4 counts: Lift your **chest** up and unfold your arms, with shoulders and head still forward.
4 counts: Roll your **shoulders** back and down, keeping your chin to your chest.
4 counts: Bring your **head** up.
- Stay in this ending position for a while, focusing on what it feels like to stand with confident posture. This exercise should be performed daily to build consistency and to become familiar with what confident posture feels like.

BASICS 2: HIGH MARK TIME (up 4/down 4)

Focus: Maintain time and consistent motion while keeping our balance.

Rationale: Even if high mark time is nowhere else in your technique, this exercise is still incredibly helpful because it over-trains our ability to keep our bodies in time despite external factors. If we are able to maintain our balance while gracefully moving our legs in a high mark time, it will be much easier to march in-time in other settings.

Exercise:

- This exercise can be done with or without instruments and can be done in set or playing position.
- The slower the tempo, the harder you will have to work to keep balance. I recommend around 60bpm to start.
- The high mark time will initially take 8 counts on each side, 4 counts up and 4 counts down. I usually do this exercise with the vocals “roll up and off, 3, 4, down, 2, 3, touch roll up and off...” with “off” being when my toe comes off the ground on the way up and “touch” being when my toe hits the ground on the way down. I subdivide the 4 on the way up to ensure that the motion is constant until I have to start bringing my leg back down on 1.

- While your foot is lifted, it should be aligned with the opposite calf and perpendicular to the ground. If done correctly, your knee will be in front of you.
- Our upper bodies should not bob back and forth. Ideally, if we were to video tape the ensemble performing the exercise and cut out the bottom half of the clip, it should look like everybody is standing still.
- Repeat in two counts, then one count.

BASICS 3: FLEX-POINT-FLEX

Focus: Isolate the pendulum swing of the leg keeping the leg straight. This exercise also gets them used to flexing their foot for forward marching condition those muscles.

Rationale: Many students break at the knee after the crossing count as opposed to before. Also, many student struggle with keeping their toes raised during the forward march. This helps the condition of those muscles.

Exercise:

- Start in 6th position (heels and toes together).
- Extend the left leg out in front of you as high as you can with your foot flexed for four counts. The vocals will be “Flex, 2-3-4”
- Holding your leg in front of you, point your toe for four counts. The vocals will be “Point-2-3-4”
- Take four counts to lower your leg back to 6th. Vocals will be “down, 2-3-4”
- Repeat on the right leg
- Repeat in two counts, then one count.

BASICS 3: STEP-AND-FREEZE

Focus: Isolate the step-off to demonstrate how we have to move our center of gravity in-time rather than just sticking out our feet.

Rationale: Many students lose time in the step-off because they are just sticking their foot out, rather than moving their center of gravity with the step. This exercise demonstrates how we have to use that center of gravity to keep our balance and set ourselves up for success for the rest of the move.

Exercise:

- This exercise can be performed with or without instruments.
- After a count-off, take one step forward and freeze. This should look as if somebody snapped a picture right before you were about take consecutive steps: Your left foot in front of you with toes up and heel on the ground, with your right heel lifting up to prepare to take another step. Our center of gravity should be aligned between our two feet, which will help with maintaining balance.
- This exercise can be done on forwards and backwards step-offs. Additionally, you can add consecutive steps as you see fit (For example, two/three/four steps and freeze. This can supplement the Step-Size Exercise or T-Pose Exercise, as well!)

BASICS 4: STEP-SIZE

Focus: Practice a variety of step-sizes to ensure that the ensemble is traveling between two points with consistency.

Rationale: This exercise demonstrates the importance of consistent step-size when travelling between two points. Without training consistency through different step-sizes, it will be much harder to properly develop forms in the context of a performance.

Exercise:

- This exercise can be performed with or without instruments in either set or playing position.
- Begin by simply marching one yard line forward or backward at varying step sizes, checking and adjusting between reps to get comfortable with what each step-size feels like. I like doing this exercise with 16, 12, 8, and 6-to-5s. (You can apply the “freeze” from the Step-and-Freeze exercise to train reaching checkpoints between the yard lines, such as splitting and 2-off.)
- After reviewing the different step-sizes, we can now start adding yard lines to each rep that take us through multiple step sizes. For example, a rep that travels two yard lines, the first being at a 16-to-5 and the second being an 8-to-5.
- This exercise has many variables that can be modified to fit the needs of the ensemble. Differing numbers of yard lines with differing step-sizes, having reps that are all forwards or backwards or reps that alternate between both to practice direction changes, or incorporating the T-Pose Exercise are all suggestions.

BASICS 5: T-POSE (Gatorade tops)

Focus: To train what it feels like to properly perform a slide by getting the shoulders around without strain.

Rationale: Many students struggle with slides, and understandably so. Our bodies are not built to have our feet traveling one direction while our chest points in another direction. This exercise demonstrates how we need to rotate from our hips in order to get our shoulders around to where they need to be without sacrificing good posture.

Exercise:

- This exercise is done without instruments.
- Standing tall, bring your arms directly out to your side, making a “t-pose.” Your shoulders should be relaxed.
- Rotate your upper body to either the left or right so that your arms are perpendicular to the direction your lower body is pointing. You will find that in order to successfully do this without the back-shoulder jutting forward, you will have to rotate more from your hips. It is helpful to think about your hips being a 30° rotation and your chest being a 60° rotation, making your shoulders rest at 90° with ease.
- The Step-Size Exercise and the Step-and-Freeze exercises can be supplemented by t-posing on left or right slides.
- It is important to check throughout the exercise that your shoulders have not started holding tension or jutting forward, which is what our bodies will naturally do if we are not focused on it.

BASICS 6: Zig-Zags

Focus: Incorporate left and right slides with the added responsibility of maintaining consistent spacing and step-size.

Rationale: When marching at a slide, it is quite easy for our paths to drift forward because our hips are not rotated enough. This exercise simultaneously helps our students practice slides while making them work to stay in the form.

Exercise:

- This exercise is typically done at an 8-to-5 but can be done with other step-sizes as well. I recommend initially doing this exercise in the “t-pose” and then transitioning to instruments.
- After the count-off, march forward 8 steps, left 8, forward 8, right 8, forward 8, and close. You can break this process down by doing 8 counts at a time with a plus-one to practice the direction changes.
- If you are struggling to stay in your line on the left and right slides, it is generally an indicator that you need to rotate your hips more. It is incredibly difficult to go in a direction that your hips are not facing - Make your job easier!
- These exercises can be done with backwards marching, as well. It is worth breaking this down and starting at a slower tempo to avoid the reinforcement of bad habits.

BASICS 7: ACROSS-THE-FLOORS

Focus: Performing exercises in smaller groups rather than as an entire ensemble.

Rationale: Utilizing across-the-floor generally takes more time than doing an exercise with the full band all at once, but this provides the director and staff with more opportunities for individual feedback, as well as provides the students with opportunities to watch and perform for their peers.

Exercise:

- Across-the-floors refers to a line of students travelling from point A to point B on their own instead of performing the exercise with the rest of the entire ensemble at once.
- An efficient way to set this up would be to compress the basics block to one side, and have the other side be the starting line. After the first line begins the exercise, have each subsequent line begin after 8-16 counts of the preceding line.
- There are a number of exercises that you can perform in an across-the-floor setting. The Step-Size and Donkey Kongs/Snake exercises are excellent options for students to observe the importance of consistent step-size for themselves.

Notes



TECHNIQUE BREAKDOWN

By Bryan Scheidecker

Students are not going to arrive on the first day of band camp knowing how to march! It is our responsibility to define a technique for them to follow. For reference, I have provided a breakdown of the method that I prefer. There are many different ways to approach marching technique, and as long as the student is able to play beautifully while meeting the visual demands of the technique, then I believe it is viable.

“Set” or Horns Down

- Heels together, toes at 45°
- Instrument carriage varies for instrument, but for everybody, focus on having a strong presence. Think about airing out those armpits!
- Don't lock your knees! You can still look strong without having to be stiff.
- Imagine your hips are like a bowl of cereal. Tip too far forward or back, and you'll spill. You want to find where the milk is level.
- Visualize a string coming out of the top of your head, and somebody is pulling straight up on it.

“Horns Up” or Playing Position

- Lower body will be the same as set.
- Horn is up to where you are able to play, but don't allow your elbows to shrink in. Keep airing out those armpits!
- Somebody is still pulling on that string coming out of the top of your head. Don't start to slouch!
- Keep a relaxed grip on your horn.
- Find something at your eye-level in the distance and keep your focus on something slightly above that. This will help keep your chin up!

Step Off

- Begin with your left foot, with your toe lifting straight forward. Think “Push-and-one,” initiating the movement a full beat before your first step with one being the downbeat.
- Imagine that there is writing on the bottom of your shoe that you want to show off by keeping your toes high.
- Follow your foot with your body so your center of gravity is between your feet.
- Practice with the Step-Size exercise by taking one step and balancing on the heel of your left foot and the ball of your right foot.

Consecutive Steps

- Both of your feet should be pointed forward after your first steps, and not stay at the 45°.
- You should think about rolling through different contact points of your feet: Starting with the heel, rolling to the ball, and finally to the toe. Imagine you're trying to squeeze out the rest of the toothpaste by stepping on it!
- Your legs should be straight, except for the slight bend that is required when your feet pass each other so your foot doesn't scrape the ground.
- To practice this slight bend, stand with your feet together and swing one leg like a pendulum, focusing on only bending your leg slightly as your foot passes over the ground. This should feel natural!

Direction Changes

- The step before a direction change will always be toe-down, with your toes pointed in the direction you will be heading. When performing any direction change, think “Plant-and-one,” with one being the next step after the change. “Plant” helps reinforce the idea of planting your foot and stopping the momentum of your body from continuing in the original direction.

The angle of the toe-plant doesn't matter as long as it is comfortable (for example, a direction change directly left or right can be done with your foot being at a 45°.)

- For backwards to forwards direction changes, you will plant your back foot, flip up your front foot to prepare to move forward, and roll through the step in the new direction. Again, think "plant-and-one," to avoid putting too much weight on your back foot.
- For forwards to backwards direction changes, leave your back foot on the ground as your center of gravity shifts forward slightly to prepare for the new direction. Again, you don't want too much of your weight going forward, think "plant-and-one."

Backwards

- For stepping off backwards, imagine there is now a string on the back of your leg at knee level. Somebody pulls straight back, initiating your leg movement. You will need to think about staying lifted up on the balls of your feet so your heels are about an inch off the ground, and to help with this, think "Push-and-one" on the step off.
- Similar to moving forwards, your center of gravity will be between your feet. Practice balancing after one step.
- The contact point on your foot when traveling backwards should be the ball of your foot.
- You don't want to bend your legs much with consecutive steps, just enough so your foot can glide over the ground on the pass-through. Think about the pendulum exercise.
- Don't let your hips tip forward or backwards! Think about the bowl of water concept.

Slides

- Keeping your feet pointed forward, rotate your hips to a 30° angle, your chest to 60°, and your shoulders to 90°. Think about having both shoulders facing perpendicular to the direction your feet are pointing.
- The T-Pose exercise is wonderful for getting familiar with what we have to do with our hips in order to achieve a full rotation.
- Keep thinking about somebody pulling the string on the top of your head. Imagine that your spine is like a corkscrew that is twisting up as you rotate!
- Don't allow your shoulders to start creeping back forward as you begin marching.

Close

- When coming to a stop, think about planting your right foot at a 45° angle from your leg and then bringing your left foot to meet it. Your lower body should now be the same as when you started.
- This applies for both forwards and backwards closes.
- Think "Plant-and-close" to help visualize stopping your momentum from moving.

Notes
