



VISUAL TECHNIQUE HANDBOOK

OVERVIEW:

The visual technique of the Pelham High School Band is a modern approach to visual technique. We call this approach "relaxed straight leg." The goal of this technique is to keep the lower body close to the ground, making every step light and staccato, and to keep the upper body as tall as possible. This eliminates bounce in the upper body AND interruptions in the airstream while playing.

OBJECTIVES:

- Perform with a strong, relaxed body carriage, and be able to maintain that carriage for the entirety of any rehearsal and performance setting.
- Move with fluidity in the lower body and rigidity in the upper body.
- Demonstrate excellence in playing while moving.

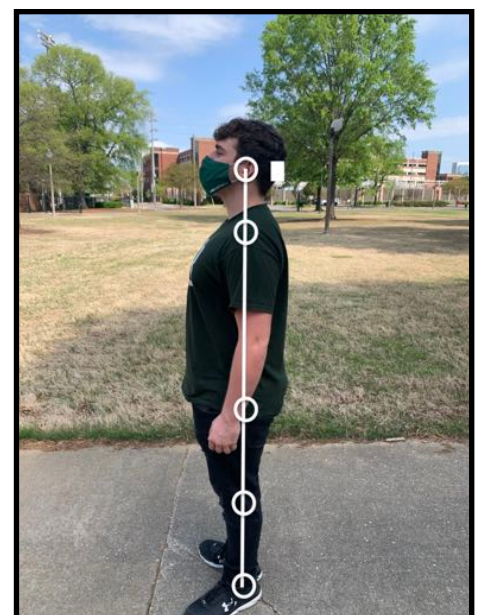
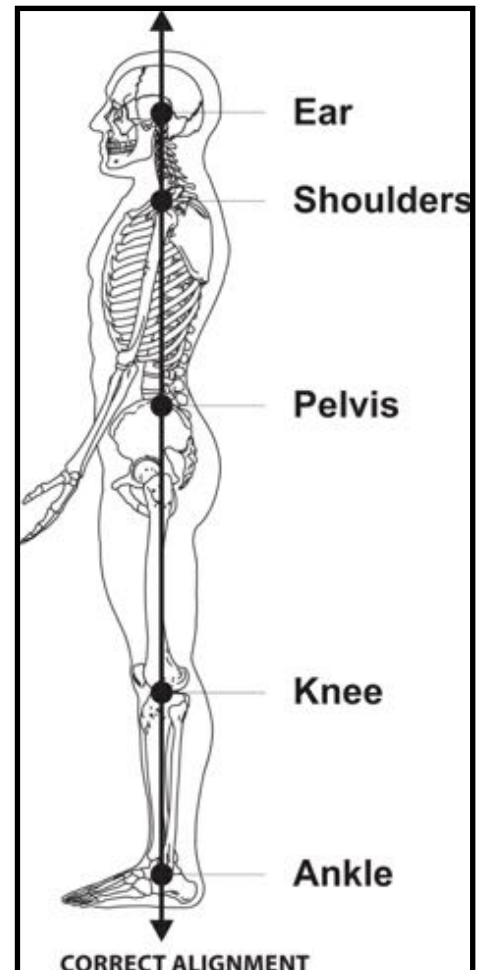
VIDEOS:

There are a number of videos embedded in this packet to demonstrate the technique that is outlined. For convenience, click [here](#) to access a playlist of all of the videos found in this packet. You can also access these videos individually by clicking the links under each concept.

STATIONARY FUNDAMENTALS

POSTURE:

- Posture is the foundational building block of what we are capable of doing on the field. A common phrase in our program is “We will only be as good as our posture looks.”
- We have 5 Points of Alignment that we build our posture around. We use these points to create an imaginary straight line from the bottom of our feet to the top of our heads.
 - Ankles: This is our first point of alignment. We want the inside of our ankles to be centered on our dot.
 - Knees: From our ankles we move to our knees. We want our knees directly above our ankles. This should be very similar to how we normally stand.
 - Hips: Moving upward, our next point of alignment is our hips. We will “tuck” our hips in slightly. You should feel slight engagement in the back of your thighs.
 - Shoulders: We want our shoulders to rest in the middle of our ribcage. This should feel very relaxed, but likely different from how we normally stand.
 - Ears: This is our last point of alignment. We want our ears to be in line with the rest of our body, and to do that, we look slightly above parallel.



MARKING TIME:

- A way for us to practice foot timing or visual movement while stationary in a music rehearsal setting.
- We start in what we call First Position — with our heels together and our toes apart.
- On count 1, our left foot goes from turn-out to parallel. Our heel comes up to meet our right ankle.
- On count 2, our right foot goes from turn-out to parallel. Our heel comes up to meet our left ankle.
- This motion continues for as long as the rep lasts.
- On the last count of a rep, we move our right foot back to turn-out.
- The count after the rep ends, or the Plus-One, our left foot meets our right in turn-out.
- For the entirety of the movement, the heels hit the ground on the downbeat and are in the air on the upbeat. This teaches us internal tempo maintenance.
- Click [here](#) for a video on marking time.



STANDBY:

- How we stand while receiving feedback from a rep OR waiting for instruction on a rep.
- Very relaxed and comfortable position.
- We always stand in first position.

FLUTE:

- Instrument held parallel to the ground with right hand.
- Left hand relaxed.



CLARINET:

- Instrument held parallel to the ground with right hand.
- Left hand relaxed.



SAXOPHONE / LOW REEDS:

- Instrument held parallel to the ground in both hands.
- Elbows on the same plane.



TRUMPET / MELLOPHONE / BARITONE:

- Instrument held parallel to the body in the left hand.
- Right hand covers left hand.



TROMBONE:

- Left thumb on trigger and left pointer finger touching the shank of the mouthpiece.
- Right fingers on slide.
- Instrument parallel to body.

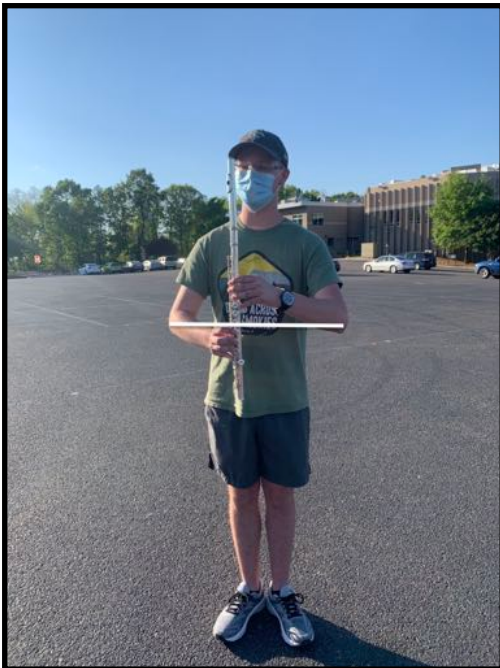


HORNS DOWN (VISUAL SET):

- How we hold our horns while we are on the move, but not playing.
- A comfortable position, but also very confident and full of energy.

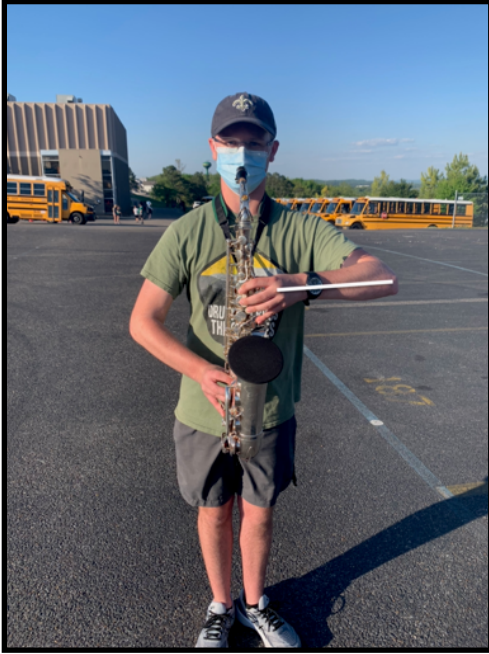
FLUTE / CLARINET:

- The biggest definition in flute and clarinet carriage is making sure that our elbows are on the same plane.
- Instrument parallel to body.



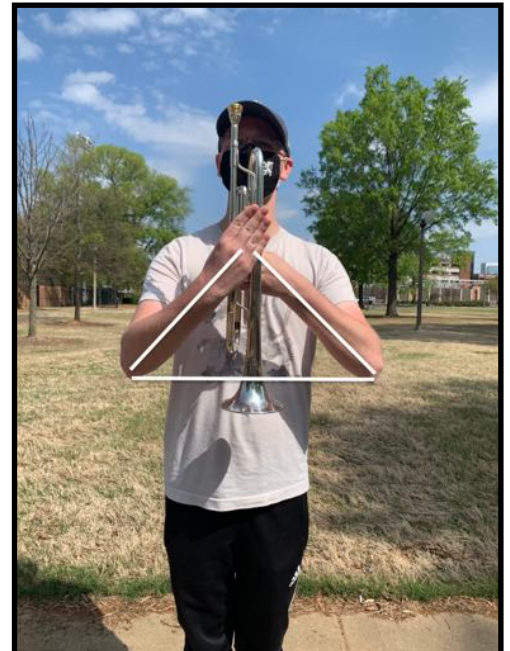
SAXOPHONE / LOW REEDS:

- Instrument parallel to body.
- Left hand straight out from instrument.
- Bari Saxes will have the instrument to the right of the body.



TRUMPET / MELLOPHONE / BARITONE:

- The most important aspect of this carriage is creating a triangle with your upper body.
- There needs to be a straight line from the hands to the elbows, and both elbows need to be on the same plane.
- The right hand is in a "blade," with all the fingers touching and coming straight out off the valves.



TROMBONE:

- Right hand in the same position as standby.
- Elbows on the same plane.
- Instrument parallel to body.



HORNS UP (MUSIC SET):

- How we hold our instrument while we are playing.

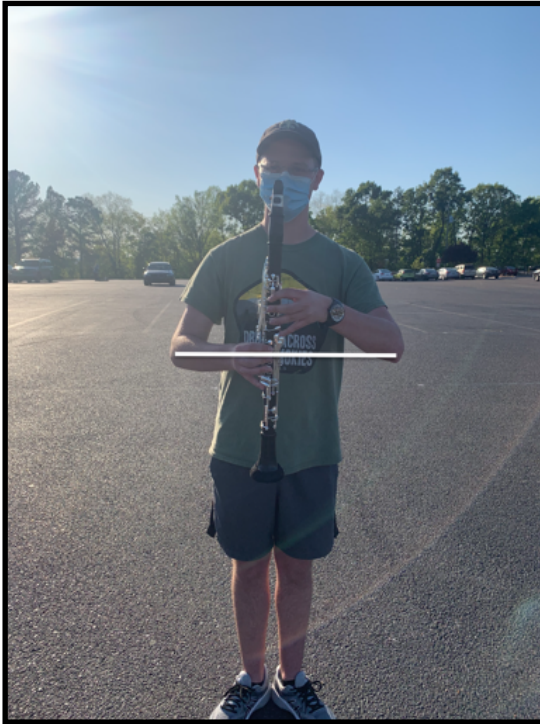
FLUTE:

- Elbows on the same plane.
- Instrument straight out from body.



CLARINET / SAXOPHONE:

- Same definitions as horns down, but with the instrument in your mouth and ready to play.



TRUMPET / MELLOPHONE / BARITONE:

- Elbows on the same plane.
- Straight lines from the hands to the elbows.
- Left palm should be off of the valve casing.
- Tops of the fingers resting on valves, making a "C" with the right hand.



TROMBONE:

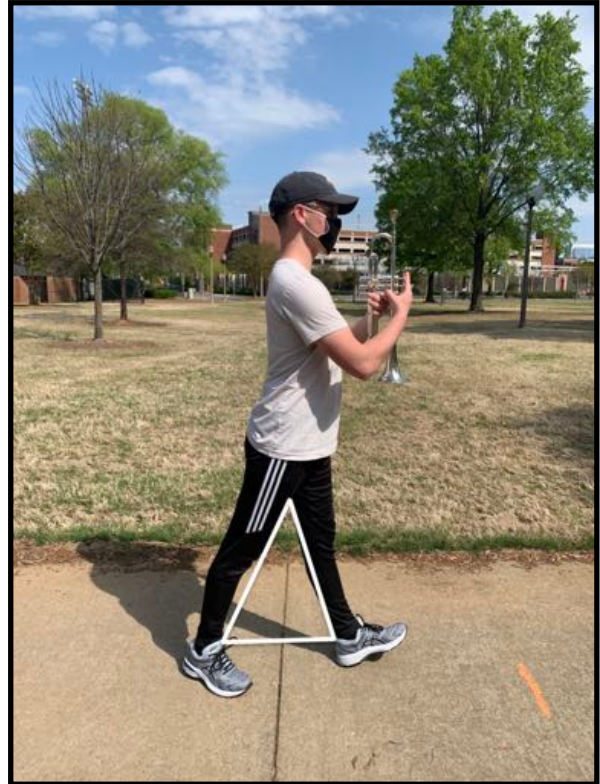
- Elbows on the same plane.
- Straight lines from the hands to the elbows.



MOVEMENT FUNDAMENTALS

FORWARD MARCHING:

- The most important aspect of our technique is having straight legs on the downbeat. This should create a triangle in the lower body (pictured).
- The initiation starts an eighth note before the move when marching at any tempo under 132bpm. When the tempo is 132bpm or higher, the initiation is one full beat before count one.
- We don't think about how much our knees bend. Instead we are focused on staying relaxed and keeping our heels low to the ground.
- Instead of stepping forward, think about moving your entire upper body forward.
- On every downbeat, our heels are on the ground and our toes are in the air.
- The ultimate goal of this technique is relaxation and fluidity in the lower body while staying confident and rigid in the upper body.
- Click [here](#) for a video on forward marching.
- Click [here](#) for a slow-motion video on forward marching.



BACKWARD MARCHING:

- When moving backward, we are still very focused on having straight legs on the downbeat. We want to make another lower body triangle with this movement.
- We want to keep our heels as low to the ground as possible in this movement.
- There should be zero knee bend in this movement.
- Think about pushing the earth away from you instead of stepping backward.
- This movement leads with the back of the knee.
- Click [here](#) for a video on backward marching.
- Click [here](#) for a slow-motion video on backward marching.



SLIDE MARCHING:

- A way for us to move side-to-side while keeping our upper body facing the audience.
- Movement generated from the hips and shoulders.
- On a 90 degree slide, there will be quite a bit of tension.
- Focus on keeping your entire t-shirt logo facing the audience.
- We still want low heels and straight legs on downbeats.
- Click [here](#) for a video on slide marching.



DIRECTION CHANGES:

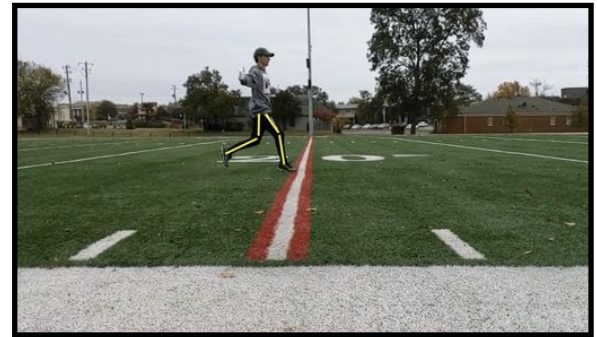
- A way for us to transition from a backwards march to a forwards march
- When transitioning from forwards to backwards, place the right platform on count 8 of the forward march and re-articulate with the toe of the left foot on count 1 of the backward march.
- When transitioning from backward to forward, place the right platform on count 8 of the backward march and re-articulate with the heel of the left foot on count 1 of the forward march.
- In any oblique direction change, our right foot will be placed halfway between where we are coming from and where we are going.
- Click [here](#) for a video on forward to backward direction changing.
- Click [here](#) for a video on backward to forward direction changing

DIAMOND DRILL:

- A way for us to practice direction changes and foot placements.
- Also practices every movement type we have (Forward, Backward, and Slides).
- The drill follows these moves:
 - 8 steps on a forward-left oblique
 - 8 steps on a forward-right oblique
 - 8 steps on a backward-right oblique
 - 8 steps on a backward-left oblique
- Click [here](#) for a video on the diamond drill.

JAZZ RUNNING:

- A way for us to move efficiently at an extraordinarily large step size or at extraordinarily fast tempos.
 - Used primarily for a step size somewhere between a 5-to-5 and a 4-to-5.
- This is an advanced concept, and it is unlikely that every member will be asked to perform it in the course of a field show.
- When we jazz run, we want to keep the same posture and height as any other technique.
- We will start in a demi-plié and push ourselves forward so that our legs straighten.
- Land with the platform of the left foot, then bring the right foot in to meet it (back in a true demi-plié). Then repeat this with the right foot.
- We will keep the heels low on the passthrough.
- Click [here](#) for a video on Jazz Running.



CHOREOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS

POSITIONS:

- Different ways we organize our foot placement to create different effects.

FIRST POSITION:

- Heels together, toes apart.
- This is our default position.



SECOND POSITION:

- First position foot angles.
- Heels shoulder-width apart.



THIRD POSITION:

- First position foot angles.
- Heel of left foot in the arch of right foot.



FOURTH POSITION:

- First position foot angles.
- Same idea as Third Position, but the left foot has taken a step forward.



LOWER BODY CHOREOGRAPHY:

- Our fundamental choreography.
- These are all lower body shapes we can use while.

Demi-Plié:

- We bend our knees halfway, keeping our heels securely on the ground.



Grand-Plié:

- We bend our knees all the way, letting our heels come up off the ground.



Relevé:

- From whatever position we are in, we go up on our toes, maintaining all of our posture alignment.



LUNGE:

- A movement done primarily in second position.
- One straight leg and one bent leg.
- Upper body stays upright.



BAR:

- A movement done primarily in second position.
- One straight leg and one bent leg.
- Upper body follows line of straight leg, so that there's one line from our foot to our shoulder.



FORCED ARCH:

- A movement done with open feet.
- Feet facing perpendicular to upper body.
- Both knees bent.
- One heel on the ground, one heel facing upward.



Passé:

- A movement done in any position.
- One foot comes up so that the bottom of the foot is on the inside of the knee of the other leg.
- Creates a lower-body triangle.



A WORD ABOUT BEING GREAT

We are in an activity where the expectation is perfection. The trick is that we will never get there. We can always be a better player, a better marcher, and a better performer. Our goal as a staff is that you, whether it is your first year or your last, come to every rehearsal with a desire to improve yourself, and get us just one step closer to perfection.

The Pelham High School Band is a program that is dedicated to the pursuit of greatness. However, greatness can often seem unattainable. What makes Nick Saban who he is? What makes Michael Jordan who he is? Greatness is not defined by having a good rehearsal, or even having a good performance. Greatness is not a competition result, or a trophy, or a medal, or a standing ovation. Greatness is waking up every day and striving to be one percent better than you were the day before. Taking every rep of every rehearsal as an opportunity to get better. Better in your posture, in your technique, and in your playing. Greatness seems unattainable, but the hardest part of being great is starting. The only thing it takes to be great at something is to make the decision to give it every ounce of yourself.