

# Drum Major Responsibilities

## Westlake High School Thunder Band

Great, you were just made Drum Major by your band teacher. Now what? Once you have become a Drum Major your main goals are to keep your band happy, out of trouble, prepare them to play a good show and keep them self motivated. The following items identifies the general expectations and duties for section leaders.

### General Leader Responsibilities

**Understand what being a leader means.** Being a drum major is hard; not only do you have to worry about your music, but you have to worry about the music of all of the sections. It also doesn't mean you get to be some dictator; you have to help your band. You are there to serve the section leaders and the people in your band, not to rule over them.

**Learn Names.** Learn the names of everybody in your section and in the band ASAP. Trust and respect work best when they go both ways.

**Lead by example.** Not only will this let your band know what to do, but it is also essential to leadership. Members learn to trust and respect you when they see that you practice what you teach. You were most likely chosen because of your playing or marching skills; now is your time to pass these on.

**Participation in leadership trainings and band council.** From time to time there will be activities and events to help train you and guide you in your responsibilities. You are expected to participate in these training sessions. You will also need to participate in band council meetings to help guide the band programs and give your ideas, input and help. Remember that this is your band and you will only get out of it what you put into it.

**Learn your music.** As drum major, you're expected to know it before anyone else and help other sections with their parts. If you don't know your music, how can you help others with their music?

**Following up with grades.** You need to know how each member of your band is doing in regards to school grades and participation. It is your duty to make sure that each member is eligible to compete and participate in every part of band. Your task it to follow up with the section leaders who should be following up with each member of their section. Help out if you can or see if other members of your band can help out in any way. If you have any concerns or are worried about a members grades or attendance, please talk with and keep Mr. Mangelson informed.

### Drum Major Responsibilities

**Lead rehearsals.** Drum majors working with staff, execute rehearsal schedule and lead practices even when staff is not present This includes leading brass or woodwind sectionals, conducting music and warmups, leading full rehearsals as well as taking the initiative to make sure the band is where they need to be and using time wisely working hard. During practices and events it is important to take charge and working with section leaders to know where every member of the band is.

**Setup, cleanup and equipment.** Assist and delegate with field setup and cleanup. Manage and help transport equipment by direction and make assignments. This means taking ownership for band property, equipment and facilities. Make sure that whenever you leave the band room or field that it is cleaner than you found it. Show up early and stay late.

**Creating efficient rehearsals.** It is your job to brainstorm with the field commanders and section leaders to create great practices. This includes creating and maintaining quiet practices on the field, helping the band focus, keeping discipline, as well as helping maintain quiet time and focus before competitions.

**Member performance.** You are responsible for the discipline and actions of those in the band. It falls on you to make sure everyone is where they need to be earlier than they need to. You determine the physical setup of the ensemble. It is your job to train section leaders on expectations, instrument maintenance and care, what it means to

be a part of the band and bring new section leaders up to speed and understanding. Ultimately, marching technique, playing ability, and all other aspects of performance and conduct of those within your band comes down to you.

**Teaching Section Leaders.** Teaching and making sure that your section leaders understand and can teach members: Notes, Rhythm, Dynamics, Tone, Intonation, Articulation, Blend, Balance and Phrasing is your job. You are the staff for your section leaders and it is your job to train, coach and work with your them in progressing their teaching and leadership abilities.

**Track section attendance.** Working with the section leaders it's your job to know where your band members are and that they report this to you. It's your job to take role for each practice and performance. Help section leaders know they need to call members who may be missing and find out if there is anything they or the band can do to help get the person to rehearsal.

**Marching and music pass-offs.** It's your job to make sure section leaders have and hold pass-offs. This means assisting them and pushing them to accomplish this by the required times. Your example determines if music pass-offs are treated lightly and if they happen or not.

**Attend sectionals.** Help with sectionals where you can. Assist section leaders and coordinate how to best help them out. When you become friends with your section leaders and those in their section, they'll be more likely to listen to you, and you'll get a better feel of their playing ability and how best to assist them.

## **Other Responsibilities**

**Welcome new members in your band.** Introduce yourself before rehearsals. Introduce the new members to their section leaders and other band members. Follow up with them and check in on their experience.

**Help sections when they need it.** Let them practice, but if you see someone struggling with a part or playing it wrong without realizing it, go and help them.

**Be exacting about your uniform.** Besides looking your best, you set the standard for your band. Make sure you can explain the correct arrangement of hats and any other pieces of your uniform. Keep shoes, gloves, and gauntlets polished and all uniform parts clean. Never eat or drink anything but water while in uniform. Dry clean your uniform at the end of parade season and again at the end of show season. Show respect for the uniform and the tradition that it stands for. Teach the members in your band to cherish the uniform and the band experience.

**Hold your section leaders to their promises.** If someone said they'll complete an assignment by next Tuesday, they better have it down when next Tuesday comes rolling by. If they don't, ask them why they didn't.

**Be understanding.** If someone can't make it to the sectional because their grandma died, don't hold that against them. People have lives outside of marching band.

**Keep your band under control.** This doesn't mean order them around, but when they get out of hand, let the section leaders know. If necessary, seek help from staff. Remember, rehearsal time is limited and essential to the success of the whole band. Keep your band quiet and focused so they don't miss important instruction.

**Listen to both sides of a conflict.** If there's a conflict between two sides, you will probably have to be the third party to step in and solve it. If it starts to get physical, keep them apart and tell someone to get help from an adult as soon as possible.

**Sectional parties are required.** Section leaders will organize get-togethers with their section. There should also be brass and woodwind parties. Try to attend them when you can. They can be after sectionals or pass-offs. This will help you and your band bond.

**Be on the same page with other section leaders.** If you're telling one section something completely different than the other section leaders, it will only confuse your band.

**Remember the team.** No matter what goals you may have for individuals and section leaders, don't lose sight of what is best for the entire band. Each section must work together to achieve what is best for the entire ensemble.

Your band directors and staff goals should take priority over your own. Also, being a drum major is a privilege, not a right. Remember... with great power comes great responsibility, as said by Uncle Ben.

## Other Helpful Tips

- Respect the chain of command. While it's perfectly all right to bring a problem or concern to the attention of the director or other staff, try to resolve any major disagreements privately and discreetly. You undermine your authority and that of your director, otherwise.
- Listen to your group members and any section leaders or field commanders. If somebody approaches you with a problem, do your best to address it. Be responsive to peoples' needs and accommodate what you can. If something is beyond your control, explain to the group what you know about the situation as ask their assistance and forbearance, as appropriate.
- Be generous with compliments. Compliments are often more powerful than criticism. If somebody is doing something well, or has improved, say so. It's ok to single somebody out for the good news, or tell the whole group. It will help everybody be more confident and it will encourage people to try harder. It will also improve morale.
- Be a part of your group as much as possible. There will be times when you do act independently as part of your duties, but make an effort to do what they do. Rehearse and perform when they do. Eat when and what they eat, and if you are traveling, sleep where they sleep. Most importantly, don't carry on as though you are above them or apart from them.
- Notice or recall what you like and dislike about directors, drum majors and teachers you have worked with. Analyze their styles. What was effective? What wasn't? What was fun? What was miserable? Your priorities should be first to do your job and second to please people. While you can't possibly please everyone, your group will be easiest to lead and it will perform its best if the people in it are generally satisfied and confident about your performance.
- Learn drill notation. Drum majors are often called upon to help teach the drill.
- Pass on section traditions; handshakes, pre-competition/game traditions, any unusual sayings, etc. This will keep the tradition alive, and it will establish a sense of being a part of something.
- Encourage making sectional t-shirts and or sweatshirts.
- Tell everyone to come to rehearsals early. This way, time won't be lost waiting for people to show up. To be Early is to be on time. To be on time is to be late. To be late is to miss the bus. Being late is unacceptable.
- Since you'll probably be able to drive while others won't be, offer to give them rides home from practice if they need them.
- Do your best to offer advice in a way that doesn't hurt anyone's feelings. For instance, instead of yelling at them for always missing the same accidental, say something like "by the way, there's a B flat in measure 7... make sure you've all got it marked". Wording is key.
- Be funny and creative to motivate your band to do well. Even be willing to sacrifice your dignity sometimes to do it. You could try making a "deal" with sections, that if they all pass-off, they can pie you or make you do something else ridiculous. Make goofy, bright colored hats for people to wear when they need to focus (all in fun, of course).
- Feed them. Food is a great motivation and it also offers your sections a chance to bond with each other. Bring breakfast on competition mornings, or hand out small pastries for no reason. They'll love you for it.
- Give rewards! An really easy and ridiculous way to motivate your section is to give stickers to them when they do a good job. For some reason this works. Offer to throw a movie or pizza party if everyone memorizes their music by a certain date.

## Warnings

- Don't let other people in your band tell you or your band what to do. You're the one that will have more experience, (plus Mr. Mangelson put you here for a reason) thus you will probably know better than them. Listen to advice, but make your own decisions.
- Make sure you don't get too power-hungry; remember that being drum major doesn't mean you have to control every minute aspect of your band's lives.
- Don't be bossy. There is a fine line between asserting yourself and just being a jerk. Remember: A good leader is selfless. Take the blame; give the credit away.

## **Quality Leader Traits we all Like**

Have a sense of humor  
Have a passionate interest in some things  
Have high energy levels  
Are tolerant of changing moods  
Know how to listen  
Are creative  
Is trustworthy  
Are enthusiastic  
Exude self-confidence  
Knows how and when to be personal and professional  
Takes initiative  
Appreciate success - are sympathetic when I fail  
Have a keen sense of justice and injustice  
Are sensitive to the needs of others  
Can take risks  
Knows everyone  
Are not sure of everything  
Are punctual  
Are optimistic  
Don't make fun of people  
Can offer love unselfishly  
Are people in whose presence I like myself more