Denison High School

Touch of Gold Marching Band

Marching Technique Manual

2025 - 2026

Melissa Hatheway Lewis

Director of Bands

Table of Contents

I. Posture, page 4
- A. Body Mapping
- B. Six Points of Balance
- C. Foot Placement
- D. Knee Alignment
- E. Movement from the Hip
- F. The Torso and Spine
- G. Shoulders
- H. The A.O. Joint
- I. "Stand-by" Position
- J. "Set" Position
- K. "Horns Down" Position
- L. "Horns Up" Position

II. Mark Time, page 13
- A. Technique
- B. Timing

III. Forward March, page 15
- A. Technique
- B. Cross-Through Position
- C. The Halt
- D. Timing

IV. Backward March, page 18
- A. Technique
- B. Cross-Through Position
- C. Keeping Feet in Track
- D. The Halt
- E. Timing

V. Step Outs, page 21
    A. Technique
    B. Timing
    C. Backward Step Out
VI. Direction Changes, page 23
    A. Primary Direction Changes: Forward to Backward
    B. Primary Direction Changes: Backward to Forward
    C. Secondary Direction Changes – Preps
VII. Slides, page 26
    A. Standing Still
    B. On the Move

I. Posture

A. Body Mapping

The Andover educators developed the “Six Points of Balance” from the Body Mapping technique. An important aspect of learning this balanced posture is to develop an anatomically correct Body Map. The Body Map is one’s self-representation of the skeleton in one’s own brain. An inaccurate Body Map produces inefficient movement that may lead to misuse and injury. An accurate body map is efficient, smooth and produces elegant and controlled movement. By learning more about the anatomy of the human body and pinpointing where these six points of balance lie on one’s own body, a correct posture and use of the body can be obtained.

B. The Six Points of Balance

1. Ankles
2. Knees
3. Hips
4. Torso
5. Shoulders
6. A.O. Joint

The above “Six Points of Balance” correspond to six joints within the body that should be balanced over each other in order to obtain a proper standing posture. The “point of balance” is the place where movement in any direction is easiest.

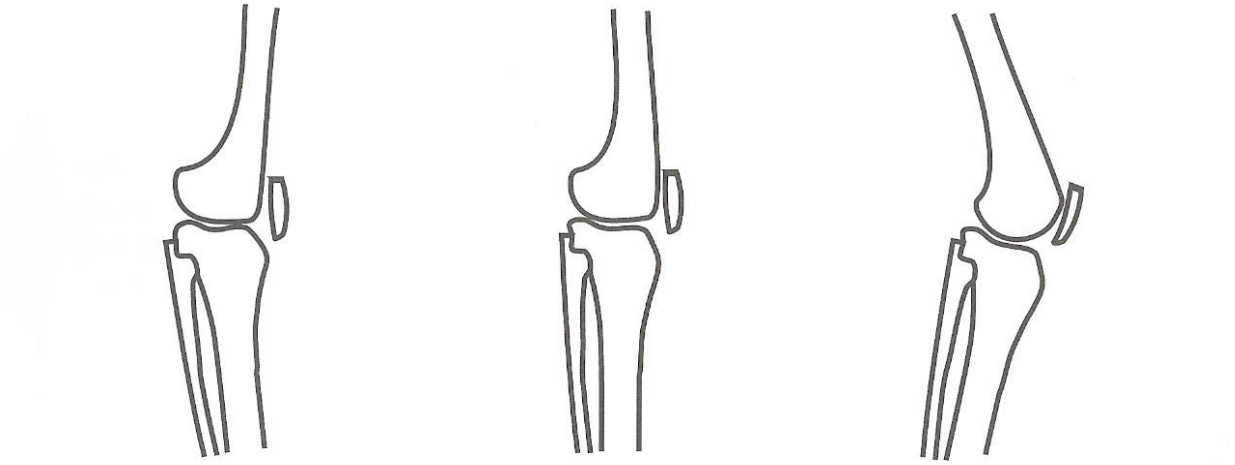
C. Foot Placement

Feet should be placed directly next to each other, with heels lined up. The toes will be apart, creating a 90 degree angle with the feet. This is referred to as “open first position”. Weight should be towards the front of the foot, on the platform. The platform is essentially the front 2/3 of the foot, and starts at the arch of the foot and extends up to the ball of the foot, which spreads from the big toe outward to the pinky.

The inner anklebones of the foot should be what “splits” the dot or yard line during marching. This means that the anklebones of both feet will each cover one-half of the painted dot, or the center of the yard line.

D. Knee Alignment

It is vital to note that the kneecap floats on top of the actual knee joint. When putting the knee in proper balance, be sure that the knee is not locked with the kneecap pulled back. Instead, think of the knee joint as where the thigh and lower leg meet with the kneecap appearing above the joint.



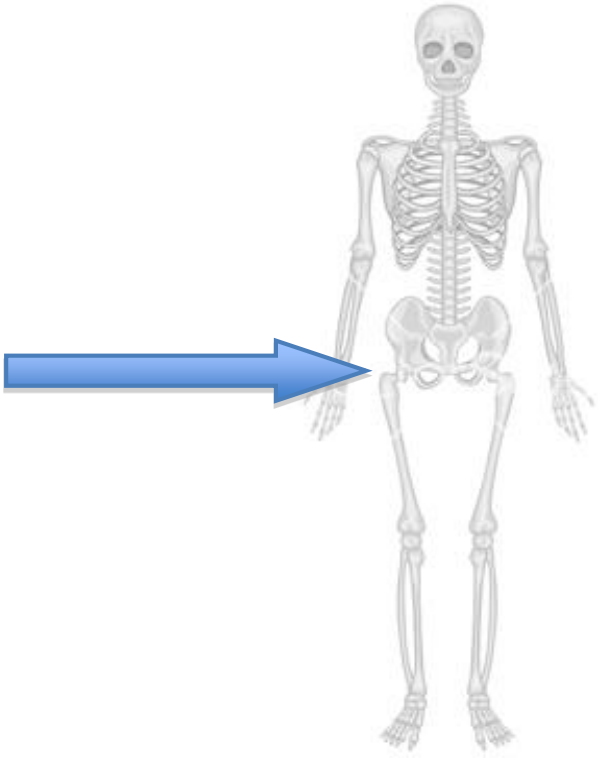
Locked Knee Balanced Knee Bent Knee

The previous picture shows the position of the leg bones in a locked, balanced, and bent position. Proper marching technique dictates a straight leg and a balanced knee joint.

If a marching member were to look down at their feet with their knee in a straight, balanced position, they would not be able to see their shins. If a marching member can see their shins, this means that their knee is pulled back too far and is in a locked and/or hyper extended position.

E. Movement from the Hip

The hip joint is a ball-and-socket joint where the thighbone joins the pelvis. This is lower than most people think when they "put their hands on their hips". The rivet on one's jeans pocket more accurately locates the hip joint on the side of one's body. This joint provides for 360 degrees of motion in the leg. The freedom of the hip joint means that the motion of the leg starts all the way up at the hip. When marching forward and/or backward, be sure that the motion of the leg begins at this hip joint.



The above picture depicts the location of one's hip joint.

In addition, the weight of one's torso is delivered outwards through the pelvis and hip joint down into the legs. In this way, the weight is grounded down into the feet.

F. The Torso and Spine

The spine travels through the pelvis and torso into the neck and ultimately, the head. The spine is intentionally curved so that it can absorb the impact of movement. The spine is segmented by curves so that it can move in any direction and twist. It also lengthens and gathers. Therefore, it is vital not to try and straighten the spine, but rather lengthen it by avoiding tension. The lengthening and gathering of the spine vertebrae is a reflexive movement that will occur constantly if one does not contract against it through tension.

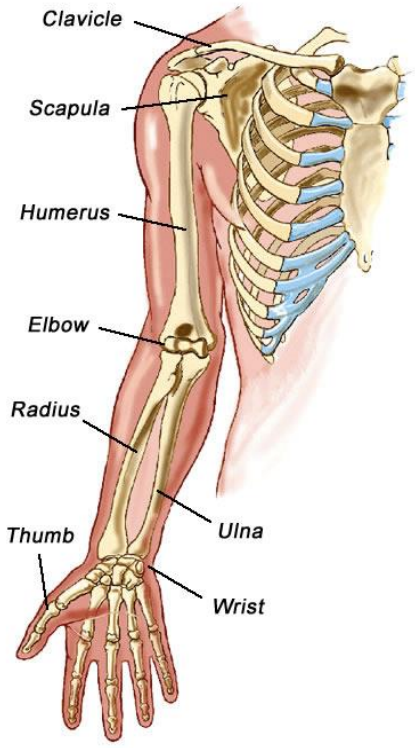
The back half of the spine (the bony points that one can feel through the skin) contains the spinal cord and nerves. This is *not* the weight bearing half of the spine. Rather, the weight bearing half of the spine is the core that is located more towards the middle of the body. Keep one's weight towards the core of the body to avoid putting weight and pressure onto the nerves in the spinal cord.

In order for the muscles of the back to be free and allow the spine to curve and lengthen as needed, the torso must be in proper balance. When locating this point of balance, feel along the side of one's body for the lowest rib. These bones should be balanced over the hips. In addition, to fully enjoy a freedom of the leg muscles, one must let the whole back release onto the core support of the spine. Therefore, the muscles that fan from the lower back down through the pelvis and hips into the legs must release all tension. This release will feel like a downward drop of the rear, but this is not the same as tucking the butt underneath you. There should not be any rotation of the hips, but rather a relaxation of the gluteus. This release will give the lower back a subtle and natural curve.

G. Shoulders

The shoulders are another ball-and-socket joint, and therefore have 360 degrees of available motion. When identifying the "point of balance", be sure to identify the joint as the end of the shoulder where the arm comes into the shoulder. This is the point that should be balanced over the torso, hips, and so on.

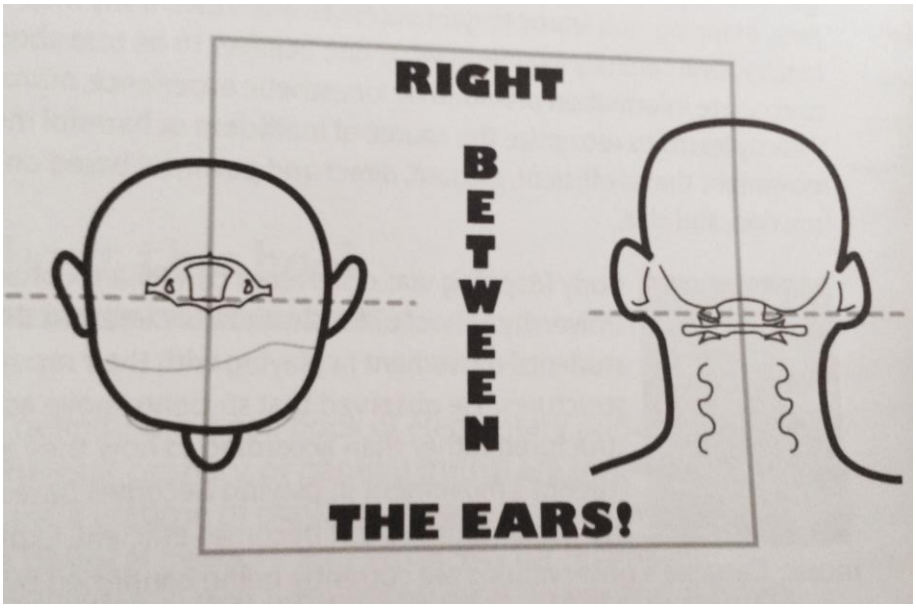
Although the shoulder joint is the "point of balance", there are three other joints in the arm structure to be concerned about when marching. These are the wrist, elbow, and sternoclavicular joint (the last of these being where the clavicle connects to the sternum – or the top of the shoulder coming into the rib cage). Many muscles that move the arm structure extend to the front and back. Therefore, free movement of the arms relies on tension free muscles in these areas.



The above picture depicts the four joints of the arm structure: 1) sternoclavicular, 2) shoulder, 3) elbow and 4) wrist.

H. The A. O. Joint

The A. O. Joint is made up of the atlas (the top of the vertebra of the spine) and the occiput (a round donut-like bone that is the base of the skull). This joint is located right between – and in the same plane of – the ears. One can find the A. O. joint by nodding and then shaking one's head, and then locating the axis point for this motion. This joint is the last "point of balance". The A. O. joint should be centered between the shoulders. In addition, this point should be where one lifts up. Using the A.O. joint as an axis point, the chin should be raised to 15 degrees above parallel.



The above picture depicts the location of the A. O. joint right between the ears.

I. "Stand-by" Position

This is the position that all marching members will return to when not marching. Instructors will give information to members while they are at this position.

Stand with the "Six Points of Balance" posture, as described in Section I. of the manual. From here, simply form the left hand into a relaxed fist. The right hand will form a

blade, with all the fingers except the thumb touching, and cover the left fist. From here, the arms will hang down naturally in front of the body.

Section Leaders will further describe this position with instruments. It is important to note that when holding the instrument at stand-by position that you do not want to "break" the wrist. Keep the wrist and arm in a natural extension.

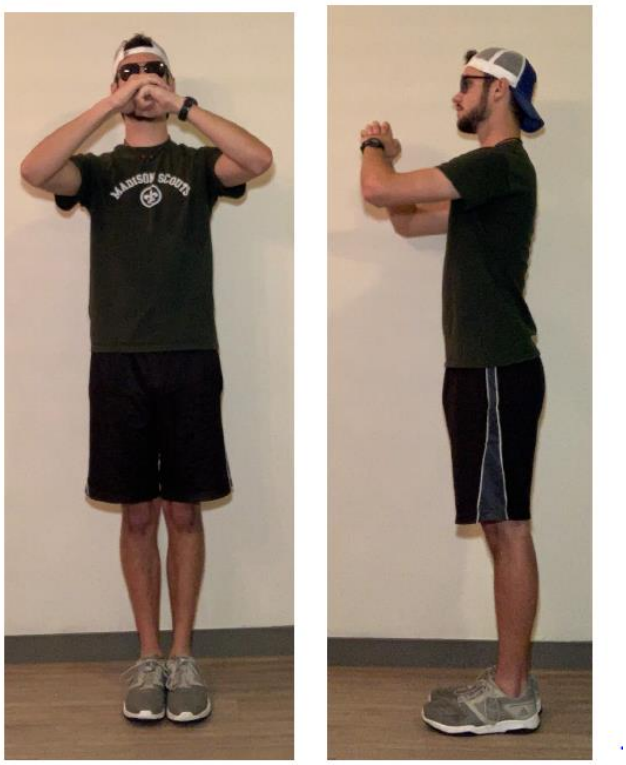
J. "Set" Position

This is the position that all marching members will snap to before beginning a marching exercise or portion of the production. Unless otherwise instructed, the position of attention will always be with the horns down.

Again, stand with the "Six Points of Balance" posture, as described in Section I. of the manual. The left hand will still be in a fist, with the right hand blade covering it. The right hand thumb will be placed directly above the left hand fist, in the "swirl" created by the index finger. The fist will come up to where the fist is level with the clavicle. The fingers will face in towards the center of the body. The arms will form a right angle with each other, so that the plane of the wrist and arm is continuous (with no bend or break).

If instructed to go to the “horns up” from here, simply rotate at the wrist so that the thumbs now face the body. There should be a straight plane from knuckles to elbow. An example of stand-by and set positions can be seen below:

Stand-by Position



Set Position

K. “Horns Down” Position

This is the position that marching members will assume with their instruments in their hands, but not in the playing position. This position will be used in both visual and marching rehearsals.

Section Leaders will further describe the details of this position for each section.

When the instrument is in horns down position that the elbows should be extended far enough away from the body to ensure a straight plane from the knuckles to the elbow. This is to avoid a broken, or bent wrist. For most brass instruments, the palm of the hand will need to be brought away from the valve casing.

L. “Horns Up” Position

This is the position that marching members will assume with their instruments in their hands and in the playing position. This position will be used in both visual and marching rehearsals.

Section Leaders will further describe the details of this position for each section. A few specific instructions for instruments are listed below:

For bell front brass, the elbows should create a 120 degree angle when the instrument is at horns up position. The palms of the hand should be away from the valve casing to create a continuous plane from knuckles to elbow. Trombone players should pay special attention to matching the angle of their elbows (as the tendency is for the right elbow to be too close to the body).

Saxophone and clarinet players should utilize neck straps. The right hand should be as far forward (away from the body) as the neck strap will allow. This ensures that the player does not rest their wrist on their hip bones while at horns up position.

Flute players should keep their shoulders parallel to the front sideline when going to horns up position. This means that the right hand will be more forward than the left. Students should practice going to horns up position while standing against a flat wall, to practice this adjusted posture. This posture allows students to keep their shoulders aligned when doing slide technique, as described later in the manual.

II. Mark Time

A. Technique

Mark time serves as a way for marching members to keep tempo while rehearsing music only (standing still). Mark time technique should be employed during all music ensemble rehearsals.

Starting with the feet together, raise the left heel until the bottom of one's shoe is equal with the other foot's ankle bone. This is approximately one inch off of the ground. As the heel raises, the knee should pull straight forward over the toe of the left foot. If a marching member were to look down at their feet during mark time, the knee should completely cover the foot.

Heel should be about 1 inch off of the ground.

From here, simply reverse the motion, and bring the left heel back down to the ground. Repeat this process with the right foot. This motion will continue, trading feet, until the marching member is told to stop or the exercise is complete.

Throughout the mark time motion, the hips should not sway back and forth. Rather, one should lift up, so as to maintain posture and proper control of their body and instrument.

B. Timing

Motion will start on the "&" of the eighth beat of the preparation measure before the exercise begins. Students will always receive two full measures of four counts each before an exercise begins. The left heel will come down and hit the ground on the downbeat of "1" in the first actual measure. The heels will continue to hit the ground on each downbeat.

Remember: the heel comes **down** to the ground on the **downbeat**. The heel goes **up** off of the ground on the **upbeat**.

III. Forward March

A. Technique

Forward march technique is nothing more than defined walking. Forward march begins before any movement is visible. This occurs during the eighth count of the preparation measure, when the right leg muscles engage to prepare movement. This can be achieved curling the toes in the right foot until the muscles all the way up through the right leg engage. The right leg serves as the "push" into the first step of forward march.

As the right leg propels the marcher forward, the left heel stays very close to the ground, until it comes to rest of the back edge of the left heel. The left foot will form a right angle, as the foot remains flexed throughout the motion. The toes of the left foot will pull back towards the left shin to achieve "high toes". Throughout the motion of the left foot, the knee will remain pulled back so that the leg is balanced at the knee joint. Be mindful that the kneecap should float on top of the knee joint. *The knee joint is not a part of the motion forward; rather, the hip joint initiates the motion down to the ankle*. This process will repeat with the right foot. During this motion, the left foot will roll down onto the platform, before taking the third step forward. In this way, the feet will remain in constant motion.

First step of forward march

Throughout this motion, the marcher's weight must be split evening between both feet. This will ensure that the marcher's body remains directly in between both of their legs and keep their rear tucked. *The students must also lift up to extend the space between the hips and torso, to minimize bouncing will in motion.*

B. Cross-Through Position

As the left foot passes by the right, it will pass through the “cross-through position”. In this position, the left foot will be flexed and will be raised slightly off the ground. The left and right feet are right next to each other in this position. As the feet pass by each other, it is important that they go through the cross-through position, so as not to trip. In addition, the heel should remain as low to the ground as possible when moving to and through this position. This “cross-through” position can be seen below:

As seen to the left, the cross-position looks very similar to the feet in a halt. However, the right foot is raises slightly off the ground and is flexed at the ankle. There is a slight bend to the knee in this position.

C. The Halt

To come to a halt from forward march, the platform of the foot will hit the ground instead of the heel on whatever the last count is (for this example, that would be count eight). On the downbeat of one of the next measure, the halt, the right platform will also hit the ground, followed shortly by the rest of the foot. During this motion, the left heel will slowly pull down towards the ground. The right toe and heel will be directly next to the left in the halt position. The foot should remain flexed as it comes into the halt.

D. Timing

All exercises will begin with two four-count measures. The right leg will activate, or engage, the muscles on beat eight of these preparation measures. The left foot will begin to move on the “e” of beat eight, or the second sixteenth note subdivision. The left heel will hit the ground on the downbeat of one of the first real measure. The heel of each foot will always hit on the downbeat. All cross-through positions will occur on the “&” of each beat. During the halt, the right platform will hit the ground on the last downbeat of the measure. The feet will close and motion will stop on the downbeat of one.

IV. Backward March

A. Technique

Backward march technique was developed so that the body could still face the audience, while the performer moved backwards. This development led to much more interesting drill formations and possibilities. *Backward marching technique utilizes the calf muscles almost constantly, so strengthening of these muscles is encouraged. In addition, it is important to equally strengthen the thigh muscles so as to balance around the knee joint.*

Backward marching technique begins identically to forward marching technique – with the activation of the right leg muscles. Please refer to Section II.A for more instruction on this topic. The movement of the left leg differs only in that it is moving backward, rather than forward. The movement still comes from the hip joint down to the ankle. The knee will remain straight and balanced while the left leg moves straight back. The left foot will land on the platform, or first two-thirds of the foot. It is important that the heel pulls straight back in the direction of travel, so that when landing on the downbeat the heel is not turned underneath the body. The foot should remain flexed throughout this movement, and the heel should be as close to the ground as possible without risk of tripping. Upon landing on the platform, the left heel should only be an inch or two off the ground. This motion is identical in the right foot. An example of proper backwards technique can be seen to the left.

B. Cross-Through Position

Throughout the backward march, the marching member will always remain on their platforms – the heel should never touch the ground. The "cross-through position" is very similar in the backward march technique as the forward. Both feet will be lined up, with heels and toes next to each other. The passing foot will be flexed and raised slightly off the ground. Unlike during forward march, in the backward technique, the non-passing foot will be on the platform, not rolled through and planted on the ground.

C. Keeping Feet in Track

As the marcher moves backward, it is vital that the heel pulls straight back. This is commonly referred to as "keeping your feet in track". If a student ever places one foot directly behind the other, the risk for tripping increases dramatically. Therefore, as the student marches backwards, they must keep their feet moving in their own independent tracks straight behind them. *In addition, when landing on the platform, be sure that the weight of the body is centered towards the big toe. When the weight is thrown to the outside of the foot, over the pinky toe, the ankle is thrown out of proper balance. This is known as over supination.*

As seen to the right, the heels must remain in track while moving backwards.

D. The Halt

The halting process is very similar to that of the forward march technique. On the last downbeat of the measure, say beat eight, the right platform will hit the ground. On the first beat of the halt measure, the left platform will move backwards to meet the right. During this motion, the right platform will slowly roll down to where the entire foot is on the ground, as will the left. As with the forward halt, the foot will flex and keep the heel as low to the ground as possible when coming into the halt.

E. Timing

The timing of this backward march technique is identical to that of the forward march. Please refer to section II.D. for more information.

V. Step-Outs

A. Technique

Step-outs are used to designate the beginnings of drill sets during music ensemble rehearsals. Marching members will begin all drill sets with a complete step-out in the direction of travel, and then continue with mark time technique. Step-outs can be done in both the forward and backward direction, as well as at an angle. For the purposes of the general technique, a forward step-out will be described below.

A step-out begins with one step of forward march, at an 8 to 5 step size. Proper forward marching technique will be used, and the marching member will land on the back edge of the heel. The right heel will come off the ground naturally. From here, the marching member will take a second step with the right foot, but this time land on the platform as if to begin a halt. This second step will land on the downbeat of two, with both platforms on the ground (following the roll through of the left foot). On beat three, the marching member will flex the left foot so that the toe comes off the ground to re-articulate the beat. The last portion of the step out is one step backwards with the right foot, landing on beat four. The feet will close in a halt on beat five. Mark time will begin immediately with the right foot and continue from there. Once drill is learned, the step out should be in the size and direction the marcher would travel to their dot.

B. Timing

Students will have two four-count measures of preparation before the step-out will begin. On the eight count of the preparation measure, the students will engage the right leg. Movement forward will begin on the “e” of beat eight. The marching member will land on the heel of their left foot on the downbeat of one of the first measure. The right heel will be placed back on the ground on the downbeat of two. The left foot will come forward and land on the platform of the foot on the next beat. The left foot will flex, so that the toe re-articulates on beat three. On beat four, the right foot will move in a backwards march step and land on the platform on beat four. The left foot will move

back to meet the right on beat five to halt. The right foot will resume normal mark time technique on beat six.

C. Backward Step Out

The backward step-out differs only slightly from the forward one. Instead of landing on the back edge of the heel, the left foot will land on the platform on beat one. The right foot will move backwards on beat two. On beat three, the left foot will flip from the platform to the back edge of the heel. From here, the rest of the technique is the same as described above.

VI. Direction Changes

A. Primary Direction Changes: Forward to Backward

Direction changes most commonly occur between drill sets, as a way to transition from one to the next. Forward to backward direction changes occur when the marching member is performing a drill move where they are moving straightforward, to one where they are moving straight backwards.

The first portion of a forward to backward direction change is identical to the first part of a forward march halt. The right platform will hit the ground on the last downbeat of the drill set. The left foot will roll through as usual, so that on the last downbeat of the drill set, both platforms are on the ground. The left foot will then flex at the ankle so that the toes come off the ground to re-articulate on the next downbeat of one. From here, the marching member will continue to use backward marching technique.

Count 8

During the direction change (and for any direction change as later described in the manual), students should again extend the space between the hips and torso, or “lift up out of the hips”. Students should also work to keep their torso and shoulders in line with their hips, and not allow their shoulders to fall forward on the direction change. This requires an engagement of the core and back muscles.

B. Primary Direction Changes: Backward to Forward

Backward to forward direction changes occur when the marching member transitions from a drill set where they are moving straight backward, to one where they are moving straight forward.

During a backward direction change, the marching member will march the drill set as normal, and freeze on the last beat (for the purposes of this exercise, beat eight). On the downbeat of eight, both platforms will be touching the ground. Similarly to the prior direction change, the left foot will flip and re-articulate on the downbeat of one of the following measure. The left foot will flip from the platform to the back edge of the heel. From here, the marching member will continue to next drill set by marching forward.

Count 8

Count 1

C. Secondary Direction Changes - Preps

Secondary direction changes occur whenever the marcher must change directions at an angle. Forward to backward and backward to forward direction change can be modified and employed during direction changes at an acute angle. However, when the drill calls for a student to march forward/backward and then to the side, a prep step must be used.

Preps are very similar to those that precede halts in that the marching member will land on their platform on the last downbeat of the drill set (again, beat eight for these examples). *When landing on the platform, be sure to keep the weight towards the inside of the foot (over the big toe) so not as to over supinate the foot.* In the case of prepped direction changes however, these preps are merely pauses before continuing on in a new direction. Preps always split the distance between the old direction of travel and the new. For example, if the past drill set called for the marcher to move straight forward, and the next called for them to move to the left, the prep step would be a 45-degree angle to the left.

When prepping, it is vital that the anklebone continues to split the dot, as described in Section I.A. This may cause the platform of the foot to be placed slightly more forward and turned out than one might expect. Immediately following a prep step, the marching member will continue to the next drill set using proper marching technique.

VIII. Slides

A. Standing Still

Slides are employed so that the instrument will always face the audience; despite whatever direction the student is marching. For the purposes of this manual, a 90-degree slide will be described. However, it is important to note that any angle of a slide can occur while marching. The same slide technique can be used for all angles of slides called for by the drill.

To begin a 90-degree slide to the left, first stand with the posture described in Section I. From here, rotate the pelvis 45 degrees to the left, or as much as is comfortably possible. This twisting motion occurs around the spine. Once the hips have rotated as much as is comfortable, the torso (defined as the bottom rib) will continue to rotate as far as is comfortable – or to around 60-75 degrees. As the torso rotates, the marching member should think about extending the space between the pelvis and the bottom-most rib (as if you are going up a spiral staircase). At this point the shoulders are also facing the same direction as the rest of the upper body, having followed the torso. From this position, the shoulders will rotate the remaining 30 degrees until the upper body is facing directly to the left, while the feet still remain in their original position. Despite this rotation, the shoulders should still be balanced over the torso and hips.

While the shoulders are rotating, focus on elongating the spine and rotating up as well as to the left. The head should remain in the center of the body, with the collarbones pointing directly to the left. Relaxation is key to performing a successful slide, so keep the shoulders down and round.

To perform a 90-degree slide to the right, the same process is used, but rotating to the right instead of the left. Again, the rotating motion should always begin with the hips and torso, and then the shoulders.

The key is to focus on the three step rotation. Many performers will skip the rotation of the torso, and try to rotate primarily from the shoulders. This creates considerable tension, and often results in a collapsed posture (where the shoulders are out of alignment).

B. On the Move

When performing a slide on the move the most important this is to rotate from the hips and torso first. Many performers will attempt to rotate only from their shoulders. *This can be identified by looking at the angle of their hips while on the move. If the hips are facing flat to the direction of travel, the performer is not rotating their hips appropriately.*

When the performer rotates their hips for the slide, one leg will be slightly longer than the other. Additionally, one leg will feel easier and/or freer to move. For example, when sliding to the left, the left leg will feel longer and easier to move than the right. The marcher must compensate for this, so that even step sizes are taken.

When teaching the slide technique, it is important to first isolate 1 and 2 steps. Additionally, be cautious to not hold the students in a slide position for an extended amount of time – as this causes discomfort. Slowly increase the amount of time that students are in this 90 degree slide position, as students become more strong and flexible.

It is also vital that the marching member keeps their feet in track. The tendency is to move one foot out at an angle, to lessen the degree of the slide. This just causes more difficulties however, with drifting and taking curved paths to drill sets. When marching in a slide, be sure to point the toes and heels of the moving foot in the same direction – the direction of travel.

Slides both standing still and on the move can be seen below:

Standing Still

On the Move