

Fundamentals for Guard Basics

If you want a strong color guard, you have to train. That's it. It's that simple. Yes, as an instructor, there are many responsibilities that you have, but, if you want a strong group of performers, you have to train.

Training really starts back in May, not band camp. At the end of each school year, you should be planning your summer rehearsals. It is important to let your students experience a summer vacation away from school, but you need to see them once a week or every other for technical training. This will allow you time to work fundamentals and also familiarize the new students with your teaching style; it also helps the group get connected with each other a little earlier than band camp. These rehearsals do not need to be long, about 4 hours should suffice. This might be a good guideline to follow:

- Hour 1 -Warm and stretch the body for half an hour.
-Dance technique for half an hour.
- Hour 2 - "Across the floors" and dance combo for 50 minutes.
-10 minute break.
- Hour 3 -Flag technique/training for half an hour.
-Flag combo for half an hour.
- Hour 4 -Weapon technique/training for half an hour.
-Weapon combo for half an hour.

Once you enter your regular season, a consistent technique regiment must exist. Within your allotted amount of rehearsal, you have to balance technique and training time with the rehearsal time of your current show. This should be relative to the time you rehearse, but can't suffer due to shortened rehearsals. For example, in a 3 hour rehearsal block, you may want to run dance for 20 minutes and equipment for 20 minutes. In a 4 hour block, you may want to run dance and equipment for 30 minutes. 20 minutes should be about the minimum that you train or warm-up. Once the season gets underway, it is probably not necessary to warm-up for more than an hour to an hour and a half.

When taking extended breaks, i.e. lunch and dinner, you should consider re-warming the muscles with light exercises. This will increase the mental and muscle memory of the performers.

This is not the only way to rehearse, but can prove to be an efficient guideline for your ensemble(s).

When approaching the training aspect of your program, technique is the ultimate question that needs a solution. When you are focusing on dance technique, it is a little clearer than equipment technique dependent on which idiom you choose to dance. When you are focusing on equipment technique, there is a lot more room for interpretation, as there has been no decision to make one way more correct than another throughout the color guard world. Thus there is virtually an infinite amount of ways to apply technique.

Your training program should have exercises that can be directly applied to the choreography that the students might encounter. But this isn't always possible due to the abundant supply of potential choreography, so you may not always have a tool...you will learn to be creative through experience. When creating an exercise regime, there are 3 main themes to keep in mind, flexibility, muscular control and timing. If there are other stylistic elements to your choreography, then you should find ways to apply them as well. This is a really important part of the process, as the performers can make mental and physical references when learning new choreography.

Having a well defined technical program really proves to be beneficial when it comes time to clean choreography. Cleaning a specific moment in space is one thing. Cleaning the ensemble to approach a phrase with the same time, space and energy, is another. This is an element that far too many guards lack and truly too important to overlook.

By focusing on technique, whether it's over the summer, in August or preparing for the winter season, you are sure to make your program successful from a performer standpoint. Preparing the right technique program will take a lot of time, effort, planning and of course, patience.

