

Top Ten Competition Tips for New Performers: Marching Band Color Guard

Your first competition is coming up and the excitement is setting in, along with maybe a few questions and a case of nerves! Don't worry! Competitions will probably become one of your favorite parts of being a color guard performer. They can be nerve-wracking, but nothing is more fun than getting to perform the show you've worked so hard to learn in front of an audience that is there *specifically* because they love to watch marching bands! This article discusses some important information you need to know along with tips for successful performance at competitions!

1. Know Your Routines!

The number one piece of advice that anyone can give you is to make sure you are prepared on competition day. Make sure you know the routines inside and out! The better you know your routines, the more confident you will feel. You will also be more likely to remember them and perform them well when you get nervous (and even the most experienced performers still get nervous!). Nerves can make it really difficult to remember routines, especially when you haven't practiced them enough. Don't take that chance! Try performing your routines in front of parents and friends to get used to having an audience and to make sure you can still remember when someone else is watching!

2. Get Plenty of Rest and Eat Healthy!

As with any physical activity, it is very important that you get plenty of rest the night before and make sure to eat healthy both the day before and the day of the competition. Eat a healthy breakfast, drink lots of water throughout the morning and avoid high sugar snacks which ZAP your energy shortly after you eat them! Early in the season (depending on where you live), competition days can be warm and that can be exaggerated if your team wears uniforms that were designed for cooler weather (like long-sleeves, long pants or even velvet and wool material). It is imperative that you prepare yourself for the physical challenges of competition day and that you pack healthy snacks and lots of water. Trying to perform on an empty stomach or too little sleep can lead to injury or worse! No one wants to risk passing out or vomiting due to dehydration or lack of sleep! If you plan ahead and take care of yourself you'll have no trouble at all!

3. Don't Leave Anything Behind!

This tip is simple! Make sure to check, double-check and triple-check that you have everything you need and that it goes with you on either the bus or equipment trailer. Don't ask other people to help you load your equipment. The best way to make sure your things make it on the bus is to put them there yourself. Be sure to unzip your equipment AND uniform bag to make sure that all of the equipment you think is there is, in fact, inside. Even if you're sure – check again. Nothing is worse than getting to a competition and realizing you don't have your equipment or a piece of your uniform! Use the checklist below as a starting point – or make your own checklist and use it every time you have a performance!

1. *Equipment*
2. *Uniform*
3. *Gloves*
4. *Shoes*
5. *Socks*
6. *Hairpiece*
7. *Supplies to fix your hair*
8. *Make-up*
9. *NO JEWELRY (take it off at home so it doesn't get lost)*
10. *Money for souvenirs and concessions*
11. *Change of clothes for after performance*
12. *Band t-shirt (if you have one)*
13. *Jacket*
14. *Lunch/Healthy snacks, if needed*

4. Be Prepared to Change in Public

It is not uncommon at competitions for groups to have little or no space to change into uniforms. Often bands are forced to dress in the parking lot or on the buses – which means changing clothes in public. Talk with your staff about whether this might be a possibility. If so, come prepared! Purchase a leotard or a tank and biker shorts for underneath your uniform and wear it under your clothes for the day so that you can change into your uniform without any unwanted attention!

5. Make a Good First Impression

Before you even begin spinning on competition day you are making an impression on those people around you: judges, spectators, and your competitors. You want your first impression to be a good one so that people WANT to see your performance! Keep in mind that the minute you step off the bus your competitors are watching and the minute you step into the stadium, the judges are watching.

Be on your best behaviors at all times. Make sure to represent your school in a mature and responsible way. Pay close attention to your instructors and captains.

If you have to set flags before the show starts remember that the judges and audience are watching you even though the show hasn't quite started. Carry yourself calmly and with poise as you run to set your flags. Make sure all of your flags are laid down properly, facing the right direction and with the fabric stripped so that they are hidden as much as possible. While you are standing in your opening set waiting for the show to start, stand still. Don't move or wiggle and definitely don't talk. These first impressions can make a huge difference in how both the audience AND the judges remember your show.

6. Keep Focused during Warm-Up

At each competition your band will usually have a short period of time to warm-up in a designated area. This time is usually between 15 – 20 minutes long (depending on which competition you attend) so it needs to be a focused and efficient time to prepare you to perform your show. Each coaching staff handles the warm-up time differently, however, warm-ups are usually done standing still (you probably won't have the opportunity to march your drill during warm-up). You may get a few minutes to do some of your fundamentals and work through difficult or important sections of your show in rehearsal block. It is important that you are focused on your show and your instructional staff during this time. Try to avoid letting yourself be distracted by the other groups walking around. During warm-up, spin as if you are performing (which you really should be doing each time you practice...but especially now!) and remember that people are watching you warm-up and getting their first impressions of your group right now. When you are marching to the stadium and entering the field use proper marching technique and carry yourself in a manner that shows you are proud of your group.

7. Don't Be Afraid of the Judges

Being judged at a competition can seem like a scary thing. But it is actually part of what makes competitions so much fun! The judges are there to help you. They are there to let you know what parts of your performance are working really well and to tell you areas where you could make improvements. If you look forward to the judges comments and handle them in a constructive manner then by the end of the season you will be able to create the best performance possible.

Despite that, looking up and seeing a judge can be a little unnerving! Every competition is different. At some competitions the judges all sit in the stands. At other competitions you will have some judges up in the stands watching while

other judges (called field judges) will walk around the field, sometimes even onto the field between band members, in order to get a better view. The field judges are usually judging things like percussion, individual marching technique or individual music performance. In most cases, the color guard judge is up in the stands where he or she can have the best view of the entire group. Occasionally, a field judge gets in the way of a drill move and gets run into by a band member or flag. If this happens you just keep going. The judge knows that it is his or her responsibility to watch carefully and avoid getting in the way so you don't have to worry that they will hold it against you if you accidentally run into one. You just keep going and recover as quickly as possible. However, it is appropriate, if you see an accident about to happen – to avoid hitting a judge if at all possible. After all! You wouldn't want to hurt someone on purpose!

The judges usually talk into tape recorders throughout your performance. While distracting, this is the most important part of judging for your instructional staff. They will get the tapes after the competition ends and be able to hear all of the suggestions made by the judges in order to make your show better. Try not to let yourself get distracted if you hear one of the field judges speaking into their tape recorder. And don't be surprised if you see the occasional judge moving their arms or pointing as they talk into their tape recorder. It's all to help you improve your show!

8. Enjoy Your Performance & Do Not be Afraid of Mistakes

Obviously, the most important part of your first competition will be making sure you have the best performance you can for that point in the season. This doesn't mean you will be perfect, especially early in the season. Even the most experienced performers make mistakes. So don't be afraid of making a mistake. Instead, focus on preparing yourself for a good performance by practicing your routines until you know them inside and out. When you rehearse, make sure you also practice like you are performing every time. This will help you to train your muscles and help you stand up nice and tall, chin up, and looking confident. Finally, when you do get to that competition field, relax! Rely on your training to pull you through. Focus. Make sure to set all of your flags in the right spot. Look up at the judges' box. And if you make a mistake just recover as quickly as possible and keep going! Mistakes are never a big deal unless you make them a big deal!

Most of all...HAVE FUN! This is what you've been working for!

9. Practice Good Sportsmanship and Say Thank You!

One of the most important parts of any competitive activity, whether that's sports, color guard or even academics, is to ALWAYS practice good sportsmanship. It's good to always keep in mind how hard you have worked to get to where you are and that most of your competitors have also been working just as hard, putting in just as many hours. Everyone wants to do their best. Smile and wish your competitors good luck. Cheer the other teams on in the stands. Remember how great it feels when people applaud your performance? You can do that for others! You can make them feel great and they will do the same in return. Most of all, remember that there is never any good time for negative commentary in the stands. If you see something you don't like, keep it to yourself. Even if you think there's no one around to hear you, think again. You never know whose grandmother, brother or friend is sitting just a few rows away. Not only would poor sportsmanship make them feel terrible it would also be a terrible representation of your group. So, always practice good sportsmanship and never say anything negative about another group at a competition.

You also need to remember that while you have put in a lot of work to get to this point, there are parents, staff and volunteers who have put in many hours as well. Without these people the show would never come together on competition day. Take a moment to say, "Thank You" to the volunteers for all the hard work they are doing for you! Seeing your smile and appreciation makes it all worthwhile for them!

10. Understanding the Awards Ceremony

Each competition has a slightly different manner of conducting their awards ceremony. Some have full band retreats where the entire band stands on the field while awards are presented. Most, however, have what is called a "Drum Major's Retreat," where the drum majors from each band stand to represent the unit while the rest of the membership cheer them on in the stands. Often, the guard captains, percussion captains or other student leaders will join the drum major. This is usually left up to the discretion of the band director. As the awards are read, the drum major of the band receiving an award will step forward from the line when the school's name is called and usually give some sort of salute to the audience and judges before accepting the award. Awards are given for band placement. Bands may also be recognized for other outstanding parts of their performance. These additional awards may (but do not always) include a special award for drum major, percussion and color guard. Many competitions use the term "auxiliary" in place of "color guard" to account for the fact that the non-instrumental performers may also include baton twirlers or dancers who do not

spin traditional color guard equipment. So, if you hear “Best Auxiliary” that is the award for color guard! Some competitions will also give awards for other more specific areas such as best brass section, best woodwind section, best marching, etc. Award ceremonies can be very fun.

Remember to support your student leaders who are representing you by clapping and cheering for your school no matter what place you end up in. And always remember good sportsmanship! Exhibit gracefulness and pride in both good finishes and disappointing ones. Offer applause and congratulations to all of the teams that do well. Remember, they have been working just as hard as you have and be happy for them in their achievement.

Keep in mind that even if your group is not recognized with an award, it does not mean that you didn't do a good job. Trophies are a fun comparison by the team of judges based on their evaluation of the performances that day. But, more important is your own evaluation of both your performance AND your progress. Your goal should be to make your own performance and thus, your show, better each time you perform it. If you can say that you improved or that your group improved, then, trophy or no trophy, you are a success.

Most of all, don't worry! Your first competition can cause a case of nerves and it may seem like there is just too much to remember! But, in no time you'll be a pro and you'll be handing out advice to the rookies who come after you! The chance to perform your show for an audience that loves marching band and to get to see other entertaining and sometimes amazing shows is sure to become one of your favorite parts of being in the marching band!