

What Can I Expect From a Marching Band Competition?

How do we get to the competition (show)?

All marching band members and chaperones will travel to and from each show on the bus. Parents and fans must provide their own transportation. Directions will be made available during the week prior to each show.

Do we need tickets for the show?

Marching Band members get in free, but there is an admission fee of for spectators that varies from show to show. Tickets can be purchased at the gate. Bands of America (B.O.A.) tickets can be purchased in advance from their website at www.musicforall.org.

What is a typical show like?

Shows usually begin with the smallest bands and end with the largest bands. Each band has approximately 15 minutes to set up, perform and clean up the field. You may see judges walking around on the field during the show, watching and listening for particular elements. There are also judges in the announcer's booth (press box), who watch for the overall effect of the performance. The stadium will be filled with fans and the performing bands, while areas around the parking lots and athletic fields will be filled with bands warming up. It can be fun to walk around and listen to the groups warming up. It is also nice to support the other performers by watching them from the stands.

How do we get the best seats?

The best seats are as close to the 50 yard line and as high up in the stands as possible. Naturally, these are the first to go. If you want to have the best seats, arrive before the show begins and stake out your spot. Wear your LWE gear and look for other LWE fans so everyone can sit together. This is a great opportunity to see other bands perform and support their hard work. There are some very talented marching bands in our area and it can be a real treat to see them perform. If you don't care about seating, your other option is to arrive late at the show just to watch the Marching Griffins and/or the bands after us.

Is there any special etiquette to being a marching band fan?

Yes! Here are a few things to remember:

1. Please do not enter or exit the stands while a band is performing. If you need to enter or exit, do so while the band is setting up their equipment or exiting the field.
2. Show your support by applauding and cheering all the students, regardless of school. All of the students have worked hard and are excited to perform for an audience that appreciates what they do. Please refrain from making any disparaging remarks about other schools, students, or performances. This seems obvious, but you'd be surprised how even the most well-intentioned people can get caught up in the heat of competition and make hurtful remarks! These kinds of comments can reflect negatively on the entire LWE music program.
3. Noisemakers at a marching band competition are discouraged. They may distract the performers and could even affect a band's score if the judge is unable to hear the music. Cheering and applause are fine during a performance and may be especially appropriate after a solo or when the band or color guard achieves a particularly striking effect.
4. Please do not talk during performances. Turn cell phones to a silent setting. You would be upset if you missed your child's performance because the people sitting nearby were chatting, answering cell phones or otherwise making distracting noises. Please be respectful of others' desire to see their child perform. Hopefully they will be respectful of you, too!
5. Keep in mind that marching band is about putting forth your best performance. It is not about beating another band, winning a trophy or getting a certain score. It's ok to be excited if the band improves their score or wins a certain award; but ultimately we hope the students feel a sense of accomplishment that comes from a great performance, not from a trophy.

I see my child in the parking lot before the show. Is this a good time to say hello?

Sorry, but no. Students have specific instructions about what to do when they arrive at the show, and your arrival may put them into conflict with those instructions. It puts the students in an awkward position if their instructor is telling them one thing and then their parent arrives and distracts them. The staff asks that you respect the following guidelines:

1. Please do not try to talk to your child until after the performance unless you have a very serious situation that absolutely cannot wait. If this is the case, please approach the director or staff person first so that they can help you to work through this situation with your child.
2. Don't worry too much about finding your child after the performance. They usually have an uncanny ability to find you when they need money for the concession stand! If you wear your LWE gear and sit with other LWE fans, it will make it even easier for them to find you.
3. The best thing you can do before the show is find a seat and cheer!

What happens at the end of the show?

After the last performance, the drum majors from each band will line up on the field. Scores and awards will be presented.

The bus just got back to school. Why can't my child leave yet?

Students are responsible for unloading and properly storing all equipment, even if they do not personally use it. If we work together this process won't take long and everyone can go home.

How are the bands scored?

Each contest has its own approved scoring system, but in general the judges are looking for proficiency in music, visual, and overall effect. Judges are assigned to critique Individual Music performance, Ensemble Music Performance, Individual Visual Performance, Ensemble Visual Performance, Overall Effect of Music, and Overall Effect of Visual. Within each of these categories, judges are assessing the show design, musical composition, difficulty level, quality of technique, musicianship, and how effectively the performers portray the show concept through their playing, movement and guard work. The best shows are those that are both challenging and well performed. The overall score adds up to 100 points total.

Is it better to perform an easy show perfectly or a difficult show pretty well?

Different contests have different philosophies about this. What you actually do correctly will earn more credit than something that you attempt but fail to achieve. So in theory, an easy, clean show would be scored higher than a difficult, dirty show. However, the bands that achieve very difficult skills will earn more points than bands that achieve easy ones. So by the end of the year, when all the bands have had time to clean and perfect their shows, you will start to see that the groups with more difficult music, drill, and guard work are rising to the top of the standings over the groups with easier shows. (Keep in mind it's a subjective activity, so there is some gray area here!)

Why don't they give credit for attempting difficult skills even if they aren't done perfectly?

Many times they do give credit, but they can't give full credit to something that is imperfectly performed. The job of the staff is to design a show that is both challenging and achievable for their students. The closer they are to achieving it perfectly, the more credit they will receive. It does happen sometimes that a band will be out there trying to perform work that is just too difficult for them.

What are caption awards?

The host has the option of presenting awards to the best performers in various categories (called captions), such as best music or visual performance, best color guard, best percussion, etc. The performances of the color guard, percussion section, drum major and other captions affect the overall visual and musical scores, but there are also separate judges who look at these areas completely apart from the overall band's performance. The scores given by these judges are used to decide who wins a caption award and may not factor into the band's overall score.

I thought the students did a great job. Why wasn't their score higher?

The students probably did do a great job. The most important thing is that they feel good about their performance and know that they did their best. The judges are professionally trained to look for specific skills that an untrained spectator may not even notice. Tiny discrepancies in marching technique, difficulty level and musical proficiency can make a big difference in score, but might be totally unnoticed by the fans. Judging is fairly subjective, too. Sometimes a judge may simply prefer a different style. Please remember that the most important thing is that our students push themselves to reach their highest potential.

Why do Percussion and Color Guard sometimes receive separate scores?

The entire percussion section and color guard are extremely important. On its own, the wind section can achieve some wonderful musical and visual moments, but adding percussion and color guard helps to push these moments to the maximum. Percussion and color guard do factor into the overall scores. They may also receive separate scores because the skills associated with these sections are specialized and different from what the rest of the band is doing.