

# How to March with *The Beat Goes On Marching Band*

TBGO isn't exactly a precision marching power, but we do aim to look respectable on the street (that is, when we're not goofing around with someone in the crowd!). Why?

1. Band pride. We like to look like we know what we're doing!
2. Getting invited to exciting new places. Looking good entices people to invite us to their events. Even when we invite ourselves, we want the video on our website to look good!
3. Most important: We ask parade organizers to pay us for our performance. They are our customers, and we owe them a band that looks good, sounds good, and brings something special to their event.

We can have fun on the street (that's our calling card!) and still look professional. Here's what we're aiming for.

## Pay Attention!

If we don't pay attention during a parade and correct mistakes continuously, nothing in this document will make us look better.

**TAKEAWAY: Learn what you SHOULD be doing and check/correct things regularly!**

## March in Rhythm

Marching in rhythm means that one of your feet should hit the ground on each beat of the music or drum cadence – not during some random interval between beats, but RIGHT ON each beat. The result will be that we look a lot more like a marching band and a lot less like a centipede. **Getting this right is one of the biggest things we can do to improve our look on the street.**

As a side bonus, marching in rhythm makes it much easier to keep the music from “tearing” since everyone has the same tempo and the same idea of where each beat lands – just watch the feet all around you! Even if you're not explicitly watching the feet you'll see them in your peripheral vision, making it much easier to know where the beat is.

**TAKEAWAY: ONE OF YOUR FEET SHOULD HIT THE GROUND ON EVERY BEAT.**

## March in Step

Wait – didn't we just cover this in the previous section? Well, no. Suppose you're marching along in rhythm, with a foot coming down on each beat ... but your RIGHT foot comes down when everybody else's LEFT foot comes down. Hey – you're out of step!

In TBGO we step off with the LEFT foot, and your left foot should strike the ground on beat 1 of each measure.<sup>1</sup> For music in 4/4 time (our most common case), that means your LEFT foot strikes the ground on beats 1 and 3, and your RIGHT foot strikes the ground on beats 2 and 4. For music in 2/4 or 2/2 (cut) time, your LEFT foot hits on beat 1 and your RIGHT foot hits on beat 2.

Drum Line: The 4 clicks to start a cadence (and the cadence itself) should always start on the LEFT foot. If a tune finishes up on the first beat of a measure, let beats 2, 3, and 4 be silent (which will work fine because we're all marching in rhythm), then click to restart the cadence on the next beat 1.

Marching in step will help us look more like a coherent marching unit, although frankly it's less important than having us all march in rhythm. If we're out of rhythm, we look (and are) just sloppy. If a couple of people are out of step, we still look like we know what we're doing (and in fact it's easy to get back in step by "skipping" a step; ask any of our seasoned marchers if you don't know how).

**TAKEAWAY: YOUR LEFT FOOT HITS THE GROUND ON BEAT ONE OF EACH MEASURE.**

## Aligning Ranks

When marching in a straight line (i.e., not in a turn), TBGO uses a "guide right" technique for keeping ranks straight: you keep your shoulder even with the shoulder of the person to your RIGHT. If everyone does that – voilà, it's a straight rank! Generally, you can do this using your peripheral vision so that you don't have to turn and look (although it's fine if you do).

But wait – how do you stay in line with the person to your left? Answer: That's not your job, it's his/her job (whew!). Remember, your left-hand neighbor is responsible for staying aligned with the person to his/her right and that person is ... you!

If we're doing this correctly, the only people in your rank that you should be able to see are to your immediate left and immediate right. If you can see other people in your rank, either you or they are too far forward or too far back (i.e., out of line).

So far, so good. But what about the person at the far righthand end of the rank? Who does THAT person stay in line with? Answer: Nobody. But THAT person's job is to correctly set the distance between his rank and the rank in front of him.<sup>2</sup> That distance should be about 2 to 2½ yards, or roughly 3 to 4 marching steps.

So in summary: The right end of the rank sets the distance to the rank immediately ahead, and everyone else guides right to keep the rank aligned. This means we should ensure that an EXPERIENCED MARCHER WHO WILL PAY ATTENTION THROUGHOUT THE PARADE is at the right end of each rank.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not totally accurate if we're marching with music that's in 3/4 or in 5/4; in this case, your left foot hits the ground on beat 1 of every OTHER measure. But how often do we do that?!!!!

<sup>2</sup> Sorry, just too awkward to keep the "his/her" thing going throughout!

TBGO is not a military band or drum and bugle corps, so it's unlikely that our rank alignment will be perfect. But we can pay enough attention so that we at least look MOSTLY aligned – and that'll really improve our appearance on the street.

**TAKEAWAYS: GUIDE RIGHT – ALIGN YOUR SHOULDER WITH THE SHOULDER OF THE PERSON TO YOUR RIGHT. THE RIGHT HAND GUIDE SHOULD STAY 2 TO 2½ YARDS (3-4 STEPS) BEHIND THE RANK IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF HIM.**

## Aligning Columns

When marching in a straight line (i.e., not in a turn), it's straightforward to keep the columns aligned: just stay directly behind the person in front of you. Ta-da!

Each of our units (twirlers, dancers, band block, color guard) may use different left-right spacing on the street, which means that the columns of the unit A may or may not be directly aligned behind the columns of unit B.

The first rank of each unit is responsible for setting left-right spacing of its unit. The center person in the rank will generally be on the centerline of the street; the remaining members of the rank should spread out to cover as much street as is practical given the width of the street and the number of people in the rank. This often means that the band block is WIDER than the twirlers or the dancers since there are more people per rank. We draw energy from the crowd, so it's always better to have the outsides of the band be reasonably close to the crowd if possible.

During most of a parade, column alignment is somewhat less important than rank alignment because the audience sees ranks, not columns. However, it's good to pay special attention to column alignment in TV areas since those overhead TV cameras look right down the columns.

**TAKEAWAYS: STAY DIRECTLY BEHIND THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU. THE FIRST RANK OF EACH UNIT SETS THE LEFT-RIGHT SPACING ON THE STREET FOR THAT UNIT.**

## Tempo, Parade Speed, and Length of Stride

Standard marching tempo is "Stars and Stripes Forever tempo", about 120 beats per minute (bpm), or two steps per second. TBGO parade music is chosen to sound good in a range of 116-128 bpm, so on average we move down the street at a pretty standard marching tempo – at least until we get tired! It's important to focus on MAINTAINING A TEMPO OF 120 BPM on the street.

How do we fix it if we happen to slow down? One of things the Director can do is use the whistles right before a roll-off to reset the tempo (typically by speeding it up). Please LISTEN to the tempo being set by the whistles that start a roll-off. Drums, use that tempo for the roll-off and then band: DON'T SLOW DOWN!

It's also important to take the right size steps so that we keep moving forward and don't fall behind; if our feet keep moving at 120 bpm but we take little-bitty-tiny steps, then we fall behind and gaps open in the parade. As you may have noticed, parade organizers don't take kindly to that!

So how big should a step be? Well, let's do some math.<sup>3</sup> Parades target an average speed of two miles per hour, or  $2 * 5,280 = 11,560$  feet per hour. We march at 120 bpm, or  $60 * 120 = 7,200$  beats per hour. So to cover 2 miles, each step needs to be  $11,560 / 7,200 = 1.605$  feet = 19.25 inches. On average, we need to move forward a little more than 19 inches with each step in order to keep up with the speed of the parade. In practice, we should take a slightly larger stride to account for parade stoppages and pace cars that drive a little too fast. If you remember your old high school marching days on a football field, the standard was 8 steps to 5 yards, which equates to 22.5 inches per step, so our parade stride should remind you of "the good old days". "Marching 8 to 5" is a good way to practice your stride length so that we keep moving down the street.

If our parade stride is 20-22.5", then 4 steps is 80-90", which is (son of a gun!) about 2 to 2½ yards. So if we were keeping a reasonable stride, our ranks will be about 4 steps apart. This gives the rank guides another way to tell if they are setting correct spacing: Watch where the right foot of the rank guide in front of you comes down, then see if you get there in about 4 steps.

It's in your best interest to keep up a standard stride and tempo throughout the parade. It's especially important to focus on MAINTAINING A CONSISTENT STRIDE LENGTH WHILE WE ARE PLAYING. It's tempting to take smaller steps while we're playing a tune, but that means sooner or later we'll have to start running to catch up and nobody wants that!

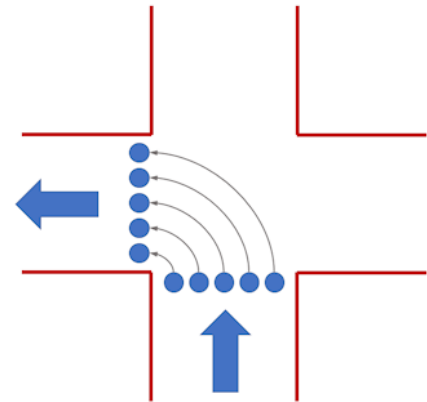
**TAKEAWAY: PARADE TEMPO is 120 BPM. EACH STEP SHOULD COVER 20-22 INCHES SO THAT WE KEEP UP WITH THE PARADE. DON'T SLOW DOWN OR TAKE SMALLER STEPS WHILE PLAYING TUNES!**

## Turning Corners

TBGO uses gate turn corners, probably the simplest technique available: when we get to a corner, the entire rank swings around it like a big garden gate as shown in the diagram at right. Simple, right? And yet ... we always want to make it harder than it is.

Here are some do's and don'ts for marching around corners:

- DO keep your rank in a straight line at a 90 degree angle to the street until you reach the corner. DON'T let the people on the outside of the turn creep ahead of the rest of the rank before reaching the corner. In the diagram, notice that everyone in the rank reaches the corner simultaneously (in a straight rank).
- DO swing smoothly around the turn as a unit once you reach the corner (i.e., when your whole rank has reached the place where the next street begins). DON'T change the left-right distance between the people in your rank as you go around a corner; the people on the outside of the turn DO NOT drift further to the outside of the turn. It should be like there's a steel bar welded across the entire rank that swings like a gate around the corner. The left-right distance between people in the rank stays exactly the same.
- DO change the way you align your column as you go around a corner. Each column follows an imaginary quarter-circle (arrows on the diagram) as it goes around the corner. Visualize that



<sup>3</sup> I know, it's scary. But it'll be over soon.

circle and follow it. One implication is that the distance between you and the person in front of you CHANGES as you go around a corner. If you're on the INSIDE of the turn, you get CLOSER to the person in front of you (in fact, you'll be VERY close). If you're on the OUTSIDE of the turn, you get FARTHER AWAY.

- The person on the inside of a turn takes (much) smaller steps than usual, the person on the outside takes (much) bigger steps than usual (he has farther to travel).
- In a turn, GUIDE to the person on the INSIDE of the turn; that person has the least work to do, so we make him responsible for keeping everyone aligned. (Practically speaking, what usually happens is that the innermost and outermost people watch each other to stay aligned and everyone else swings around at the same rate they do.)
- All the members of your rank should complete the quarter-circle of the turn at the same time and then step off together down the street in the new direction.
- If the band stalls in the middle of a corner (because the parade has momentarily stopped), DON'T change anything about left-right or front-back spacing while we wait for the parade to restart. It's just fine to have part of the band on the original street, part of the band on the new street, and a "curved" part of the band still in the middle of the turn. Be patient, stay where you are, and finish the corner normally when the parade gets going again.

Want more visual aids? Both the Rehearsal page and the Rehearsal Music page have links to another tutorial on how to turn corners, complete with diagrams and an animated GIF showing a full turn.

**TAKEAWAYS: DON'T START THE TURN UNTIL YOUR ENTIRE RANK REACHES THE CORNER, THEN START THE TURN TOGETHER. DON'T CHANGE LEFT-RIGHT DISTANCE IN A TURN (DON'T DRIFT TO THE OUTSIDE OF THE TURN). GUIDE TO THE INSIDE WHILE MAKING THE TURN. IF THE BAND STOPS PART WAY THROUGH A TURN, DON'T CHANGE SPACING; JUST WAIT AND FINISH THE TURN NORMALLY WHEN THE BAND STARTS MOVING AGAIN.**

## Preventing Gaps

Everyone in the band is responsible for helping the band move forward smartly at all times. If one row falls behind, then they have to hustle to catch up ... and so do ALL the rows behind them.

Our first line of defense is ... our front banner carriers. This is the first unit in the band, and their job is to keep a consistent distance from the parade unit in front of TBGO. Unless the Director tells them otherwise, the banner carriers should NOT slow down to stay with the band; their job is to keep up with the unit in front of TBGO, and then the rest of the band must keep up with the banner carriers.

If despite our best efforts a gap begins to open up, here are some ways we can help ourselves:

- Take larger steps, especially when we aren't playing. It's a lot easier to go faster when we're just marching instead of marching and playing.
- Don't let the tempo drag when we start to play. (It's not unusual for a roll-off to happen at a faster tempo and then have the band immediately slow down.) Pay close attention to the whistles that start a roll-off since the Director may use those whistles to raise a sluggish tempo.

- The Director may use the TBGO Cadence (*"The beat goes on, the beat goes on"*) as a way to help catch up; this cadence takes the least energy from everyone so we can focus on moving down the street quickly.
- In rare circumstances when the parade speed is faster than normal, the Director may instruct the banner carriers to allow a gap to open. However, we STILL want to keep moving at standard pace to minimize the gap as much as possible.

**TAKEAWAYS: USE THE TIME WHEN WE AREN'T PLAYING TO TAKE BIGGER STEPS AND MOVE FASTER. DON'T SLOW DOWN WHEN WE START A TUNE. PAY ATTENTION TO TEMPO CHANGES WHEN WE WHISTLE FOR ROLL-OFFS.**

## Miscellaneous

1. It's quite often necessary to turn a corner while we are in the staging area and preparing to hit the parade route. These corners work exactly like corners on the parade route. In particular, don't ooze out into the street and realign with the new direction if we are stopped halfway through a corner. Just wait in place and complete the turn normally.
2. TBGO likes to hit the street and exit the street playing music and entertaining the crowd. The Director typically wants to whistle the first roll-off as soon as our first rank exits the staging area and hits the beginning of the parade route. In most cases that first rank may be as much as 30 yards ahead of the beginning of the band block, which means we need to be PREPARED as we near the end of the staging area. In the last 100 yards of the staging area, keep your rank together and CLOSER THAN USUAL to the rank in front of you. We should also "go to clicks" in the drum section to get everyone synchronized as we near the corner and prepare for our first roll-off. This will help prevent the band from "accordioning" as we step onto the parade route at full speed and allows us to sound good from our opening notes. Spacing can be adjusted to normal as we move onto the route.

## Coda

As noted earlier, it's unlikely that TBGO will ever become known for the precision and beauty of its marching. Our "thing" is entertaining the crowd, and we do that well. However, we can have a great time and still look good with just a little extra attention. Let's have our cake and eat it too!!!