

Audience Etiquette

author: SI Staffer [Scott Leatherland](#)

In the years I have been involved in marching band as a participant and as a spectator, I have seen an evolution take place. The shows have become more complex, many bands have become competitive, whereas only a few were 15 or 20 years ago and the support for the activity is beginning to rival football and basketball.

One thing that hasn't evolved, though, is how people behave at contests. It is important to realize that although it is fun to socialize with friends and family during a contest, it is rather rude to make a lot of noise during any performance including marching band performances. To put this in perspective, you wouldn't normally openly discuss what kind of week you had with a friend at a theater during a movie. Marching band contests are no different. Granted, the venues are generally outside, but the sound of voices tends to travel pretty far in the fall air and it is disruptive to someone who may want to hear a particular performance. I am not saying that you shouldn't talk at all during a performance. If you wish to socialize, please sit next to each other and talk quietly; however, you might be surprised what you are missing if you paid attention to the performance on the field.

Something else you should avoid is any unnecessary movement during performances. This includes, getting up to run to the refreshment stand or the restroom during a performance. There is time for that in between every performance and each show is only about 8 minutes long.

Most of us have been guilty of being inconsiderate to the performing bands and other spectators (myself included). Because of this I have outlined a few things you should and shouldn't do at marching band contests...

Do

Support all bands. If a rival band is on the field, applaud -- even cheer when they do a good job. I know many people think that acknowledgment of a good show by applause dramatically increases General Effect scores, it doesn't. It may encourage the band to perform better, but wouldn't you rather see a great performance than be bored to tears with a flat show?

Observe the whole show. By this I mean watch different elements. Your interest may be percussion, but you might be surprised with the rifle work the guard is doing, too. Often several things are going on at once in a given performance and you may watch the same show several times and see something new on each occasion.

Respect others. All of the kids on the field have put a lot of time and effort into what you see on a Saturday afternoon. Please be courteous and applaud at the end of solos, major drill moves and at the end of musical selections. Also, don't be afraid to tell a band member that they did a nice job, even if you don't know them. You would be surprised how good it makes someone feel if they are told that you liked their show.

Show up early. This is especially true for supporters of larger bands. Many small bands have great shows! Arrive early at the next show and see what you have been missing!

Don't

Don't Get wrapped up in the term "competition." For what it is worth, most band members call contests "shows," because that is what they are. Scores are pretty arbitrary and can vary quite a bit from show to show. The bottom line is that everyone in every band is literally trying to perform to the best of their ability and each ensemble has something to offer the spectator. Everyone loves to win, but if the main purpose of a band becomes winning every show, they are missing the point. (I'm sure that a lot of people will disagree with me on this).

Don't Make negative comments about other bands. For instance, if you don't like a particular band's uniform, be happy in the fact that you don't have to wear it and move on with your life. I have sat in the audience at many shows and listened to people make derogatory comments about other bands for years. If you have nothing nice to say, please be quiet.

Don't Obstruct the view of others. Please avoid standing in front of people trying to watch the show. If you have a banner you wish to display, please do so from the top of the stands or in some other fashion that doesn't block the field of vision of the other spectators.

Don't Boo other bands or the judges' results during the awards presentation. I am sure you have been at shows where you did not agree with the results, but unfortunately, those things happen from time to time.