

Hey all,

Shirlee Whitcomb (former Education Director for WGI and presently the Director of Color guard Development) has been sending out to the WGI directors a series of emails to help get everyone prepared for the coming season. These emails cover a variety of topics, but they are all great materials I hope you'll review.

We'll put these materials on the MCCGA website so you can reference students, parents, and additional staff there as well. Even if the email does not at first glance seem to pertain to you or your situation, please take a moment to read through it. Within Shirlee's words lies more wisdom and understanding of winter guard than most of us will ever begin to know.

As always, if you should have any questions regarding any of these emails or what is in them, please feel free to check in with me. I'm always happy to get into philosophical discussions or just help define what she is saying here.

This first email is geared towards training and development of your guard program from "downstairs" (equipment and movement). Please note that while she discusses the A, Open, and World classes, the same principles are applicable to Regional A, B, & C as well as our Scholastic B & C classes. The narrative before and after the class specific descriptors is particularly useful for all classes and levels.

The one point of additional emphasis I want to impart to you on this subject is that achievement is paramount in the downstairs captions (in particular). Train your students to achieve the skills you want to design into your program. If they can not achieve the skills, then it will be difficult for the judges to reward the skills. This DOES NOT mean you have to write an "easy" show. It simply means that every skill you choose to design should be supported by a training program that will allow the students to achieve the skills in the show.

Thanks for your continued support and I hope your fall season is going well! Best of luck and let me know if I can help in any way. Travel safely,

Chris

Training – Vocabulary & Expression

In an ideal world where you have tons of time, money and rehearsal space (LOL) you would provide your students with a full conditioning of their bodies. Let's begin by clarifying the difference between training and warm ups. Training teaches and heightens the body to handle responsibilities beyond the normal pedestrian type of movement and establishes the techniques needed to achieve the vocabulary. Warm up gets the blood moving, the muscles responding and SHOULD reinforce technique. It is never as effective unless the TRAINING has established those techniques.

Realistically, most groups only have the time to teach their students those "task specific" techniques that will be an integral part of their show. Don't forget that the body WILL have a direct bearing on the efficiency of the equipment and the ability of the performers to project those qualities that inspire "communication" with the audience and the judges.

VOCABULARY BY CLASS

Several years ago we printed a vocabulary list that typified each class. Not wanting to limit groups, it was removed from the Manual. However, I honestly think it might be helpful to reacquaint ourselves with those models. Everybody has a few students who can do those isolated high-level tricks/moves and that levels the playing field in that regard. However, the balance of the guard (if in the proper class) will be typical of those skills shown below. While you should ALWAYS create your vocabulary based on the students' skills, this might serve to bring us to a common ground and help you in proper classification as well as achievement of your goals.

For Younger Class A guards, Basic Equipment Vocabulary will include:

- Spins
- Tosses
- Carving/extensions
- Beginning multi-planal work
- Some layering on movement
- Expressive Dynamic efforts mostly involving time & weight

Basic Movement Vocabulary will include:

- Traveling (walking, running)
- Simple jumps, hops, leaps
- Single dance turns
- Simple moves into the ground
- Postural and gestural shaping
- Basic drill/staging responsibilities
- Dynamic effort qualities mostly involving time and weight
- Some movement or shaping layered with Equipment
- Use of isolated body parts

As your students grow and you're A guard is more experienced, you will introduce them to some intermediate skills moving to the point where they prepare for Open Class. These skills will include:

- Layering & longer phrases
- Broader range of expressive dynamics
- Broader drill/staging responsibilities
- Larger kinetic space
- More variety in releases & catches
- More variety in travel, jumps, turns, etc.

THE OPEN CLASS VOCABULARY – As you move into the Open class, your students should be capable of doing not only those moves above, but also new ones. The Intermediate Equipment Vocabulary will include (in addition to Basic moves)

- Variations of Spins
- Tosses - more variety
- Carving/extensions - longer phrases
- Some hand to hand and hand changes
- Moderate multi-planal work
- A good level of layering on movement
- Some work from different parts of the equipment.
- Expressive dynamic efforts - a fuller range
- Broader range of tempo/meter/rhythm
- Some ambidexterity
- Longer phrasing in general

Intermediate Movement Vocabulary will include (in addition to Basic moves):

- Traveling (variations in speed, and traveling moves)
- Jumps, jump turns, grand jetes
- Varied turns, chaines, piques
- Varied moves into the ground
- Balance moves - turns on 1 leg, attitudes
- Postural and gestural shaping
- Moderate drill/staging responsibilities
- Broader understanding of dynamic efforts
- Movement/shaping layered with equipment
- Larger kinetic range

As your students advance toward that move to World Class, it is common to see the following:

- Greater layering & longer phrases
- Broader understanding of expressive dynamics
- Broader drill/staging responsibilities
- Some weight sharing (partnering)
- More tempo/meter/rhythm challenge

So, once you've established the vocabulary, you are now ready to train and establish the techniques for these specific tasks.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE EXPRESSIVE EFFORT QUALITIES?

Obviously you write your vocabulary to the music which will guide you in terms of speed, phrase length, punctuated moments, time signatures and such things as density and weight. Notice that they include several of the expressive efforts you hear judges reference (space, time, weight, flow) and hopefully this will help to dispel the question of just how and why you should teach those qualities. If you take care in how you illustrate those qualities within the music, you will have a head start toward knowing what to reinforce expressively.

OK, so some of you are no doubt asking why we just don't call that part of your vocabulary musicality. Here's the answer, we don't want the judges to be focusing on interpretive choices because that's subjective. We do want them to see and credit those expressive efforts as the important components they are. My reference to music, is ONLY to give you an easy reference tool toward understanding, teaching and reinforcing those qualities. ABOVE ALL ELSE, teach your kids to BREATHE!!!! Absence of breath constricts all movement.