

## **Clarifying Expectations: The Band Handbook and Syllabus**

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This article is intended for new directors who are creating their first handbook, but I hope anyone who reads this can find some ideas that will help them look at their handbook with new eyes.

Honestly, August is not the usual time that I work on the Band Handbook, but if you are a new teacher, it is important that you have this in order before you meet your students for the first time. When I am not moving to a new job, I usually take care of handbook stuff before I leave for the summer. No matter your assignment, Middle or High school, I believe it is important to have a handbook. First and foremost, it is important to understand why you are writing a handbook and the purpose of the document. For me, it is more a set of guidelines that support my belief system and the philosophical basis for how I will run things, rather than “rules and regulations,” even though they are in there, too. No matter the grade level, these are the opening lines of my band handbook:

Each member of the Band Program will:

1. conduct themselves like ladies and gentlemen.
2. perform like outstanding musicians.
3. behave like exceptional citizens.

As I tell students parents the remaining pages just explaining those three statements.

If you are coming into a program for the first year, I would encourage you to leave as much in place as possible, especially if the program you are entering had some success. If you can live with something for even a year, try to do it. If you can't do not be afraid to change it as long as you can explain why it adds to the success of the group to change it.

### **Thou Shalt or Thou Shalt Not**

When organizing or writing a handbook, I strongly encourage you to write it in the “Thou Shalt” format. Expectations are more appealing and digestible for students and parents when written in a positive voice instead of a negative. For example, “Students may only perform with the band with their hair in a “natural” hair color,” is a little easier to accept than, “Students may not dye their hair a rainbow color.” It is easy for me to explain to my principal why a uniform look is important in the band performance tradition and how each student's individual look contributes to that impression, but it's hard to explain why I won't allow students with blue hair perform with the band. For me, this is important. I want students to express themselves and be who they are as much as possible, but when we perform as a group WE are the focus. If blue hair doesn't bother you – this something not even needed to address in your handbook.

One more example of trying to express expectation in a positive manner, Excused Absences. Attendance is THE place where expectations should be spelled out clearly. This is how I address excused absences:

Excused Absences:

- a) Students and parents should check dates immediately upon notification to determine if there is a conflict with a previously scheduled event.
- b) The student should immediately provide the director with an Excused Absence Form explaining the conflict and requesting an excused absence.
- c) In case of last minute illness or family emergency, the director should be notified through parental contact (telephone, email, or note) in advance of the activity if possible. In any case, the student should provide the director with an excused absence form and/or documentation from a physician or law enforcement immediately upon his/her return to school.
- d) In order for a student's absence to be excused, the director must be apprised of the conflict using an ABSENCE FORM – NOT EMAIL. The director will make the ultimate decision as to whether an absence is excused or unexcused.

I understand that some reading this may have an opinion regarding the harshness or leniency of this policy. I get that, but that's not my point. The point is the expectations are explained, clear, and done in a “Thou Shalt” voice. The other

BIG PIECE of this is, I can only have this in my handbook if my principal will support the policy. This deserves repeating: **CRAFT A HANDBOOK THAT YOUR PRINCIPAL WILL SUPPORT!** You may have to negotiate some specifics, but it is worth it when you need the support. There are few things more debilitating to your professional clout than not being able to enforce handbook policies.

### **Handbook or Syllabus**

I have been asked to edit countless handbooks that have too much specific grading information. A handbook is a handbook and syllabus is a syllabus. Think about it this way, the handbook is a guide for your program and the syllabus is a guide for the grade book. There are several places in my handbook where it will say, "See syllabus for grading information." For me, depending on the grade level or class, the attendance grade differs. I have seen handbooks get too long and cumbersome because they get bogged down in grading policies. A syllabus is important and in most schools required. Like in the band handbook, specific and positive is the key to having a document that works.

### **Blood Oath**

OK, the handbook nor syllabus are a "blood oath," but they are an AGREEMENT between parent, student, administration, and director that this is how the program and the classroom will be run for the year. I certainly keep the approval email from my principal and have parents and students sign a "Handbook Agreement Form" and sign and return the syllabus (all remain available online). On these forms the statement reads, "I understand that these policies are in place for the school year." It does not say that "I agree." They don't have to agree, that is not up for debate. Everyone involved is stating that they understand that this is how WE ALL will function for the year.

When I say "WE" I include myself in that statement. If something happens, as it usually does, or someone finds a loop hole in the handbook, which does not happen as frequently anymore, I make a note on the hard copy I keep on my desk and change it **NEXT YEAR**. I have seen directors quickly lose the respect of their students and parents and support of their principal for not wanting to honor their own handbooks. I could probably go through my handbook line by line and tell you "the incident" that lead to that policy. Developing a program requires developing trust. That cannot happen if students/parents think that the handbook or syllabus is only for them and not for everyone involved.

### **Steal from the best**

This is the second section of my handbook no matter the grade level:

#### **Acknowledgments**

A debt of gratitude is paid to superior band directors and their students across the state of Florida for contributing ideas and information that lead to the compilation of this handbook. The Band Program is grateful for the leadership these directors have shown through their outstanding musicianship, moral character, and contributions to their profession.

Over 29 years, I have edited, added, and deleted so many things that it's hard for me to say what is my work and what is the work of others, but I did not recreate the wheel when writing my handbook. Especially in my early years of teaching, I stole from the best, always with permission, and integrated their policies and procedures in my own voice. Syllabi have changed more over the years because classroom expectations have changed to a greater degree. I would recommend asking directors of the most successful programs you know to look at their handbook. I would ask them for their syllabus as well. In addition, I would recommend you ask another arts teacher for his/her syllabus and an advanced level Language Arts or Science teacher on your campus for his/her syllabus. That should give you some good information for developing something that works for you, your students, and your principal.

### **Nuts and Bolts**

In my opinion, there should be an induction session done on this annually at Summer conference. The Handbook and Syllabus are very important documents that help the director clarify his/her own expectations and ideals as well as expressing those ideals and policies to stakeholders. This topic is too big to write about in this format, but I will gladly share my handbooks and syllabi with you. Ask your mentor for help with these documents, they are important and large documents, and you may need help getting started. To get you going right away, here are the topics that I cover in each. This should be enough to get you going and a place to start healthy conversations with other directors in your district. I will gladly share what you are interested in having. Let me know if you want MS or HS documents. [kc.crocco@gmail.com](mailto:kc.crocco@gmail.com)

The handbook outlines below will help you see how much more is needed for a high school band than middle school band. (look at the page numbers) Should I travel out of the district with my middle school band, I will hand out information about travel expectations with the trip permission forms. For traveling to an MPA in our school district, I reiterate county policies that our already outlined in the school's code of conduct.

The syllabus below is a middle school syllabus. Pending principal approval, this is probably the one I will use this year. I may or may not parcel them out for each class. I'll wait to chat with my supervising administrator on that. Think about conserving paper when preparing documents for approval and print. Even though it's still printing one syllabus for each student, an administrator is more likely to really read ONE syllabus than three. A high school syllabus would not look too much different. I would probably make the percentages different for my most advanced group, less emphasis on things that they are expected to do, such as coming to class prepared and participating, and more weight on performances and testing.

### HANDBOOK OUTLINES

<b><u>High School Handbook</u></b>	<b><u>Middle School Handbook</u></b>
<u>Content</u>	<u>Content</u>
<u>Page</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	Introduction
<u>Acknowledgments</u>	Acknowledgments
<u>Mission Statement</u>	Mission Statement
<u>Objectives</u>	Objectives
<u>Electronic Communication</u>	Electronic Communication
<u>Electronic Video / Web-Sharing</u>	Electronic Video / Web-Sharing
I. Program Description	I. Program Descriptions
A. Classroom Instruction	A. Classroom Instruction
B. Performing Bands	B. Performing Bands
C. Grading	C. Grading
II. Participation Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each class will receive a syllabus and a grading policy during the first week of instruction. <i>(really, this is all it says under grading)</i></li> </ul>
A. Academic Requirements	II. PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS
B. Laboratory Assignments/Rehearsals	III. ATTENDANCE
C. Necessary Equipment	A. Excused
III. Attendance	B. Unexcused
A. Excused	IV. Rehearsals and Performances
B. Unexcused	V. BAND UNIFORM
IV. Rehearsals and Performances	A. General Uniform Guidelines:
V. Code of Conduct	B. Casual Band Uniform
A. Citations	C. Concert Attire
B. Merits/Demerits	Appendices:
VI. School Equipment and Facilities	P.E. Waiver
VII. Uniforms and Student Attire	Handbook Agreement
A. General Appearance Guidelines	In-County Travel Permission Form
B. Marching Uniform	All Forms can be found at <a href="http://www.band.com/forms/">http://www.band.com/forms/</a>
C. Concert Uniform	
VIII. Student Leadership	
IX. Awards	
X. Travel	
XI. Marching Band	
Appendices:	
Appendix A Handbook Verification Form	
Appendix B Trip Permission Form	
Appendix C Medical Release Form	
Appendix D Financial Obligation Form	
All Forms can be found at <a href="http://www.band.com/forms/">http://www.band.com/forms/</a>	

**Course Syllabus**  
**BEGINNING/ INTERMEDIATE/ ADVANCED BANDS**

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**Daily Requirements:**

**Preparation:**

1. Students must have the following materials with them in class on a daily basis:
  - PENCIL
  - Book and music
  - All accessories necessary for playing their instrument  
(i.e. reeds, mouthpiece, valve oil, slide grease, key oil, cork grease, sticks, etc.)
2. Students must come to class prepared to learn, and prepared for the day's rehearsal.
3. Refer to the Band Handbook for further details

**Participation and Behavior:**

1. Students are to follow verbal and written directions as given.
2. Students are to treat themselves, other students, the teacher, and facilities with respect and caring.
3. Students must only be in band areas as designated by the director.
4. Students are to raise his/her hand to participate in class discussion and to get the teacher's attention
5. Student's must sign in and out to use the restroom
6. All Book Bags and Back Packs are to be left in the designated areas
7. All instruments are to be label with the student's name, grade and band period.
8. No eating or drinking in the band room
9. Refer to the Band Handbook for further details

**Discipline Policy:**

Students that do not comply with the behavioral guidelines of the class will receive:

**First Offense:** A verbal warning

**Second Offense:** Time Out (In Class)

**Third Offense:** Time Out (Out of Class) and Call home

**Fourth Offense:** Removal from class/Possible Discipline Referral and Call Home

**Severe Behavior: Immediate Removal and Discipline Referral**

**Terminal Gum Policy:** Because of the instruments and carpeting, gum chewing or food is not tolerated in the Band room. Students get one warning for chewing gum or having personal food in the band room. **The warning is accompanied by a parent phone call and habitual offenders will be treated as openly defiant**

**Grading:**

	<b>BEG.</b>	<b>INT.</b>	<b>ADV.</b>
Homework	30%	30%	25%
Classwork/Daily Preparation and Participation	30%	25%	25%
Quizzes	20%	25%	25%
Rehearsals/Performances/Tests	20%	20%	25%

I have read and understand the course expectations and grading policies:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**DO NOT DETACH - PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY AUGUST 24, 2017**