



The Mississippi Community Symphonic Band

www.mcsb.us

SECTION LEADER GUIDELINES

These *Section Leader Guidelines* are furnished to help section leaders in the MCSB understand how they can do the most to help the band operate smoothly.

One of the great strengths of the MCSB is the many, many people who step up to the plate and take on a portion of the load of getting all the things done needed for the band to thrive. One of the most important of these tasks is *communication*, and that is the section leaders' primary duty. That duty and others are outlined in these *Guidelines*.

1. **APPOINTMENT and DEMIT OF SECTION LEADERS.** Section leaders are appointed by the music director. The office of section leader is not a name-only position, it is a working position, as are all the other offices in the band.

Section leaders are not always the best player or musician in the section. Section leaders are selected because of their dedication to the band, their availability to devote time to the band, their demonstrated judgement in making decisions, and their willingness to do whatever is needed for the section and for the band. Section leaders are people who will attend almost all rehearsals and concerts.

Demit. If someone is selected as a section leader, and later discovers they have pressing family or work commitments that prevent them from dedicating as much time to this job as they would like or as the job needs, they may either step down from the position or be asked to help find a new section leader. If this happens, it **IS NOT** a reflection on the dedication or competency of the outgoing section leader, it is merely an acknowledgement that we all have other priorities that sometimes get in the way. We understand this, accept it, and reinforce our philosophy of "People First, Music Second," which means we understand that sometimes these things come up. No negative reflections at all on the outgoing section leader. We are pleased to have had your service.

2. **MAINTAIN SECTION ROSTER.** You are expected to establish and maintain a current list of each person in your section, including their phone numbers, email address, and mailing address.

You should probably get in touch with each person in your section by phone or email AT

LEAST once per concert, just to ensure the means for staying in touch is still valid.

You should also keep a prominent list of any in your section who do not have (or do not use) email, and make it a point to contact them by phone when necessary.

3. **COMMUNICATIONS.** As section leader, you are the first line of communication between the music director and the members, and between the Board and the members.

It is the music director's belief that **COMMUNICATIONS** is the number one most important thing we all do, and is the number one most important thing for you to do as a section leader. By communicating, you will stay in touch with their people, learn their concerns, complaints, and gripes, learn what they like and want more of, and will keep them informed on even the trivial things that are going on with the band. You never know when something that seems trivial to you is going to be vitally important to someone else. You will also need to use your judgement to determine when to tell things about your members (usually concerns) to the Music Director, for further consideration or action.

When there are last minute updates or schedule changes, you will need to make sure that everyone in your section gets the word. This might mean some phone calls, or even a telephone tree for larger sections. It will definitely mean phone calls to those members of your section who do not have or use email.

You are responsible for checking your own email several times a week – it's preferable to check it daily, and informing your section members of anything they need to know about.

4. **UPDATING THE MUSIC DIRECTOR.** Whenever you receive a change of address, email address, phone number, any data on any of the members of your section, please be sure the Music Director has the updates for the master list.

Eventually, we will have our entire roster in an online secure database, but until then, we'll just have to keep each other up to date.

Concert Attendance Update. One of your duties is to furnish the Music Director a list of names of people in your section who will be playing in the next concert, not later than one month prior to the concert. If our next concert is December 17, then get this list to the director NLT November 17. The reason for this is so we can have an updated list of band members to print in our program for that concert.

5. **KNOWING YOUR SECTION.** As a section leader, you are expected to know who is in your section: the active players, the inactive players, and the potential players. Know their abilities musically, their abilities outside of music, and how much time and willingness they have to help with other aspects of running the band. Please ask the Music Director if you're not sure you have the latest list of people in your section.

Please see the item on **Personal Interest** (below) for more on this.

6. **SOLO ASSIGNMENTS.** As section leader, it is one of your duties to assign solos, when they occur. There are several things to consider here. We operate under the philosophy “People first, music second,” which means we should spread the solos around. You need to always keep your finger on the pulse of your section, and *know* (ask frequently) who in your section wants to take a turn on the solos. Then you must match up the musical abilities of the volunteers with the technical requirements of the solos. Let them know that if they want a particular solo, they should let you know right away.

Sometimes, a person will ask to tackle a solo that’s beyond their technical ability, and it will be *your* responsibility to make the judgement call – can they learn it and improve sufficiently in time for the concert? It’s your call.

This may require that you work with your section librarian, and possibly the music director, to find and examine these solos ahead of the first rehearsal, so you’ll be ready to make an assignment when the piece comes up.

You should also listen carefully to how well the soloist is playing. If it seems they are having a difficult time with a solo, then you might ask if the soloist would prefer someone else to play it (if you have a more competent person), or see about getting the solo re-written so it is a bit less demanding.

7. **SEATING and PART ASSIGNMENTS.** This is a community band, and as such, seating is not nearly the issue it is in a school band. We are not competitive here – we are cooperative. Most of the time, we will get a good balance in each section just by asking each person what part they prefer to play.

Part Assignments. We all know that everyone can’t play first part all the time, and at times we may want to implement a rotating first section policy, where when you have more people that want to play first than can logically fit in the section, you figure out a system where you can rotate the players. Some systems that have worked include rotating by concert, and rotating by individual titles within a concert. However, if you rotate by titles within a concert, then you might be creating a nightmare for your section music librarian. Please keep that in mind.

In any case, you should make it a policy to ask each person in your section several times a year what part they prefer playing.

Seating. Except for solo assignments, we don’t really have seating. Practically speaking, as a community band, there is no such thing as “First Chair” in any section. Generally, we find that people just naturally sit in the chairs they judge best for themselves. Bottom line, we advise you just let seating evolve naturally, and only step in if there’s a problem. But we should also stay aware that there will always be the “First Chair concept” held over from bands where it was a status thing, so factor that into your figuring as you make any decisions you need to make. *However*, this will be your decision. Just keep the music director informed of what method you will use.

8. **MUSICAL IMPROVEMENTS.** It has become apparent that the vast majority of MCSB members want to be better musicians, that we all want our concerts to be of the best musical quality we can make them. Consequently, as section leader, you may wish to call occasional sectional rehearsals.

It might be good to establish a policy of having at least one sectional rehearsal per concert, where you work on specific passages needed for the concert. It might also be good to coordinate with the music director on which parts need the most rehearsal, and how best to rehearse them.

Many of the individual members of your section will also practice their instruments at home. As a section leader, you might want to consider pointing out things that will help them when they do practice. It might be a good idea to work with the music director and/or a professional instructor (of which there are many in the band) to determine these things.

9. **MAINTAINING THE SECTION MUSIC LIBRARY.** This is not *necessarily* the duty of the section leader, but sometimes the section leader is also the section music librarian. If you are *not* the section music librarian, it is your job to know who your section librarian is, and to make sure the section librarian has enough help, and isn't getting burned out.

If you are the section leader *and* the section librarian, feel free to recruit help. If you are not the section librarian, ask your librarian if he or she needs help, and recruit someone to help if needed. Many hands make light work.

10. **PERSONAL INTEREST.** You should take at least a bit of personal interest in every member of your section. Know something about their families, their interests outside of band, what kind of work they do or did, and whether they or some loved one has any health issues to be concerned about.

Some members would prefer to be private or reclusive, and that's fine, that's their choice. But most people appreciate it when we take an interest in them. Here are some ways in which you might demonstrate this interest.

Talk to them. Before band, during break, or after rehearsal, seek out someone you don't know well yet, and just ask how they're doing. If you're at a loss for what to say, use "F.O.R.M." – Family, Occupation, Recreation, Message. Ask about their **family**, spouse, kids, parents, interests. Ask about their **occupation**, what they do for a living, how well they like it, would they do it again if they had it to do over. Ask what they do for fun (**recreation**) outside of band, do they like golf, what movies, books, etc. The **message** is, of course, anything to do with MCSB. Ask how they like the music selections, what do they think we could do better, how can we increase our audience size, that sort of thing. Even if you talk to only one person a week, you'll be amazed what you can learn about your people.

Also, talk to other people in the band, outside your section. We have some wonderful,

delightful people, and it's fun to get to know them.

Learn of Special Dates. Learn their birthday and make a big deal of it. If a child is getting married or graduating, that's a big deal also. Maybe get someone in your section to get them a card and pass it around for everyone to sign. You can do this either for just the section or for the whole band to sign.

In certain events, such as a hospital stay or funeral, it might not be a bad idea to take up a collection for flowers or other sort of gift.

Laud accomplishments. You should make it a point to find out something wonderful about one of your people at least once or twice a year, and then stand up in band some night and share it with everyone and lead a round of applause. For example, last year (2005) Marvin Milner's band won highest awards at contest. This was worthy of recognition.

11. **SECTION SPIRIT, BAND SPIRIT.** There are many things you can do to foster section spirit and band spirit, and we encourage all – well, almost all – of them. Feel free to be creative (with good judgement) and do things that help everyone have fun and join in the spirit and camaraderie of the group.

Some things that might come to mind when doing this might include such things as suggesting and working at social events, such as a party, picnic, banquet, or potluck; special hats for everyone in the section, saying "KAZOOS RULE!" (sub-stitute your own instrument); vests or sleeve garters for the band; a section cheer; everyone showing up wearing Groucho Marx nose and glasses (I did this at an AF staff meeting once); instigating a come-as-you-are party some weekend.

As you can see, being a section leader IS work. But it should also be fun, and it ought to help everyone in your section and in the band have a better experience.

A section leader is a LEADER, and a leader is someone who's willing to jump in and do what needs doing for the good of the group being led.

Just keep in mind our governing philosophy, "People First, Music Second," and do whatever needs doing to help our people have fun and make good music.

Please note, this document is labeled **GUIDELINES** (not RULES), because we want it to be a guidance document for how to be an effective section leader, not a set of strictures or other draconian regulations. It is always open to interpretation and modification. Use your best judgement.