

Everything You Need to Know About Lining a Football Field for Marching Band

Written by Brendan Maltese

Lining a football field is a time-consuming, tedious, and easy-to-mess-up process. This is a detailed description of how to accurately line a field, with lots of tips to help avoid the most common errors. Carefully following these instructions should yield a full field in 2-3 hours for beginners, but plan for it to take longer in the likely case that something goes wrong. Murphy's Law is in full effect.

Please note that these instructions are written for an NCAA (college) football field. If you are lining a high school field, read the notes at the bottom before proceeding.

Materials needed:

- One box of inverted spray paint
- Measuring tape: 300+ feet (some extra length will prolong the life of the roll)
- Measuring tape: 150+ feet (some extra length will prolong the life of the roll)
- Roll of string: 300+ feet (some extra length will prolong the life of the roll)
- 3-5 people to make the skeleton, multiple teams of 3-5 for the innards
- Cell phones or walkie talkies for communication
- Field striper (optional. Some paint companies will give you one for free with a large purchase of paint.)
- Ample time and patience

General rules to always follow:

- Choose one person to be in charge. This person confirms anything before it is done. This will reduce major errors.
- Make sure everyone understands what is going on before starting.
- NEVER spray paint unless you're sure it's in the right place.
- NEVER "eye it up" if there's a way to measure and check something.
- When determining if a line is straight, bring your eyes as close to the ground as possible, and stand further back from the line.
- "Measure twice, spray once": Two minutes to double check a measurement could save you an hour of corrections.
- "Eyes on the prize": When spraying without a striper, look at least ten feet in front of you instead of straight down at the line. Hold the can to your side and lean your head over the line. Don't hold it between your legs and waddle.
- Always speak in terms of feet and inches, not yards.
- Always paint over the string. Never paint over the measuring tape, unless you plan on buying a new one.
- When straightening measuring tape or string, have one person anchor an end down, while another person does the straightening. Straightening from two ends will get you nowhere.
- When anchoring the measuring tape, make sure the 0-foot mark is in the right place. Most tapes have a device to anchor a stake through them. Also, hold enough pressure to not allow the line to slip.
- Make sure you look at the correct side of the tape. Some tapes have the metric system on the reverse side. Others use feet, but divide it into tenths instead of inches.

Anatomy of the field (*memorize these numbers*):

- End zone to end zone: 300 feet
- Front sideline to back sideline: 160 feet
- Front sideline to front hash: 60 feet
- Front hash to back hash: 40 feet
- Back hash to back sideline: 60 feet
- Yardline to yardline: 15 feet
- Four-step tick to four-step tick: 7.5 feet

Procedure:

Planning

1. Find a space where the field will fit.
2. Take into consideration things such as the placement of the sun, leaving room for the pit/DM podium/scaffolding, etc.
3. Review the entire procedure and general rules from above with everyone involved.

Skeleton

Part 1: Front sideline and 50 yardline

4. Measure out 300 feet where you want the front sideline. Lay down 300 feet of string parallel to the measuring tape. Take your time making sure that this line is perfectly straight. Spray the front sideline.
5. Starting from 0 feet and going all the way to 300 feet, put a mark every 15 feet for each yardline. Label the 150-foot mark as the 50 yardline.
6. Anchor the 0-foot mark on the mark for the 45 yardline. Anchor the 100-foot mark on the opposite 45 yardline.
7. Holding the 50-foot mark, walk down where the 50 yardline should be until you have created a triangle with the front sideline. Pull both sides tight, and spray a dot at the point of the triangle. This dot is perfectly perpendicular to the front sideline at the 50 yardline.
8. Anchor the 0-foot mark on the front sideline at the 50 yardline. Measure out 160 feet to the back sideline, passing through the dot sprayed in step 6. This may be tricky to line up, since the dot will be hard to see from the back sideline. Have someone stand near the dot to give directions, but *do not* anchor on the dot.
9. Starting at 0 feet, spray a small mark every 7.5 feet for the four-step ticks. Spray a bigger mark at the 60-foot, 100-foot, and 160-foot marks for the front hash, back hash, and back sideline. Spray an X at the 80-foot mark for the center X if your group uses it. Note: the front hash is the only mark that will line up with a four-step tick.
10. Replace the measuring tape with the string, and paint the 50 yardline.

Part 2: Back sideline and end zones

11. Anchor the 150-foot mark on the back sideline at the 50 yardline. With the other measuring tape, anchor the 0-foot mark on the front sideline at either of the goal lines.
12. Meet the 0-foot mark of the back sideline tape with the 160-foot mark of the other tape at the corner of the back sideline and goal line. Pull them tight and make a mark.
13. Spray a mark every 15 feet along the back sideline. On the other tape, spray the same markings found in step 9.
14. Repeat steps 11-13 on the opposite side of the field.

Part 3: Check your work

15. Measure the distance between the two marks for the back corners. For a field that you will be using for a long time, do not tolerate more than a couple of inches away from 300 feet. Anything more than 8 inches means you probably did something wrong in either step 4, 8, or 11-13.
16. Replace the tape with the string and paint the back sideline. The skeleton is now complete.

Innards

Part 1: Yardlines

17. If you have more than one string and 6 or more people, you can now split up into teams to work from opposite ends.
18. With the string, connect the front sideline to the back sideline to create the end zone. Double check to make sure you're connecting the correct marks! Spray the line.
19. Repeat for the remaining yardlines

Part 2: Hash Marks and Ticks

20. Use the string to connect the ticks from step 9. Do only half of the field at a time, since it's significantly easier to straighten 150 feet of string than 300 feet. Spray ticks and hash marks on all of the yardlines.
21. Repeat step 20 all the way to the back sideline. Then repeat it again for the other half of the field.

Addendum for high school hashes

High school football puts the hash marks wider apart than college football. If you are lining a field for high school use, mark your hashes in step 9 at 53'4" and 106'8". The center X remains at 80 feet.

This change in distance adds an additional 4 steps plus 10 inches. If you wish to mark ticks every 4 steps, you must compensate for the extra 10 inches by spacing them slightly further apart. Step 9 should read as follows for high school fields:

9. Starting at 0 feet, put a mark at each of the following measurements. Use larger marks at the front and back hashes. If desired, the center X is at 80 feet.
 - 0 feet (front sideline)
 - 7 feet 7 inches
 - 15 feet 3 inches
 - 22 feet 10 inches
 - 30 feet 6 inches
 - 38 feet 1 inch
 - 45 feet 9 inches
 - 53 feet 4 inches (front hash)
 - 60 feet 11 inches
 - 68 feet 7 inches
 - 76 feet 2 inches
 - 83 feet 10 inches
 - 91 feet 5 inches
 - 99 feet 1 inch
 - 106 feet 8 inches (back hash)
 - 114 feet 3 inches
 - 121 feet 11 inches
 - 129 feet 6 inches
 - 137 feet 2 inches
 - 144 feet 9 inches
 - 152 feet 5 inches
 - 160 feet (back sideline)