

Beyond Beethoven: Less-Obvious Skills that Colleges Look For in Piano Majors

Dr. Kevin Olson

Utah State University

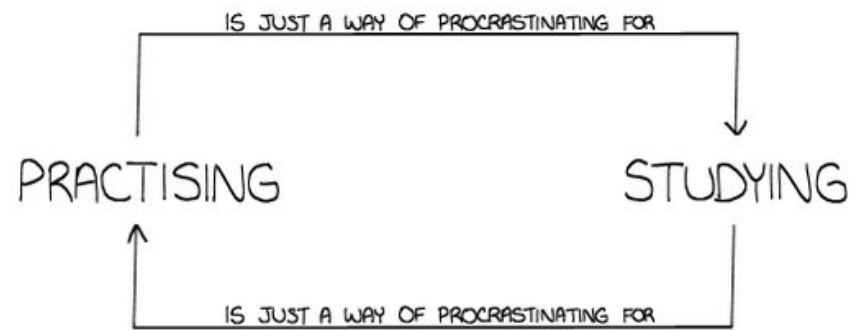
What Students Imagine Majoring in Piano Will Be Like



What Majoring in Piano Is Really Like



LIFE OF A MUSIC MAJOR



[HTTP://EUGE.CA](http://EUGE.CA)

Euge Chen

What Majoring in Piano Is Really Like



Skills that USU Piano Majors Wish They Had Developed Earlier

- Theory and Analysis
- Practice Strategies
- Improvisation Skills
- Sight Reading
- Score Reading
- Harmonization
- Accompanying/
Collaborative Skills



Keyboard Skills I

Utah State University

Course Syllabus • Fall 2018

MUSC 3420-01

MWF, 1:30-2:45

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Objectives: This course is designed to assist pianists in the development of technical facility and musical fluency at the keyboard. Study will focus on five main areas that are typically not studied in detail in the traditional private lesson:

- Technique: Continued facility in diatonic scales and modes, arpeggios, triads, and seventh chords.
- Sight Reading: Familiarity of repertoire in a variety of styles and genres through the development of efficient sight reading techniques.
- Improvisation: Learning to harmonize, play by ear, transpose, arrange, and compose at the keyboard.
- Score Reading: Basic skills required of accompanists, composers, and conductors, including the ability to read various clefs and transpositions in vocal and instrumental scores.
- Figured Bass and Chord Symbols: Correctly realizing the ways composers have incorporated harmonic shorthand for keyboard players throughout music history.
- Repertoire: Assigned pieces designed to work on a specific technical or artistic focus

Theory & Analysis

The Wild Horseman No. 8 from Op. 68, "Album for the Young"

Robert Schumann

Handwritten musical score for 'The Wild Horseman' by Robert Schumann, measures 1-10. The score is in 6/8 time and features a treble and bass staff. The melody is in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The piece is marked with dynamics such as *mf* and *sf*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

More sheet music at:
www.gmajormusictheory.org



TheWild Horseman, page 2

Continuation of the musical score for 'The Wild Horseman' by Robert Schumann, measures 11-23. The score is in 6/8 time and features a treble and bass staff. The melody is in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The piece is marked with dynamics such as *sf* and *mf*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Practice Strategies

- Working on specific objectives
 - Use correct fingering
 - Play all pitches correctly
 - Play all rhythms correctly
 - Play all dynamics correctly
 - Play all articulation correctly
 - Play all of the above in one steady tempo
 - Play all of the above with complete accuracy
 - Soften the ends of all slurs
 - Use a wrist bounce on all staccatos
 - Shape each musical phrase with a crescendo and diminuendo
- Spaced Practice over “Binge” Practice
- Switching Between Tasks (Interleaved Practice)
- Memory Retrieval
- Score Study and Off-Piano Practice
- Slow Practice (Process & Outcome)
- Chaining
- Whole-Part Whole
- Self-Evaluation

Practice Strategies for Musicians Based on the Science of Learning

<http://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2017/3/28-1>

Research-Tested Practice Strategies That Will Help You Learn New Pieces Faster

<https://bulletproofmusician.com/research-tested-practice-strategies-that-will-help-you-learn-new-pieces-faster/>

Improvisation Skills

- Set aside time each day for creative exploration and improvisation (just like piano practice)
- Set up simple, risk-free guidelines for your creations (What mood? What key? What bass pattern? What time signature?)
- Emphasize your process rather than product (It doesn't have to be 100% amazing)
- Stay close to an audio or video recorder to archive (record or write down) your best ideas
- Look for opportunities to perform (or having someone else perform) your pieces

Improvisation Styles

- Happy Birthday to You (F Major, with C7 arpeggio introduction, octave RH melody with LH octave accompaniment)
- Any Hymn, Organ Style (Three-part RH chords, octave LH bass); original key and one other key
- Any Hymn (Intro, arpeggiated LH, once through in original key, modulation to a closely-related key, once more in new key, outro)
- The Scotsman (melody with LH accompaniment; once through in original key, modulating to a distant key, once more in new key)
- A medley of two different Christmas songs in two styles and two keys, with a modulating interlude in between

Improvisation Styles

- Arrangement of “Für Elise” in a different style, with one transposition
- Chord Progression Improv—choose a four-chord progression in any key, and play a series of improvisations over those chords until being asked to stop
- Pachelbel Canon—in any key, and play a series of improvisations over those chords until being asked to stop
- Improvise over a whole tone scale on a requested pedal tone in the style of Debussy
- Improvise in any of the following modes (Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian) on your chosen tonal center

Sight Reading



“Although __% of piano teachers polled rated sight-reading as the most important or a highly important skill, only __% of them said they address it systematically. Reasons cited were

_____. Teachers also often emphasize rehearsed reading and repertoire building for successful recitals and auditions to the detriment of sight-reading and other functional skills.”

Hardy, Dianne (May 1, 1998), ["Teaching Sight-Reading at the Piano: Methodology and Significance", *Piano Pedagogy Forum \(Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina School of Music\)* 1 \(2\).](#)

Sight Reading



“Although 86% of piano teachers polled rated sight-reading as the most important or a highly important skill, only 7% of them said they address it systematically. Reasons cited were

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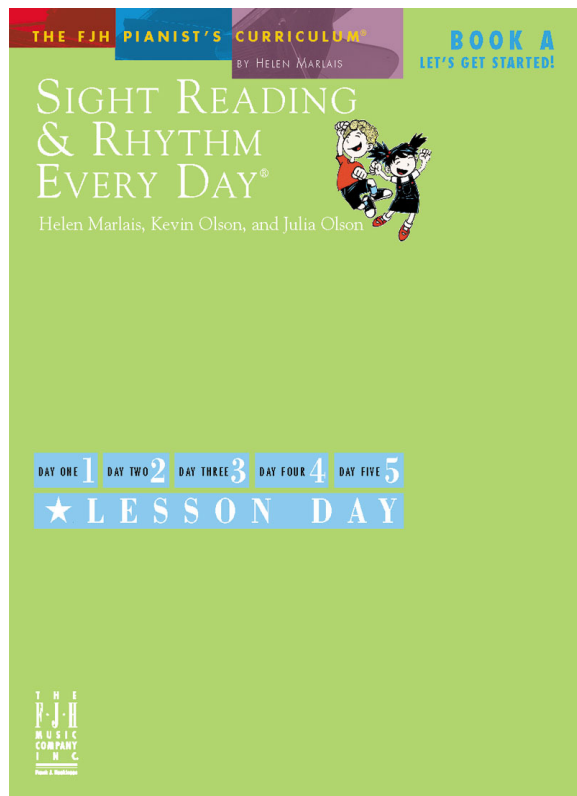
Sight Reading



“Although 86% of piano teachers polled rated sight-reading as the most important or a highly important skill, only 7% of them said they address it systematically. Reasons cited were a lack of knowledge of how to teach it, inadequacy of the training materials they use, and deficiency in their own sight-reading skills. Teachers also often emphasize rehearsed reading and repertoire building for successful recitals and auditions to the detriment of sight-reading and other functional skills.”

Hardy, Dianne (May 1, 1998), ["Teaching Sight-Reading at the Piano: Methodology and Significance"](#), *Piano Pedagogy Forum (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina School of Music) 1 (2)*.

Sight Reading & Rhythm Every Day[®], Starter Book A



DAY ONE

Unit 1 - At the Park
Guide Note Middle C with 2nds *4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4*

Rhythm—Clap and count aloud. Then speak the words in rhythm while you point to each note.

DID IT! ☐ Place a ✓ when you have been successful.

1. *4 4* Let's go to the park and stay there 'til it's dark.

2. *4 4* I will ride my bike. You can ride your trike.

Sight reading—Before playing, notice the 2nds below. Then notice the repeated notes.

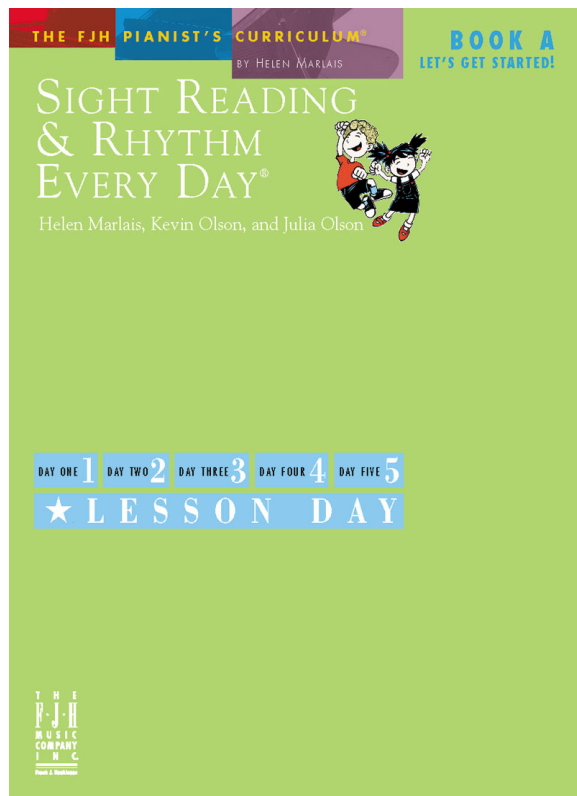
DID IT! ☐

1 2 Spin - ing, spin - ing, ver - y quick; now I think I'm feel - ing sick.

Slid - ing, slid - ing, down the slide; such a fun and bump - y ride.

1 2

Sight Reading & Rhythm Every Day[®], Starter Book A



★ LESSON DAY

Rhythm—Clap and count aloud. Then speak the words in rhythm while you point to each note.

1. Lit - tle bird in the tree, please can you sing to me?

2. La - zy sum - mer days, all I have to do is play.

Duet—Count aloud at the same time you play.

Through the Sprinklers

Student part

Teacher accompaniment (student plays one octave higher)

All Alone

Student part

Teacher accompaniment (student plays one octave higher)

After playing, ask yourself, "Did I keep my eyes on the music?"

Sight Reading & Rhythm Every Day[®], Book 8

HOW THE SERIES IS ORGANIZED



Each unit of the series is divided into five separate days of enjoyable rhythmic and sight-reading activities. Students complete these short daily activities “Every Day” at home, by themselves. Every day the words, “Did It!” are found in boxes for the student to check once they have completed both the rhythm and sight-reading activities.

The new concepts are identified in the upper right-hand corner of each unit. Once introduced, these concepts are continually reinforced through subsequent units.

★ LESSON DAY

On the lesson day, there are short rhythmic and sight-reading activities that will take only minutes for the teacher and student to do together. An enjoyable sight-reading duet wraps up each unit.

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Sight Reading & Rhythm Every Day[®], Book 8

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DAY ONE

Unit 1

New Concepts: simple hymn playing; triplets and eighth notes combined



Rhythm—Clap the following rhythm evenly, ♩ = 60. Count out loud to be sure of each beat.

DID IT! ☐

Place a ✓ when you have been successful!



Rhythm Flash!—Clap pattern #1 twice. Then close the book and try it again! When you can do it, do the same with pattern #2.

DID IT! ☐



Sight reading—Tap the rhythm, hands together. Then silently play this piece without looking down at your hands. Then play it at a steady tempo, listening for a more prominent right hand over the accompaniment.

DID IT! ☐



★ LESSON DAY

Ensemble Piece



DID IT! ☐

Practice the warm-up for the left hand. In this piece, notice that you will only play an accompaniment pattern as your teacher plays the melody.



Spanish Lament

Comfortably Dm

Gm/D

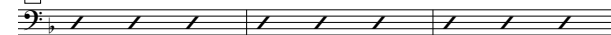
A/C#



Dm

Bb/D

Gm/D



A/C#

Dm

A/C#

Dm



Teacher accompaniment (student plays as written)

Comfortably



Score Reading

Unit 2: Haydn, String Quartet in Bb Major, Op. 20, No. 3, II

Quartet, Op. 20 No. 3: II

Menuetto Allegretto Franz Joseph Haydn

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Unit 3: Rachmaninoff, Vespers All Night Vigil Op 37 No 6; Bogoroditse Devo

Богородице Дево, радуйся

Всенощное бдение, Op. 37, No. 6

Сергей Рахманинов, 1915

$\text{♩} = 70$ Покойно, легко, очень нежно
Separated, easy, very gentle

Сопрано

Альт

Тенор

Бас

Бо-го-ро - ди-це Де - во, ра - дуй-ся, Бла-го - дат - на - я Ма -
Bo-go-ro - di-tse Dye - vo, ra - dui-sya, Bla-go - dat - na - ya Ma -

Harmonization

Units 1-5: Play without any marks on your page.

1. $\text{♩} = 76$.

6 6 4 3 8 6 5 4 7 6 6 5 3 7 8 7 5 3

2. $\text{♩} = 54$.

6 4 2 6 6 6 5 3 6 5 3 8 6 5

Unit 1: All of Me (1stx head, 2ndx embellished)

ALL OF ME

— SIMONE & HARRIS

A Cmaj7 E7 A7 D- E7 A- D7 D- G7

B Cmaj7 E7 A7 D- F F- Cmaj7 E-7 A7 D-7 G7 C6 (Eb) D-7 G7

FIVE

Accompanying/Collaborative Skills

- A positive attitude
- Ability to get along with most people and to develop working relationships with a wide cross-section of people
- Ability to play at a consistently high level
- Ability to learn music accurately and quickly
- Ability to read solo line(s) in addition to piano part
- Ability to sight-read at a level close to that of prepared material
- Ability to sing solo lines in addition to playing piano part

<https://collaborativepiano.blogspot.com/2005/11/required-and-preferred-skills-for.html>

Accompanying/Collaborative Skills

- Ability to read orchestral scores
- Ability to read figured bass
- Ability to transpose at sight
- Ability to follow a singer or instrumentalist
- Knowledge of basic repertoire
- Ability to adjust playing to the needs of individuals
- Ability to point out obvious mistakes, i.e. notes, rhythms, and entrances

<https://collaborativepiano.blogspot.com/2005/11/required-and-preferred-skills-for.html>

Learning Repertoire Holistically

- Theory and Analysis
- Practice Strategies
- Improvisation Skills
- Sight Reading
- Score Reading
- Harmonization
- Accompanying/
Collaborative Skills

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ARABIA

Alexandre Tansman
(1897-1986)

Andante (♩ = ca. 50)

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Arabia' by Alexandre Tansman, spanning measures 1 to 16. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a quarter note equal to approximately 50 beats per minute. The score is divided into four systems, each containing a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Measure numbers 1, 5, 9, and 13 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. Performance markings include 'p' (piano) at measures 1 and 5, 'pp' (pianissimo) at measure 8, 'più f' (più forte) at measure 9, 'mp' (mezzo-piano) at measure 13, and 'f' (forte) at measure 16. The notation features various musical elements such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.