

How to Teach Sight-Reading in Private Lessons

Breaking Down Sight-Reading to Lesson-Sized Pieces

Nov 22, 2009 [Amy Schumaker](#)

Research has shown how good sight-readers are successful, but how should we be teaching these skills to music students?



[Sight-reading](#) seems to be something that private lesson teachers just assume that a student is practicing on his or her own. Realistically, many students are not practicing sight-reading on their own and most probably don't know how unless it is explained to them. Also, sight-reading is a skill that takes practice to become good at. Teachers should monitor their students' sight-reading progress carefully, just like other skills taught in lessons.

A teacher can teach their student good sight-reading habits by isolating skills and teaching them to students, just like other concepts taught in a lesson. Research has isolated certain [habits of good sight-readers](#), so teaching those ideas in a lesson setting should prove beneficial. These habits are scanning the music before playing, knowing common patterns in music, reading rhythms accurately, and practicing well.

Scanning the Music Before and Reading

The best sight-readers note the time signature and key signature before playing. It seems simple, but research shows that when the music is covered up after a student has started, many students don't remember what key they're in. By establishing the importance of the key signature, the student can make a step toward good sight-reading

skills.

Knowing Common Patterns in Music

This skill comes with hour of scales, arpeggios, and exercises. Spending lesson time on these skills at any level beyond beginners can be a waste of lesson time. However, to recognize common patterns in music, a student must also know how to scan ahead enough in the music to find the patterns. Many students are not aware of their peripheral vision.

They can be taught how they can use their peripheral vision to scan ahead in music to find recognizable patterns. While doing this, the teacher can encourage the student to try to take in larger and larger “chunks” of information.

Reading Rhythms Accurately

The brain takes in sight-reading information incredibly quickly when it recognizes something familiar, and slowly when it doesn't. By taking time to go over difficult rhythms in a lesson when they come up in an exercise or solo, the student has a much better chance of recognizing it next time.

Practicing Well

Students often [don't know how to practice](#) properly. By talking about what a student should be doing during personal practice time, that student can learn good habits that will make practice time much more profitable.

Practicing scales, arpeggios and challenging rhythmical etudes at home are some ways students can improve their sight-reading skills at home. To make sure that the student is progressing, a teacher should make sure in the lessons that the student is practicing these skills at home.

Consistently teaching sight-reading practice in the right environment should yield a highly efficient sight-reader, and a student who can have more fun playing music.

Sources

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