

Become a Speedier Reader

by Anne Sullivan

Introduction

In order to sightread well and learn music quickly, it is essential that you continually develop your skill in note reading. Just knowing the names of the lines and spaces of the clef is not enough. Just being able to play the notes is not enough. When you can name each note (ideally, sing each note, although that will not be our focus for this lesson) as quickly as you can find the string on which to play it, you achieve a higher level of musical awareness that filters into everything you do musically. It will not only help your reading, but it will help your memorization, your musical understanding and your music theory studies as well.

Playing music is a holistic endeavor; all your abilities and knowledge work together each time you play. Any areas where you are weak will slow down your progress. And focused note reading practice is a great way to move forward. No matter what your skill level is now, this course will change the way you read and understand the music on the printed page.

This lesson plan will guide you through the exercises I have designed. Each weekly lesson will stretch your note reading skills and give you practical ways to apply them in your regular practice.

Week by Week Lesson Plan

Daily Warm-up: As you play your scales and arpeggios or any other warm-up exercise, say the letter names of the notes. Even though you may not be looking at music while you play, you will be practicing saying the letter names and associating the note names with the strings. **(Note – For the purposes of this course, you do not have to say any accidentals that may apply to the note in this or any of the other exercises.)**

Week 1 – Every note has a name

This week's goal: To improve accuracy and speed of note recognition.

Why? Note reading is a fundamental skill necessary for music learning and sightreading. When you can INSTANTLY recognize notes, you will play music faster and more accurately.

Become a Speedier Reader, p. 2

How? Using the exercises for Week 1, practice saying the letter names of the notes in each of the different patterns. Keep a steady tempo; set the metronome at a speed where you can say one note per click. Gradually speed up to develop your skills.

For study on your own: Use any piece of music you have on hand. It could be something you know well, or a piece you are currently learning. Ignore the rhythm of the piece; just say the notes at an even tempo using the metronome. You do not have to say any accidentals with the note names. Be sure to practice lines in both clefs.

Week 2 – Say it, then play it

This week's goal: To practice note reading as a preliminary to note playing.

Why? Saying the notes before you play them can eliminate potential mistakes in learning a piece. It can also help you smooth out difficult passages and aid in memorization.

How? Say the names of the notes in the excerpts for Week 2. Use the correct rhythm and choose a playable tempo. When you can say an excerpt correctly and smoothly, play along as you say it. Play and say each excerpt at least 3 times correctly.

For study on your own: Use 2-4 bar segments any pieces of music you have on hand. Choose some pieces that are simple and some that are more complex. Be sure to practice lines in both clefs.

Week 3 – Say this, play that

This week's goal: To apply your note reading skills to two-hand practice.

Why? This develops your sightreading ability and is also a great bridge technique between hands separately practice and hands together practice.

How? For each of the excerpts for Week 3, say the notes for each hand. Use the correct rhythm and keep a steady tempo. Then play along as you say each hand; do each hand separately. When you can do each hand smoothly and correctly, try playing one hand while you say the other one. Switch hands.

For study on your own: Use 4-8 bar segments any pieces of music you have on hand. Be sure to keep a steady tempo. If the excerpt you are using has chords in either voice, pick either the top or bottom note to say.

Questions? Comments? We're here to help at ars@arsmusica.us!