

Pattern Play: Introduction for Parents and Teachers

There are over 75 concepts and symbols that a beginning reader should comprehend before beginning to sight-read music. This book introduces these concepts and symbols in terms of a student's experience, moving from known vocabulary, knowledge and skill to the unknown. Whenever possible, concepts and symbols are not named until a student has experienced them by listening, by moving, by singing, or by playing. The lesson sequence is unusual in the division of rhythm and pitch study, the presentation of the five line staff, the introduction of the two line staff, the introduction of different counting systems and many other ideas. By following this learning sequence, advanced literacy processes are possible from the beginning of instruction. This book can be used as a reading method in a private lesson situation, as a sight-reading text in a strings class, and as a tool to help parents and students learn to read music at home.

Begin with the lessons in this book & introduce the student volume lessons when instructed to do so.

Section I: Lessons 1 - 5 These lessons introduce and review the concepts of beat and rhythm and include lessons to transition from known sounds, language, and motion to the musical symbols of basic rhythm. Basic counting systems are introduced. The lessons are written as a script and can be led by a teacher or parent. They contain

An ***introduction***: to explain a new concept or symbol.

A ***task***: to introduce a skill that will reinforce the concept or symbol.

Practice: to reinforce the skills related to the concept or symbol.

-Students should complete each task and then practice that skill over the next several days or classes.

Repetition and practice over time will best reinforce each concept.

-If a student has prior musical knowledge or experience, they should still do one ***Practice*** of each skill.

The skills may seem easy, but each is important for sequential development. The lessons are structured in small step sequences that reflect a subtle increase in difficulty.

-Parents and teachers may read the introduction section like a script to a student or class, or they may explain the concept using their own words.

Section II: Lessons 6 -7 These lessons introduce alphabet names in connection with left hand finger placement in first position. Games to reinforce this knowledge are included.

Section III: Lessons 8 - 16 These lessons introduce the five line staff, the two line staff, clefs for string instruments, and key concepts relating to reading pitch on the staff. They include brief introductions written in *italics* that should be read to students, and a "**To Do:**" skill practice to reinforce each concept.

-Each mini lesson is designed to take two or three minutes to complete.

This book consists of a series of mini lessons that can be a short part of a class, lesson, or practice. Most lessons can be done at home in an informal setting with a parent as the teacher. The first two sections are designed as reading readiness lessons for the young student preparing to read or as skill assessments for an older student with more musical experience and exposure. The series is designed to facilitate fluent sight-reading for all string players. The sight-reading pieces in the student book are in unison for all instruments. The student volume pages for violin are included in this book for teacher/parent reference only and should not be read by students. Students must read from larger notation in the student volume for their instrument.

-Words in italics should be read out loud to the student throughout the book.

This book is written so that **parent will be able to lead many of the lessons at home. Parents will learn music-reading skills** as well and will be able to assist their children by working through this book together. Occasionally, the teacher may need to assist with a lesson.

-Please study each lesson.

The mini-lessons provide a firm foundation for sight-reading development. They are structured to introduce or reinforce key concepts of sight-reading and literacy. They are designed to help students transition from hearing and playing musical sounds to reading the music symbols that represent them. Complete the *Practice* and the "To Do" suggestions in each lesson. Please ask students to identify each concept or symbol in other music as it is introduced. The student volume is written so that the student sees and reads one new concept or pattern at a time. The pieces are not to be practiced in the literal sense. They should be previewed and then just played.

Musical development is a unique process and will vary according to the experience and age of a child. No single teaching sequence can address the needs of every child. A young or inexperienced student will need more repetition to master a skill. An older or more experienced student may be able to demonstrate a skill right away.

If the concepts seem easy, make sure the student can demonstrate knowledge and skill of each lesson before moving on. In Section I, the ability to do the practice skills can determine this.

If the skills and tasks are not easy, the student should review lessons and practices from previous pages. That said, there are some challenge games and activities designed to test even the most accomplished musician. Be creative and flexible and make sure each skill is easy before moving forward.

Before beginning this book, students should be able to

- Say simple rhymes in a high and low pitched voice.
- Say simple rhymes with a steady beat.
- Sing simple songs themselves or with a group in tune.
- Speak an echo or sing an echo of rhythms and melodies that are said or sung to them.

Suggested songs to sing include songs with a small range or in pentatonic such as, *Twinkle, Teddy Bear Hot Cross Buns, Rain, Rain, Go Away, Rocky Mountain, Lucy Locket, Lightly Row*, etc.

Singing beautifully in tune is a very helpful skill towards playing beautifully in tune. If students are having difficulty singing in tune, increase their daily music listening time. Make sure all music recordings for daily listening are sung and played in tune. Make sure all singing with and for the student is in tune as well. (Parents can sing with recordings if this is a factor.) Sing for and with a student who doesn't sing comfortably. Ask them to speak the words in rhythm while you sing. (Often they will sing with you.) Begin with short pentatonic songs such as "Rain, Rain," or "Teddy Bear," and let the student choose the starting pitch. The parent or teacher should match the student as he sings.

The following explanation can be helpful in understanding sight-reading development.

-Reading readiness

Reading readiness helps students prepare to read the visual symbols of music notation. This includes the introduction of beat, rhythm, and the development of aural skills through games, singing, and movement. Readiness may include developing skills with or connected to their instrument, such as listening to repertoire that the student knows while following the printed music, or connecting alphabet note names to the fingerboard. The Section I & II of this book develops reading readiness.

-Basic sight-reading

A simple definition of basic sight-reading is "the ability to play the notes, the rhythm, and most fingerings and bowings the first or second time through with little or no hesitation." If students need more than two or three repetitions to play the notes or rhythms, or if they hesitate, they are translating the music and not sight-reading according to this definition. In this case, students need easier sight-reading material to practice and review in order to continue to develop. If the music needs to be practiced for other technical, ensemble, or musical reasons, it should be identified to the student as such and be studied in a thorough, analytical fashion. Sight-reading material should not require repetitive "practice" unless it has another purpose. The "two times only rule" increases reading focus and concentration during practice. Any further repetition of sight-reading pieces should be done with an "overlay". (See P. 7 for further explanation). Students should be able to read the student volume lessons at this basic sight-reading level. The pieces are written to be sight read with ease.

-Pattern Play sight-reading

Like the skilled language reader who visually “grabs” and comprehends an entire word, most musicians eventually begin to recognize patterns of musical “vocabulary” they know well. Musicians glance at a melodic or rhythmic pattern and recognize it in its entirety. Skilled language readers do not r...e...a...d every letter. They see the word as a whole and can process many words at once. Musicians strive for similar fluency when reading music. String students can be taught to play and recognize patterns such as common rhythms, tetrachords, triads, scales, arpeggios, and melodic sequences that are the basic vocabulary of their repertoire.

Students should preview any piece for rhythm and pitch patterns before sight-reading it. They should be encouraged to recognize and read patterns or measures at once rather than processing music note by note. Soon, they will recognize and read patterns with ease. The student book is structured to enable this type of practice and learning.

-Holistic preview and layered reading

Previewing a piece of music for meter, key and rhythmic difficulties is basic to sight-reading process. These lessons incorporate more advanced reading techniques from the beginning. Concepts such as **holistic study** (including previewing for pattern similarity and difference, previewing for formal structure or rhythm or pitch pattern deviation, tracking and tracing), **layered reading**, (reading one aspect of the printed pages, i.e. just the pitches or the rhythms), and **transfigured reading**, (reading with an addition to or alteration of the printed page, i.e. overlays or changes such as playing the consistent subdivision of the beat) are imbedded in the "**To Do**" instructions in the student book. Encourage students to follow the "**To Do**" instructions and these skills will become part of their reading experiences.

-Challenge reading through overlays

Challenge reading involves adding an unwritten technical or musical challenge to an easy sight-reading piece. One type of this processing is called an **overlay**. An overlay is a repeating pattern, (ostinati) or other musical delineation that is played in conjunction with a printed piece of music. There are **four basic types of overlays**: bowing and rhythm ostinato overlays, pitch pattern overlay, stylistic changes, and musical changes. Students can add a complex bowing pattern or rhythmic ostinato (specific repeating rhythm pattern) to a simple pitch sight-reading exercise. They can change the style from legato to staccato by measure or by section. They can change dynamics based on melodic contour or by scripted plan. They can read in a different octave or different position. (Of these types, rhythm overlays are the most difficult and should be assigned carefully.) Challenge reading with overlays is a very useful teaching tool in a class or ensemble with musicians of different abilities or for the student who needs an additional challenge. Practice with overlays increases a student's ability to do many things at once. (See P. 34 for an explanation of overlays in practice.)

-The role of music theory

The role of music theory in performance and sight-reading is critical. Students will best comprehend music theory and its application to musical performance, if they can experience a concept before naming it and before being introduced to the theory behind it. The benefits are enormous when music theory is directly connected to performance skills. Playing the D major scale before calling it such and then learning the key signature as it relates to the student's current reading ability is sequential and thorough. More importantly students will remember and apply the theory involved because it is connected with active skills.

The lessons in this volume are structured with these concepts in mind. For example, the rhythm notes in this volume are not named quarter, half, and whole. Nor are they defined by classical definitions (i.e. a whole note gets four counts.) While this definition is true in andante and in common time, it is not true in many other meters and tempi. We need to strive to teach so that we do not need to "unlearn" later. More complete definitions will be learned in time.