

“Why another book on sight-reading?” you may well ask...But this is a book explaining just why this skill is so important at **every** level of piano pupils’ development. After all, a teacher’s role is to become redundant as soon as possible and the shortest route is to teach our students *to read music* so that they are able to study by themselves. Faith Maydwell provides a graded sight-reading list of real music (not mere exercises) beginning with Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, advancing according to the ability of the student through the likes of Schumann, Mendelssohn, the odd Sonata, Haydn, and ending with Bach’s “48”. This ensures that the pupils read “musically” and note all the printed details whether at the beginning stages or advanced. There is an important “checklist” of 10 before starting any piece - title, tempo, clef, key and time signatures, motifs, fingering, surprise, detail and form.

Sight-reading skills require many complicated brain functions to work at once, for example, looking ahead as quickly as possible, “chunking” to retain and play blocks of notes while looking further forward (despite errors), quickly grasping chord formations or melodic direction. For the more advanced student, the author requires fluent scales/arpeggios in unison and double octaves for keyboard facility, all chords with their inversions and “blind-playing”, with a quote from CPE Bach who suggests that students play all their memorised pieces in the dark!

Faith Maydwell uses two other approaches with her advanced students - one is to play chamber music with them so that they are compelled to keep up even by cutting corners - and also by “guided SR” in which she plays the same piece on another piano so that the student keeps up the same rhythm while picking up some of the musical nuances at the same time. Every student must be familiar with **ALL** intervals from seconds to octaves in both clefs and at least five ledger lines above and below each staff. There is a stack of progressively difficult exercises and it is suggested that the student only moves onto the next when he can master the present one in 10 seconds. There is a section on posture as well as quotes from Czerny, Schumann, Hummel and Dohnányi who all enforce the importance of reading music fluently including one from Mozart regarding the rapid tempo in which Vogler read his (Mozart’s) music thus omitting too many notes and any real beauty. Charles Rosen is quoted as saying that the main keyboard literature could be explored in nine months working three hours a day! The book really does cover this dark topic of piano pedagogy in thorough depth and detail, dispensing with the usual secrecy, and can only help us all in our quest to transform our students into finer musicians.

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FMaydwell@primusonline.com.au

*Sight Reading Skills - A Pianist's Guide
for Learning to Read Music Accurately
and Expressively*

by Faith Maydwell