

Habits of Good Sight-Readers

Research-Supported Habits That Can Improve Sight-Reading Skills

Nov 21, 2009 [Amy Schumaker](#)

Music research is coming to common conclusions on what makes a good sight-reader. By adding a few simple habits, a musician can improve sight-reading skills.



Many studies have tried to understand what [makes a musician particularly good at sight-reading](#). The studies have come to some interesting conclusions. They say that good sight-readers can scan over the music before playing, know patterns that are common in music, read rhythms quickly and accurately and practice well.

Scan Over the Music Before Playing

A very important step in sight-reading takes place before the first note is played. Musicians must be able to quickly and accurately interpret the music prior to playing. In a study conducted by Gary E. McPherson, students were asked to sight-read a passage.

Before they started, the researcher covered the music and asked the students questions about it. The entire top 25% of the sight-readers knew all of the answers. This shows that good sight-readers can look at the music before they start playing. Sight-readers should look for key, time signature, new tempi, difficult accelerandi and ritardi, and difficult passages.

Know Common Patterns in Music

Another characteristic of highly efficient sight-readers is the ability to recognize commonly used musical ideas.

Studies have shown that people who practice their scales, arpeggios, and other patterns can sight-read better than those who don't. This is because once the eye recognizes a group of notes, the musician doesn't have to waste time looking at the rest and can move on more quickly.

Read Rhythms Quickly and Accurately

The next characteristic of good sight-readers has been researched by many scholars and proven over and over. Good sight-readers have good rhythm-reading skills. More than half of the errors made by sight-readers are rhythmical mistakes.

Practice Well

Students who work harder in general seem to be better sight-readers. Studies have proven that students with higher grade point averages and higher music jury grades can sight-read better. Many experts believe that it makes sense because higher achieving students will want to improve their skills to earn higher grades.

Of course, there are more characteristics of good sight-readers. The best way to get better at sight-reading is to practice. By adding these good habits to the practice routine, a musician can have a research-proven method to become a better sight-reader.

Sources

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