

Mr. Mayo's Tips for Becoming a Better Sight Reader – Updated January 2016

- Most musicians tend to think of sight reading as being difficult. This is because most of us have heard from others about its difficulty. Simply put, it is not difficult. Like all other ideas in the music world, it must be practiced.
- Relax. The world is not going to end if you mess up. Take a deep breath and begin to look over the piece.
- Look at your key signature. In order for this to be effective, you must first know your key signatures and scales.
- Look at your time signature. Pay attention to whether the quarter note gets the beat, the eighth note, etc.
- Ask yourself where the pulse is and be sure to keep that pulse in your head.
- Look for your highest and lowest pitches. This will help to tell you the range you will be playing in and can help you to play some of the correct pitches. While you are doing this, also look for accidentals.
- Look at the rhythm of the piece. You must know how to read basic rhythms in order to be successful. In most auditions that require sight reading (All-West,) rhythmic accuracy scores more points than melodic accuracy. This means you need to look for parts that are difficult rhythmically and possible have syncopation. Count out in your head these figures and then finger/air play the notes with them. If you struggle with rhythm, find some rhythm sheets to practice reading.
- Look for patterns in the music, specifically rhythm, scale like patterns, arpeggios, common intervals, and even repetitive sections.
- Look at your road map. Are there any repeats, D.C or D.S. al codas, first or second endings, tempo changes, key or time signature changes, etc.? Know the basic music vocabulary so that you can do what the music asks for.
- Pay attention to the shape of the piece and try to hear it in your head. If you know that the next note is higher than the one you are currently playing, then be sure that the next note you play is higher.
- Look at dynamics, style, and articulations. When you are in an audition, what may seem like minor details in the music can add tremendously to your score. Pay attention to phrasing as this can tell you where to breathe.
- Select the tempo that is right for you. The tempo marked is important but do not sacrifice the rhythm and/or melody for the tempo. It is more important that you take a piece slower and play the excerpt accurately than to rush through a piece and only play half of it correct. Also, it is very important that no matter what tempo you select, that you keep a steady tempo.
- If you are in a solo audition, take a few more seconds after you are told to begin to continue to look over the piece. It takes a good seven to ten seconds before a judge really starts to wonder when you are going to begin. Utilize this time to finish what you are looking at.
- Be sure to maintain a good tone while you play.
- If you mess up, keep going and do not hang on that mistake. What is important is how you overcome that mistake, and you can actually gain points off of recovering from a mistake. If you get off, get back on as soon as possible. We are all human and make mistakes. A professional will make more mistakes than the average person will even make attempts. In other words, embrace your failures to reach your potential.
- Do not take your eyes off the music. This means you need to know your way around your instrument and what particular positions, notes, etc. feel like or where they are at. This has a lot to do with muscle memory.
- Count in your head while you are playing. This may take time to master and is multitasking, but it will tremendously improve your rhythmic accuracy.
- Find enjoyment in sight reading and use your nervousness or excitement to your advantage. Stay concentrated, relaxed, confident, and play like the musician that you are.
- Practice sight reading every day because the more you sight read, the better at it you will become. Five minutes a day can help you become a better sight reader in a very short amount of time. Record yourself and listen to it to find your mistakes.