

How to study and practice, some tips and hints

Good habits of studying music theory include:

1. Studying Music Theory takes time: do it daily, and not too much at a time (20-30 min.)
2. A sure signal of progress is found in observing one's own mind: the concentration time span will improve with one's abilities (30-45 min.)
3. Working at a computer is a good modern help, but it cannot replace hearing and writing without the help of this digital tool: work and train also with a real piano as much as possible, and together with a fellow student or musician preferably as well, and get into the habit of writing by hand as well – a good handwriting is a sure signal of one's training and abilities.

Studying is like eating: ***once per week in an extreme quantity at one sitting just never works...***

- Daily practice 1: the Melodic Building Blocks, singing functional numbers for the tones (7, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)
- Daily practice 2: tapping or clapping the Rhythmic Building Blocks (binary) and Rhythmic Building Blocks (ternary)
- Daily practice 3: Ear training of all building blocks (melodic, rhythmic, harmonic), whether by computer or at a piano with a fellow student or musician.

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Daily exercises

EXERCISES 1

To practice rhythms, I developed a series of exercises, called Rhythmic Building Blocks. This website contains two such pages in pdf, one for the binary time signature of 2/4, here it is:

- [Rhythmic Building Blocks \(binary\) \(pdf\)](#)

Important is how to practice this, here are my recommendations:

- always use a metronome, start with slow tempi and build up gradually;
 - in the beginning, just singing, tapping or clapping is sufficient;
- when some proficiency is attained, singing while tapping the beat is recommended;
- when still more proficiency is attained, tapping while counting the beats becomes possible;
 - the three steps described above are progressively difficult;
- the exercise consists of 2 bar phrases, each must be repeated at least once.

If one understands how a 2/4 time signature “works”, a 3/4 and 4/4 are merely somewhat longer versions of the same thing, and should offer no special problems in reading.

EXERCISES 2

To practice rhythms, there is also a page with ternary Rhythmic Building Blocks in 6/8:

- [Rhythmic Building Blocks \(ternary\) \(pdf\)](#)

Important is how to practice this, here are my recommendations again:

- always use a metronome, start with slow tempi and build up gradually;
 - in the beginning, just singing, tapping or clapping is sufficient;
- when some proficiency is attained, singing while tapping the beat is recommended;
- when still more proficiency is attained, tapping while counting the beats becomes possible;
 - the three steps described above are progressively difficult;
- the exercise consists of 2 bar phrases, each must be repeated at least once.

If one understands how a 6/8 time signature “works”, a 9/8 and 12/8 are merely somewhat longer versions of the same thing, and should offer no special problems in reading.

EXERCISES 3

It is important to practice music notation reading, here are my recommendations:

- practice reading until your reading in both bass- and treble clef are about the same speed, but start by practicing them one by one;
 - copy sheet music neatly by hand, and then also in notation software;
 - when you do a good job, your handwriting should look more attractive than the computerwork;
- do this at least once a week until you are fluent and you have developed a personal but clearly legible handwriting, just as with writing language.

EXERCISES 4

- Regularly practice reading tones and naming their enharmonic equivalences;
 - Take care to evaluate the validity of accidentals in complex passages;
- Check sheet music at the Petrucci Music Library at imslp.org, e.g. an [Inventio by Bach](#);
- To train and develop your speed of reading and naming, set a metronome to your reading tempo.

EXERCISES 5

- Sing both pentatonic scales on the same beginning tone;
- Figure out how to write both these pentatonic scales, beginning on all 7 basic tones.

EXERCISES 6

- Sing all diatonic major and minor scales also on the same beginning tone;
 - Figure out how to write all of these scales on the same beginning tone;
 - Make sure you are eventually able to use all seven basic tones for each.

EXERCISES 7

- Sing the chromatic scales also on different beginning tones;
- Figure out how to write all of these scales on different beginning tones;
- Eventually make sure you are able to use all twelve chromatic tones for each.

EXERCISES 8

- Read intervals of a melody: what is the interval to the next tone;
- Read intervals of a harmony: what are the intervals in a chord;
- Sing each and all the intervals to any given tone, upward at first;
- Sing each and all the intervals to any given tone, downward next;
- Write out all the intervals to all chromatic tones in both treble and bass clefs, both upwards and downwards.

EXERCISES 9

- Notate the major and minor triads on c, d, e, f, g, a and b, in simple 3-note root positions;
 - Read and sing all these triads tone by tone, both upwards and downwards;

EXERCISES 10

- Notate diminished and augmented triads on c, d, e, f, g, a and b, in simple 3-note root positions;
 - Read and sing all these triads tone by tone, both upwards and downwards;

EXERCISES 11

- Notate the five basic seventh chords on c, d, e, f, g, a and b, in simple 4-note root positions;
 - Read and sing all these seventh chords tone by tone, both upwards and downwards;

EXERCISES 12

- Notate the seven basic degrees as triads on various major and harmonic minor scales, in simple 3-note root positions;
 - Read and sing all these degrees tone by tone and step by step, both upwards and downwards;

EXERCISES 13

- Identify the type of triad and name the chords in sheet music;
- Notate and play these and other such triads in various positions, then read and sing all these chords tone by tone, both upwards and downwards;

EXERCISES 14

- Identify and name seventh chords in sheet music;
 - Sing the seventh chords and the extensions;