

Tips for learning how to sight read

Sight reading is a skill that is learned like any other. Some people may appear naturally good at sight reading but the truth is that skillful sight reading is a combination of things that they have studied:

- The ability to **read all the notes** on the staff quickly and accurately
- The ability to **play all the notes** on your instrument quickly and accurately
- The ability to **read ahead** and think about **how you will articulate the next phrase** while you are playing
- A thorough knowledge of **key signatures, articulation symbols, dynamics and written directions**
- Having **good control over your body** (posture) and ability to manipulate **your instrument** (can you play sfz, cresc. over a bar line, use the tip of the bow, double tongue etc.)
- Having done lots of practise sight reading **new music**.

Take a look at the picture below. I find it is a very useful tool for beginning to sight read.

- Signatures – check the key signature at the start of the music and any key changes during the piece. You need to be able to play in these keys before you even attempt to sight read!
- Time/tempo – how many beats per bar? is the beat counted in quavers, crotchets or minims? What is the speed of the music. Do any of these aspects change throughout?
- Articulation – what is the general style of the piece ('feel') as well as individual markings e.g. tenuto, staccato, accents. What are the phrase lengths and breath/bowing considerations?
- Rhythms – playing an incorrect rhythm when you sight read will throw you off completely and be a very obvious shortcoming in an audition situation. Before you commit to a first playing ensure you know how to play all the rhythms present.
- Signs – are there any other performance indications given? Italian terms? Is there a DS or DC al Coda, 1st/2nd time bars or any other musical symbols that you need to know?

