



Lynne Oliver Music Studios

Piano ♦ Theory ♦ Woodwinds

Quick Study

You will have 48 hours to prepare and learn a new piece. The time you spend on the piece will be critical. It is important that you use the time you have as wisely as possible. Outlined below are the steps you should take to learn your music as thoroughly as possible. Approach learning a quick study piece in the same manner that you would for any new piece you would learn.

1. First you should look at the music overall for **patterns** and repeated sections. Label the **phrases** (in pencil). If there are similar phrases, note how and where they are different. Phrases marked "a" are usually different somehow, even if it's only dynamically (for example: one "a" phrase is *forte*, the other is *piano*).
2. Look at the **Clefs** (is it treble-bass or treble-treble, or bass-bass?). Does this ever change in the music? Does one hand play in the other clef? Does either hand cross over the other?
3. Look at the **key signature**. Note carefully in the music where there are any black notes. Look to see if there are any accidentals (sharp, flat or natural signs within the music itself). If a harmonic interval or chord has an accidental, be careful which note has it. Chances are, if it doesn't sound right, then check yourself. Also, check to see if the key signature changes. Make sure when you practise the music you are playing the right notes!
4. Look at the time signature. What beat does the music start on (does it have a pick-up)? Does the time signature change in the music or is it the same throughout?
5. Remember, when you are first learning the piece - **PLAY SLOWLY!**
6. Count and clap each hand separately. Make sure you are counting the number of beats per bar that the time signature has. Know where **beat one** is for each bar and give it a slight accent if necessary. Be careful to show the "rhythmicality" if there is a pick-up (accent beat one).
7. Count and play each hand separately. While playing, get the right **fingerings** and **articulation**. Be meticulous. If it's legato, then slur it. Don't forget to lift at the end of slurs. Make sure the **rhythm** you play is what you clapped. If you aren't sure, then practise tapping on one note before you play while counting out loud.
8. Play and say the letter names or intervals, still hands separately. Make sure you are playing the right notes (watch out for those black keys). At this stage, the **fingerings** and **articulation** should be easier to play at a SLOW and steady tempo. Gradually increase tempo, if necessary.
9. Now it's time to put hands together. Slow yourself down. Work on one section at a time, or one phrase at a time. Be satisfied with one phrase or section before you go on to the next. Continue to count and have the correct fingering and articulation.
10. Now you may play from beginning to end: understand where the music is going and how it's put together. At this stage, the music will still be pretty rough, but it will sound something

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like how it's supposed to sound. Continue to watch the **articulation**, **rhythm** and **notes**. If there are difficult spots, then practise them by themselves first and then incorporate them into the rest of the piece.

11. Now it's time to make music out of all these notes. Take the music away from the piano. Sit down with it and read all the extra markings that are on it.
 - Look at the **title**. Does it give you a hint as to the mood of the piece? Think about how you would convey that mood. Who is the **composer**? If you know who that person is then you might have an idea of style. Look the name up online.
 - Look at the **tempo** marking. It not only tells you how fast to go, but also the mood sometimes. Look it up in a music dictionary (or a standard dictionary) or online. Check the metronome marking (if given). If it is a slow tempo then you are almost there already (don't play it too fast). If it is a fast tempo, then you will have to do a little more practising to get it up to tempo. Look throughout the music for changes in tempo, like *ritardando* or *rallentando*. If there is any word you don't know, look it up. There may be different sections of music with different tempos. Make sure you play them.
 - Look for words of **style** like *dolce* or *cantabile*. If there is any word you don't know, look it up.
 - Look for **dynamic** markings (*p*, *mf*, crescendos or diminuendos etc.).
 - Where is the **melody**? Where are the climaxes of the **phrases**?
12. Go back to the piano and begin to incorporate all the things the music tells you. Play it as much as you can. Try to project the qualities of the page that make it **musical**. Listen carefully to what you are playing. Enjoy the music. Do the very best you can. If you can memorize it, then do so. If you feel comfortable with the music, then that's okay too.
13. The next day, when you are playing the piece in front of the adjudicator, ignore mistakes. The adjudicator will be very impressed if you can give the overall impression of the music with a few mistakes. Don't go back to fix. Try to ignore others who are playing the same piece. If it's played differently than yours, it doesn't mean it's better! Your version is just as valid.

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