
THREE-STAGE PLAN FOR LEARNING HYMNS OR OTHER FOUR-PART PIECES

First, sight-read through the piece, identifying the main obstacles.

1. PREPARE THE SCORE

- Deal with the TEXT (if you are learning a hymn). Understand the meaning, and mark phrasing
- Deal with REPEATED NOTES if you are learning a hymn directly from the hymnbook
- Divide into SECTIONS
- Add FINGERING AND PEDALING

2. LEARN THE SCORE

Go through the practice method you need to learn it to perfection:

- the 15-step method,
- the 7-step method, or
- a method that is customized to your abilities
- For each step, be sure to:
 1. Practice SLOWLY AND PERFECTLY until you can play it three to five times perfectly without much conscious effort
 2. SLIGHTLY INCREASE TEMPO, practicing until you can play it three to five times perfectly with little effort. Repeat this step until you arrive at a “goal” tempo for that step

3. REVIEW AND COMBINE THE SECTIONS

- Continue practicing previously learned sections each day
- Always practice slowly enough to stay in control
- Learn a section, leave it, and learn it again to drive reflex-like habits deep into your subconscious
- Combine sections into larger sections as they become easier until you can play the entire hymn

THE FIFTEEN-STEP METHOD

(for the more challenging pieces)

Each voice is treated as a unit:

- Single voices first: soprano, alto, tenor, bass
- All two-voice combinations next: bass/tenor, bass/alto, bass/soprano, tenor/soprano, alto/soprano, alto/tenor
- All three-voice combinations next: soprano/alto/tenor, soprano/alto/bass, soprano/tenor/bass, alto/tenor/bass
- Finally, all four voices together: soprano/alto/tenor/bass.

THE SEVEN-STEP METHOD

(for less challenging pieces)

Each hand or the feet are treated as a unit:

- Single units first
 1. Right hand (including soprano and most of the alto voice)
 2. Left hand (including tenor and occasional notes from the alto voice)
 3. Pedal
- Two-unit combinations
 4. Pedal and left hand
 5. Pedal and right hand
 6. Right hand and left hand
- All three units
 7. Right, left, and pedal