ADVENTURES IN PRACTICE  
Adapted from Vahl Piano Studio document

How To Begin A New Piece

**1. SILENT STUDY**

 To learn a new piece you need to understand it—answer these questions first:

 What does the piece’s title tell me?

 What is the time signature, key signature, tempo, character?

 What are the musical markings? Use a music dictionary.

 What is the form? AB? ABA? Introduction? Coda? Repeats? DC al Fine?

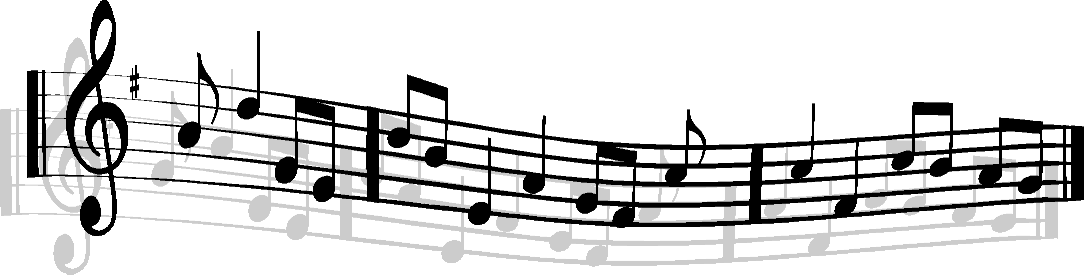
 Are there patterns? Scale passages? Chords? Jumps? Repeated notes?

 Where is the melody? What kind of accompaniment is used?

 What is the starting hand position? Does it stay in one position or move?

 Who is the composer?

 What is the musical period?



**2. SIGHT READ**

 Set a VERY slow, steady tempo.

 Sight-read piece from beginning to end.

 Play without stopping, repeating, or pausing.

 Keep going no matter what happens.

**3. MARK THE TROUBLE SPOTS**

 Pencil mark each trouble spot so you know where to drill

 These will be the areas you drill at least 5 times each day until mastered.

 Decide what makes this a trouble spot so you know how to practice it.

 Is it tricky rhythm? Fingering? Tricky notes? Jumps?

2

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**4. NUMBER THE PRACTICE SECTIONS**

4

 **Number** the beginning of each practice section.

3

 Use a pencil—mark your music.

 Practice sections should be short—4-8 measures only.

 Practice sections will later become memory sections.

**HOW TO PRACTICE EVERYDAY!**

1. **PREPARE TO PRACTICE**



* Come to the piano with a GREAT attitude.
* Be Positive!
* Come to the piano ready to work hard!
* Get rid of distractions!
* Concentrate! Practicing is  
   90% mental exercise, 10% phys**ical.**

1. **SET DAILY PRACTICE GOALS**

• Ask yourself—”What am I going to accomplish today?

• Set specific goals that can be done in one practice session.

• Think small—Concentrate on only one or two problems each day.

1. **RELAX!**

• Prepare Hand Position

• Prepare Body Posture

1. **WARM-UP!**

• Practice 5 finger warm ups, scales (one or two octaves),   
 arpeggios, chord progressions, whatever your teacher has assigned in your lesson.

1. **DISCOVER THE MUSICAL ADVENTURES**

**NOW YOU CAN PLAY...**

#1

**First Adventure: NOTES, RHYTHM, FINGERING Goals:**

**Goals:**

* To play piece beginning to end without stopping, pausing, or repeating.
* To play confidently with correct notes, fingering, and rhythm.
* To play and count aloud.
* To play at a slow controlled tempo.

**STEP ONE:** Complete **HOW TO BEGIN A NEW PIECE**

**STEP TWO:** Practice what you don`t know... Not what you do know

* Practice trouble spots only . . . Do not start at the beginning of the piece.
* Practice slowly and carefully! Learn everything correctly the first time!
* Trouble spots will be small areas – several notes or one phrase only.
* Practice smart. Drill trouble spots to solve the problem.

**♫ For All Trouble Spots—Practice HS, then HT when HS is mastered.**

**♫ For Tricky Fingering—Pencil in a comfortable fingering. Use the same  
 fingering all the time.**

**♫ For Tricky Rhythm—Clap, tap, count aloud for tricky rhythms.**

**♫ For Difficult Passages—Practice in rhythms, block the chords, change   
 dynamics, change articulation, regroup phrases, accent different notes,**

**practice slowly with the metronome.**

**♫ For Position Changes—Practice the moves and hand shapes silently,   
 practice without looking, memorize how it feels.**

**STEP THREE**: Build Musical Bridges

* Extend practice to include notes before and after each trouble spot.
* Build bridge to trouble spot by adding one or more measures before.
* Build bridge from trouble spot by adding one or more measures after.
* Build larger bridges by drilling the entire practice section.
* Continue practicing section by section, connecting sections for entire piece.

**STEP FOUR**: Play the piece from beginning to end.

* Listen for improvements and trouble spots.
* Set goals for tomorrow’s practice.

**Second Adventure: DYNAMICS, ARTICULATION, PEDALLING**

#2

**Goals:**

* To play piece musically, with all dynamic markings

and articulation.

* To play piece slowly and confidently.
* To play piece with a good tone.
* Understand all markings . . . Dynamics, tempo markings, phrases, slurs,

staccatos, accents, fermatas.

* Understand what the music says—Listen as you play so you hear it.
* Shape phrases, ending gracefully.
* Listen for balance between melody and accompaniment.
* For pedaling, practice LH and pedal. Heel on the floor.



#3

**Third Adventure: INTERPRETATION & TEMPO**

**Goals:**

* To perform piece up to tempo and with confidence and   
  control.
* To express the mood/character of the piece.
* To perform piece stylistically correct.
* To increase tempo, gradually add speed day by day.
* Use metronome to build tempo, increasing one notch at a time.
* Play to convey the mood and style of the piece. Is this piece
* Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Contemporary? Ragtime? Jazz? Popular?
* Sacred?
* Create a visual picture or story to go with the music.
* Add your own flair and spirit.

#4

**Fourth Adventure: MEMORIZATION**

#5

**Fifth Adventure: PERFORMANCE**