Learn at First Sight:
A Review of Sight-Reading Research
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I. What is the process of sight-reading?

a. Examine the score for relevant information (Sloboda, 1985):
   i. Score study procedures include: examining musical parameters, looking for patterns, noticing characteristics of musical styles, finding common musical forms, and searching for areas with which the performer may have difficulties (Killian & Henry, 2005; Lehmann & McAurthur, 2002; McPherson, 1994).
   ii. Expert sight-readers tend to look further ahead than do novice sight-readers, and experts also look backward while reading (Goolsby, 1994a; Truitt, et al., 1997; Waters & Underwood, 1998).
   iii. Expert sight-readers take in more information in a single glance than do novices and their eye movements are governed by the music’s structure (Furneaux & Land, 1999; Goolsby, 1994b; Sloboda, 1977).

b. Recall previously learned musical material:
   i. Pianists have superior pattern recognition skills (Salis, 1980).
   ii. Pianists learn patterns over time and are able to recall those patterns when reading new material (Waters, Townsend, & Findlay, 1997; Wolf, 1976).
   iii. Expert sight-readers are able to predict what may be coming next based on the structural cues in the music as well as their experience with a given style or composer (Fine, Berry, & Rosner, 2006; Sloboda, 1976; Wolf, 1976)

c. Program the muscles necessary to perform:
   i. Preparing the body to perform is usually automatic.
   ii. The difference between sight-reading and other skills is that in sight-reading time is important and tempo is kept by an “internal time-keeper” (Lehmann, & McAurthur, 2002).

II. What factors influence or predict sight-reading success?

a. Musical factors:
   i. Technique (Kopiez & Lee, 2006).
   iv. Private lessons (Cox, 2000; Hardy, 1995; Bernhard, 2003).

b. Nonmusical factors:
   i. Handedness (Kopiez, Galley, & Lee, 2006).
   iii. Spatial-temporal reasoning (Kornicke, 1995; Salis, 1980).
   iv. Working memory (Meinz & Hambrick, 2010).
   v. Academic achievement (Ciepluch, 1988).
III. What are some methods used to improve sight-reading?
   a. Shadowing (Kostka, 2000).
   b. Error detection (Killian, 1991; Kostka, 2000).
   c. Chunking procedures (Gaynor, 1996; Pike & Carter, 2010).
   d. Pre-playing score study (Killian & Henry, 2005; Fisher, 2010).
   e. Rhythmic reading drills (Ferrin, 2004; Palmer, 1976).
   f. Tonal pattern training (Henry, 2004).

IV. What are some suggestions for improving sight-reading?
   a. Practice sight-reading.
   b. Find music with clear patterns for your students to sight-read.
   c. Identify patterns in the music your students learn.
   d. Practice sight-reading in groups.
   e. Experiment with different sight-reading methods.

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References


