

MINI ESSAY 11: THE BENEFITS OF DEVOTING AN ENTIRE UNIT TO EACH INTERVAL

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Unit 3 of **Piano Safari® Repertoire Book 1** has Reading Pieces that consist solely of the intervals of a 2nd and unison. Added reinforcement for reading 2^{nds} and unisons is found in the **Level C Sightreading Flashcards**.

Unit 4 has Reading Pieces that consist solely of intervals of a 3rd and unison, supplemented by the **Level D Sightreading Flashcards**. The intervals are finally combined in **Unit 5**.

We have found that taking a full unit to focus on each interval has several benefits:

- Students feel very confident about reading ability by the end of each unit.
- Students can know with certainty that the intervals in Unit 3 will be 2^{nds}, which allows them to focus on deciding whether the notes are going up, down, or staying the same without the extra concern about whether the interval is a 2nd or another interval. Instead of thinking, "The note is going up. Which interval is it, a 2nd or 3rd? How do I play it?" They can think, "The note goes up. Play up a 2nd." It takes out one step in the thought process when students are allowed to focus for an extended period on reading one interval at a time.
- Students feel the 2nd in their hands repeatedly, making it automatic to play a 2nd when they see a 2nd. In fact, when students begin Unit 4, they usually play 2^{nds} instead of 3^{rds} in the first piece, because their hands are so used to playing 2^{nds}. However, they can usually adjust quickly to the idea that the whole of Unit 4 will be 3^{rds}, and they automatize the feeling of 3^{rds} in their hands.
- We have found that students recognize intervals aurally much more easily if they have an extended period of focused time on solely one interval. Because of the time they have spent learning 2^{nds} and 3^{rds} separately, they do not aurally confuse the sound of 2^{nds} and 3^{rds} like they might if they were combining the reading of 2^{nds} and 3^{rds} too quickly. They grow used to the distinct difference in sound between 2^{nds} and 3^{rds} because they are immersed in each interval.

During their study of an one interval in each unit, the students continue to play Rote Pieces and Folk Songs that combine intervals and add other complexities. This allows the students to continue to be motivated by interesting sounding pieces and allows them to integrate various intervals into their technique before they read the notation of these combined intervals. Because the students are playing 2^{nds} in the Introductory Unit through Unit 2 before they are introduced to reading 2^{nds} in Unit 3, they already are adept at playing 2^{nds}. All that needs to be added is the notation.

Students are playing 3^{rds} in the Introductory Unit through Unit 3 in their Rote Pieces, Folk Songs, and pre-staff Sightreading Flashcards before being introduced to the notation of 3^{rds} in Unit 4. This enables them to easily play 3^{rds} once the notation has been introduced.

We decided to devote an entire unit to 2^{nds} and one to 3^{rds} before combining the intervals because it made the most sense in terms of introducing the notation slowly. The other benefits of ear training, confidence, and technical automatization were discovered as we taught students in this way. As we continue to teach and develop Piano Safari[®], we are finding that there are many layers of benefits to having a spiral approach to learning, where concepts are presented numerous times in different ways and at varying levels of difficulty.