

MINI ESSAY 9: PHILOSOPHY OF THE PIANO SAFARI® READING APPROACH

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Reading Approaches

There are four basic types of Reading Approaches found in the piano methods written over the last century:

- **Middle C:** Expand out from Middle C and read by note name
- **Intervallic:** Read by intervals of 2nds, 3rds, 4ths, 5ths, etc.
- **Multi-Key:** Five-finger patterns in all keys
- **Eclectic:** A combination of the above

The **Piano Safari® Method** can best be described as an **Eclectic Method** that leans heavily toward the **Intervallic Approach**.

Rationale for Using an Intervallic Approach

Philosophically, we believe the Intervallic Approach is the best way to teach students to read music notation, because good sightreaders of all levels do not read by letter name. Instead, they read by shapes of chords and melody contours that are based on intervals.

However, we have found that piano methods that focus exclusively on reading by intervals can tend to have boring sounding pieces, since writing pieces based on a narrow range of intervals can be musically limiting for the composer.

Therefore in the **Piano Safari® Method**, we have added interesting **Rote Pieces**, **Folk Songs**, and **Improvisation Exercises** to supplement the **Reading Pieces** and **Sightreading Flashcards** that focus exclusively on reading by interval. The combination of learning pieces by rote with learning to read notation by interval appeals to children of various learning styles and develops the ear as well as the eye.

Landmark Notes

While researching intervallic methods, we found that some strictly intervallic methods are confusing for students because they do not use landmark notes to anchor the staff. A piece might begin on a line note marked B in one piece and a space note marked B in the next piece, which gives the student the impression that notes are never fixed to a specific place on the staff. Therefore, we have incorporated the use of Landmark Notes to give students confidence that notes do in fact have assigned places on the staff.

We chose the Landmark Notes of **Treble G** (line note) and **Bass C** (space note) because in other methods, we have found that some students tend to confuse the Landmark Notes if they are both lines (usually Treble G and Bass F). Having a line and space landmark makes it easier for students to remember which note is which.

The **Reading Pieces** in **Piano Safari® Repertoire Book 1** and the exercises in **Piano Safari® Sightreading Flashcards for Book 1** always begin on **Landmark Notes**. In this way, students can easily find the first note of the piece and then read the rest of the piece by interval. Starting pieces on **Landmark Notes** but with various fingers avoids the problem of becoming stuck in a position that often happens when using a **Middle C Reading Approach**, where students start to associate one specific finger with a certain note (2=D, for example).

Piano Safari® Method Reading Approach Plan

Level 1 of the **Piano Safari® Method** introduces the intervals of 2nds alone, 3rds alone, and 2nds and 3rds combined.

Level 2 introduces 2nds, 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths.

Level 3 transitions to a **Multi-Key Reading Approach** and also expands the reading out of the five-finger position by using larger intervals.