MINI ESSAY 29

Super Awesome Sight Readers! Part 7: Ingredient #4 - Note Names

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In the final Mini Essay in this series, I will focus on #4 of the four ingredients that lead to confident and fluent music reading:

- Ingredient #1. Patterns and Theory
- Ingredient #2. Contours and Intervals
- Ingredient #3. Rhythm
- Ingredient #4. Note Names

Note Names are important. They are just not the only key to reading music.

We introduce note names by tying the treble and bass clefs together using the Skips Alphabet. To see a video of this process, go to pianosafari.com - Videos - Repertoire Book 2 - Note Names on the Staff.

Once students understand the process shown in the video above, they get to get their name on the Note Name Chart, which they really look forward to!

Students start with **Phase 1**, saying the **Space Note** Cards. I give them only the space notes from a stack of Note Name Flashcards (I use the Bastien Note Name Cards). They must **Say** the correct names in **30 seconds** or less for the 12 cards. Once they complete Phase 1, they put stickers on the chart, get a piece of chocolate, and move on to Phase 2.



In Phase 2, I give them the Line Notes on the staff. They must say them in 30 seconds or less.

In Phase 3, they have 60 seconds to say Spaces and Line Notes mixed together.

In Phase 4, they say the Leger Line Notes in 30 seconds.

In **Phase 5**, they have **75 seconds** to say all the cards they have learned so far, **Spaces, Lines**, and Leger Lines.

Phases 6-10 are a repeat of Phases 1-5, except they must **Play** the notes in the correct octave on the piano. I have found that separating the saying of the note from the playing of the note in the correct octave at first is easier than trying to do both things at the same time. However, for older children, this might not be necessary.

Below is a chart summarizing the phases.

PHASE	SAY or PLAY	CARDS	TIME
PHASE I	SAY	Spaces	30 sec.
PHASE 2	SAY	Lines	30 sec.
PHASE 3	SAY	Spaces & Lines	60 sec.
PHASE 4	SAY	Leger Lines	30 sec.
PHASE 5	SAY	All	75 sec.
PHASE 6	PLAY	Spaces	30 sec.
PHASE 7	PLAY	Lines	30 sec.
PHASE 8	PLAY	Spaces & Lines	60 sec.
PHASE 9	PLAY	Leger Lines	30 sec.
PHASE 10	PLAY	All	75 sec.

It takes at least a year or more for students to really become automatic at their note names. And then, when students have become automatic, frequent review is still necessary. The goal is for students to see a note and know it immediately, just as they see the letter "A" and know it is an "A" immediately.

As you have seen throughout this seven part series on Reading, teaching students to read music notation takes an enormous amount of thought, understanding, reinforcement, and planning. We have thought out the process and presented what we believe are best practices in the teaching of reading notation in Piano Safari. Our goal is for all students to become confident readers, and for all teachers to trust the process and continue to work toward the goal of each student reading confidently.

June 5, 2018 Addition:

I have been recently experimenting with assigning various smaller combinations of notes, adding on just a few notes at a time, to help students gain better instant recognition of all the notes. More information will be coming once I find the best order for assigning the notes. This new system will have students work through 10 phases of 4 (or 3) notes at a time, not moving to the next phase until the previous notes are instantly recognizable. The students will learn the notes in each phase initially using the Skips Alphabet and then work toward instant recognition. Stay tuned!