Welcome to

The Art IN Sight Reading

The A-B-C Sight Reading Adventure!

Helping students make accurate and artistic sight reading a natural part of band life!

Written by David and Judy Morrison

with the

Oliver McCracken Symphonic Band

Band Director's Workshop

Presented by David Morrison

October 30, 2026

Referring to The Art IN Sight Reading…"Music literacy and the ability to successfully sight read a piece of music go beyond just the notes and rhythms. When a student can view a piece of music, perceive the phrase, and understand how to communicate the written musical nuances the first time they perform it, we know we have succeeded as educators." -Mason Daffinee, formerly of Ronald Reagan High School, San Antonio, TX.

What high school and middle school band directors say about
The Art IN Sight Reading

"*The Art IN Sight Reading* helped my high school band immensely in preparing for the UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Evaluation."

"I've been teaching band for 27 years, and putting *The Art IN Sight Reading* in front of my students has helped them grow their skills necessary for both becoming better and faster sight readers and becoming stronger, more confident musicians."

"…a director will be able to hear the transformation in their students' musical literacy within the week of starting the book."

"I love this sight reading book because it helps students streamline their thought processes before playing! Once they get in the habit of doing these steps, they play more accurately and gain confidence in their playing…"

"I found students…really embellishing on accents and other articulation markings. We often discussed after reading a new piece how much more enjoyable it was playing music with dynamics, character, and phrasing."

"I was zipping through rehearsals faster than I had in years, with kids playing completely new work. Not only were they reading better than they ever had, but they sounded better, too…"

"I had the band begin to play. As we went through the (UIL sight reading) music, we came across an 8-bar phrase I realized I had not counted for the students. Amazingly enough, they read right through the 8-bar phrase with no problem at all!"

"The step-by-step process in this book makes so much sense to my young players and helps them to feel successful and confident in reading something new. These skills are also extremely transferrable to individual practice sessions and ensemble playing."

"The pedagogical process behind each step of the exercises allowed my students to really analyze and see the different layers…to rehearse and practice in a way that advanced them in, not only their understanding of the music, but their abilities as a musician overall."

"This resource is invaluable not only in the development of students in a full ensemble setting, it is equally valuable for the individual student! The book should be in every band hall and practice room!"

"Besides increased musical literacy, I found students gaining confidence in reading new music."

"Thanks to Dave and Judy Morrison's "The Art IN Sight Reading," students are reading music and learning strategies to figure it out themselves again! The all-encompassing approach to reading music will raise the bar for students on an individual level and if done in class as a group, it will improve all aspects of an ensemble!"

Just imagine...You hand out a composition, conduct the down beat and your students perform the music accurately and expressively the very first time!

If this sounds good to you, you are in the right place, because during this clinic, I am going to guide you through a process that, in just a few minutes a day, will empower students to sight read with compelling accuracy, musical expression, and true artistry, as they unlock..

The Art IN Sight Reading!

The Dilemmas

I. No matter their age or level of experience, many students are deficient in sight reading skills.

II. Generally, students perform at a much higher level than they can read music, causing a frustrating disconnect between exposure to new material and mastery.

III. Directors are faced with a tough choice; either spend all of their valuable rehearsal time rote-loading, (AND all of their personal time incessantly testing) to prepare for concerts, contests, and auditions OR risk diminishing those performances by taking time to teach reading skills.

IV. We wondered, “Is there a system that could quickly and efficiently teach sight reading, where students become much happier and more productive musicians?”

We have a great solution to the sight reading dilemma and what this can mean for you and your students.

I. Our answer is The Art IN Sight Reading!

II. When bands can accurately and expressively sight read;

A. A **huge** amount of rehearsal time is freed up for students to improve as musicians, because they don't have to laboriously chase notes and rhythms while habitually ignoring style, articulation, and expression markings.

B. Both the **quantity and quality** of performance literature will vastly expand, thus enhancing the music-making experience for students, audiences, and directors alike.

C. Retention will improve when reading skills replace rote learning, because students experience a much greater degree of satisfaction when they accurately and artistically read music.

Why The Art IN Sight Reading is so effective.

I. This method is groundbreaking, not only because it teaches students to accurately read notes and rhythms, but more importantly, **it empowers them to "read around the notes" and develop into expressive and artistic musicians.**

I. This method engages both the **LOGICAL** and the **EXPRESSIVE** side of the brain.

III. This method uses very small, potent doses of instruction that take little time away from performance preparation.

IV. The Art IN Sight Reading is empowering, because it simultaneously builds both **COMPETENCE** and **CONFIDENCE**, making rehearsal more rewarding, efficient, and fun. Again, The Art IN Sight Reading is not just about note accuracy, **IT IS ABOUT ELEVATING MUSICAL NOTATION TO COMMUNICATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE ART.**

Description of The Art IN Sight Reading process: Method and Goals.

I. Method: It is both layered and logical in approach.

A. First, students **cold read** a small exercise as a pre-test of sorts.

B. Next, students work through a set of **layered steps**, adding on one skill a time while using sound-bite pedagogy.

C. Finally, **students return to the initial reading** as they demonstrate and reinforce their new-found knowledge and skill, looping back through critical steps when necessary.

II. Goals. Students will:

A. Learn how to accurately sight read rhythms and pitches.

B. Learn to notice and perform articulation, dynamic, and stylistic and expressive markings.

C. Learn to synthesize these skill steps into an amazing sight reading performance.

D. Learn to apply the skills in real time on new music the first time…and every time.

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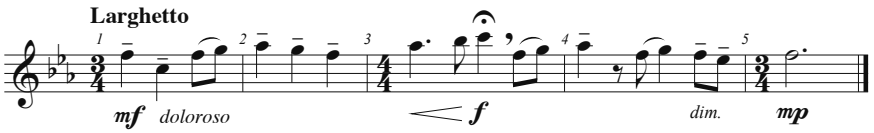
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Demo: The Art IN Sight Reading method with the Oliver McCracken Middle School Band.

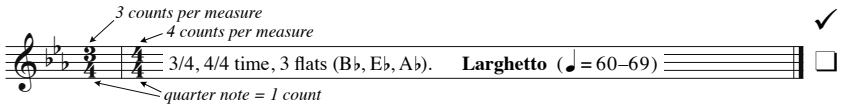
21. Time for a Change

A. Perform this line. Look ahead while reading.
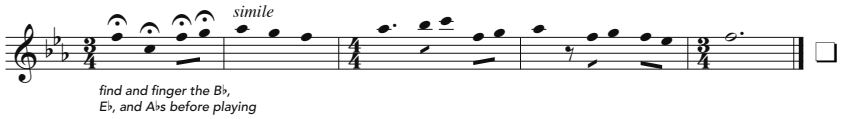


B. Study line 1, then play lines 2–7. ✓ each completed line.

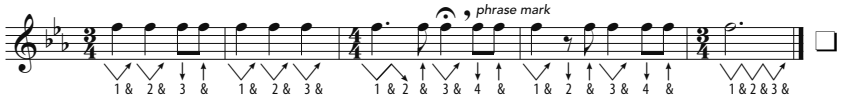
1 Map
Observe time and key signatures, tempos, repeats, etc. Notice change from 3/4 to 4/4.
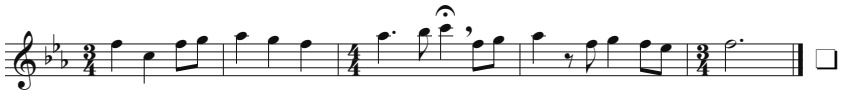


2 Pitch
Hold each note while matching pitch, blend, and balance.
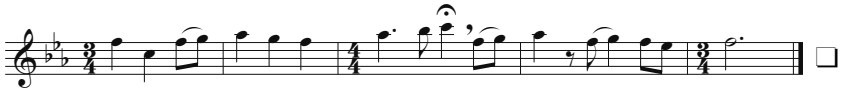


3 Rhythm
Tap foot and count. Then tap foot and play. Watch conductor on fermata (𝄐). Breathe at phrase mark (❜).
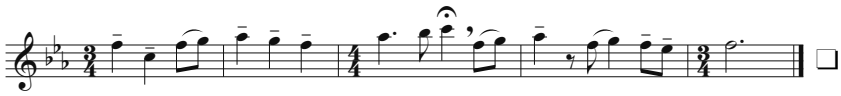


4 Pitch & Rhythm
Combine lines 2 + 3, pitch and rhythm.



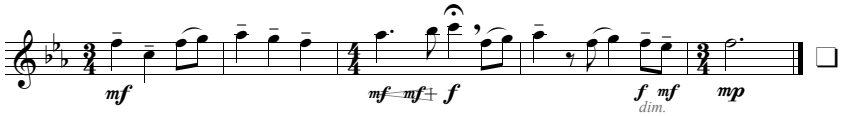
5a Articulation
slur:
Connect slurred notes.
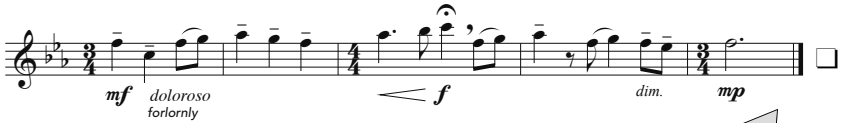


5b Articulation
legato:
Make each legato note touch following note.



6 Dynamics
static & fluid:
Observe both static and fluid dynamics. dim. (diminuendo) = gradually softer.



7 Style/Musicianship
doloroso:
Perform in a sorrowful manner.



C. Perform line A again. Demonstrate synthesis of all layered steps.
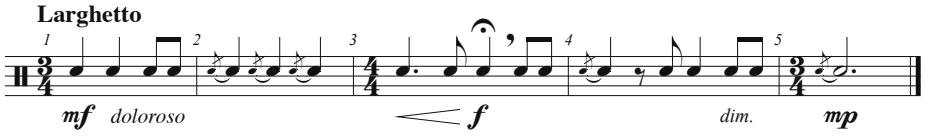
✓ after each item performed correctly.

Map ❑ **Pitch** ❑ **Rhythm** ❑ **Articulation** ❑ **Dynamics** ❑ **Style/Musicianship** ❑

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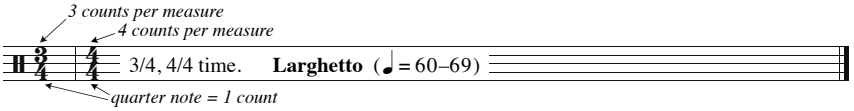
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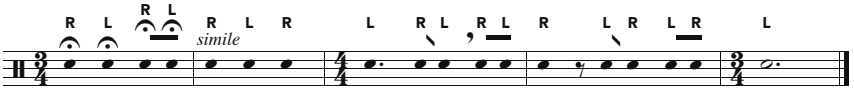


B. Study line 1, then play lines 2–7. ✓ each completed line.

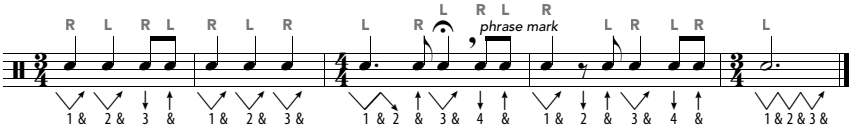
1 Map
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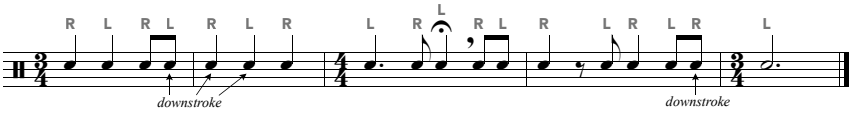
2 Pitch/Sticking
Create resonant tone while matching balance and blend. Observe stickings.
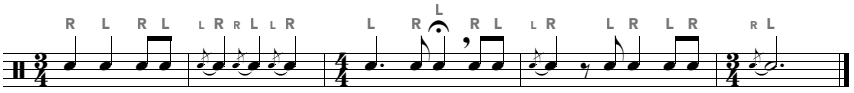


3 Rhythm
Tap foot and count. Then tap foot and play. Watch conductor on fermata (𝄐). Pause at phrase mark (𝄋).
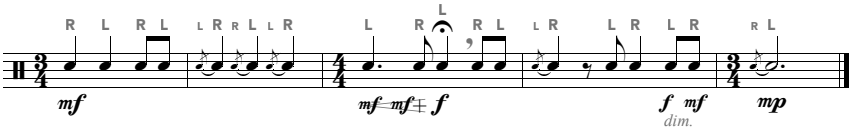


4 Pitch & Rhythm
flam prep:
Observe downstrokes. Create resonant tone.



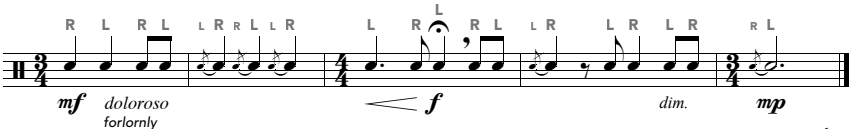
5a/b Articulation
flam:
Observe flams.



6 Dynamics
static & fluid:
Observe both static and fluid dynamics. dim. (diminuendo) = gradually softer.



7 Style/Musicianship
doloroso:
Perform in a sorrowful manner.



C. Perform line A again. Demonstrate synthesis of all layered steps.

✓ each item performed correctly.

Map ❑ **Pitch/Sticking** ❑ **Rhythm** ❑ **Articulation** ❑ **Dynamics** ❑ **Style/Musicianship** ❑

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A. Perform/Read the initial exercise (line A).

Cold read the exercise as a pretest.

B. Work through the following layered steps, adding one skill at a time.

1 Map

Look at the big picture; Notice and analyze time and key signatures, tempos, repeats, etc.

2 Pitch/Sticking

Find and finger (mallets touch bars of) key notes and accidentals in the music.
Listen for accuracy, tone, pitch, blend, and balance as each note is held.
Establish accurate percussion sticking and basic roll initiation.

3 Rhythm

Count and clap rhythms while tapping the foot, then tap and play on a single pitch (foot-tapping will eventually become internalized).
Observe fermatas, caesuras, and phrase marks.

4 Pitch and Rhythm

Combine the skills of playing correct pitches with correct rhythms (a new skill unto itself).
Subdivide percussion rolls and refine stroke heights for flams.

5 Articulation

Add slur, accent, staccato, marcato, legato, and other articulations.
Add percussion flams and rolls.

6 Dynamics

Observe both static and fluid dynamic indicators.
Employ the technique for terracing fluid dynamics.
Understand and manifest the difference between “individual” and “group” dynamics.

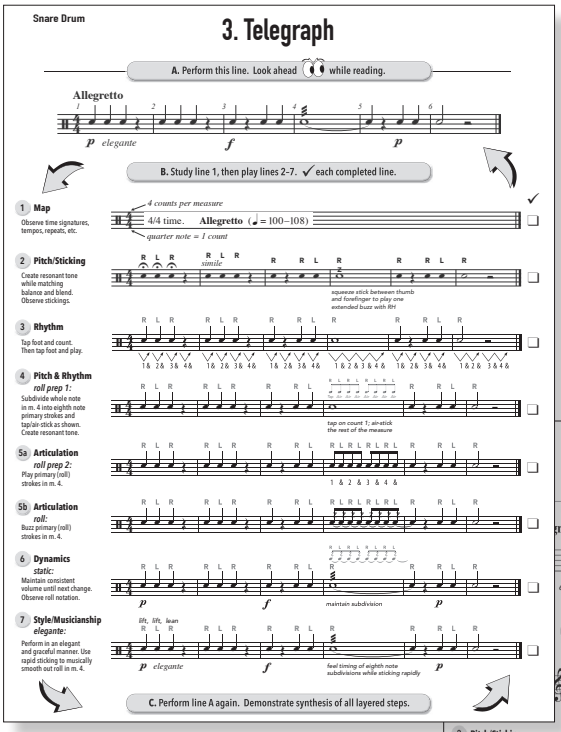
7 Style/Musicianship

Observe written expressions and stylistic indicators.
Observe tempo changes.
Put all the previous skills “on autopilot” while focusing on creating an expressive and artistic performance.
Understand that faithfully observing written expression markings and style indicators is as important as performing the correct notes and rhythms.
Understand that performing with **MUSICIANSHIP** is the ultimate goal; it is, indeed, why we do everything else.

C. Perform the initial exercise (line A) again as a post test.

Students demonstrate their new-found knowledge and skills. Any remaining deficiencies may be addressed by looping back through relevant layers.

Demo: Percussion roll pedagogy in The Art IN Sight Reading.

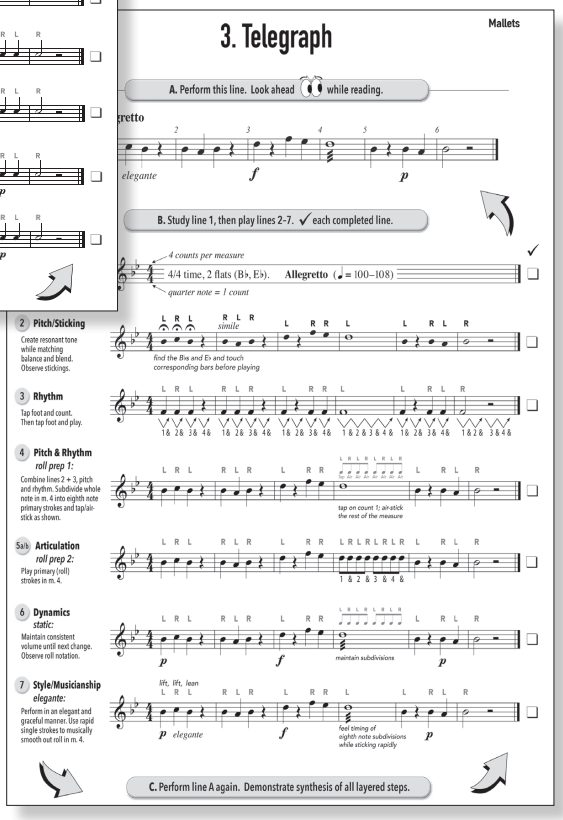


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I. Roll skills for both snare drum and mallets are introduced in layers.

1. Establish the subdivision and time framework of the roll.

2. Create a more sustained sound by increasing stroke speed and, in the case of snare drum, adding a buzz (multiple bounce) to each stroke.



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II. Notation progression.

1. Cue-size notes above the music where rolls are called for show students how to interpret the roll(s) in that line (e.g. lines 4 and 6).

2. A conventionally-notated roll appears in line A and line 7.

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More features in The Art IN Sight Reading.

The Art IN Sight Reading is comprised of 5 main sections: 4/4 time, 3/4 time, cut time, 6/8 time, and sixteenth note patterns.

Each section contains several exercises followed by a duet that summarizes all of the skills learned. Students apply their learning while hearing other parts being played-a true test of understanding and skill.

When students finish the Art IN Sight Reading, they will have established a firm foundation, preparing them to accurately and expressively sight read in simple, compound, and cut time.

Top ten innovative teaching strategies and highlights of The Art IN Sight Reading.

1-Original short expressive music compositions that are fun to play.
2-Soundbite instruction technology.
3-Layering and isolation of skills.
4-Check-off and looping review structure.
5-Fluid dynamic terracing.
6-Rhythm reading technology that works with everyone.
7-Clear roll and flam pedagogy.
8-Flexibility for full band, section, or individual instruction, where students can learn independently.
9-Three step tie pedagogy.
AND FINALLY
10. This method represents a key bridge between what teachers actually do to instruct their ensembles and what they are required to demonstrate to the state in order to fulfill curriculum guidelines. Every concept relates directly back to administrative accountability!

Conclusions.

I. The Art IN Sight Reading is far more than a book to teach sight reading. It is an excellent method to produce outstanding music ensemble performers and musicians as well!

II. Accurate and expressive sight reading, like any other habit or skill, improves through thoughtful repetition. Spending a few minutes each day on sight reading and layering the skills will result in vast improvements in both the students' ability and attitude in this area. After working on the first 4 or 5 exercises, cold read a grade two composition to see how the skills easily transfer.

III. After the first few sessions, the process will streamline down to just a few minutes a day.

IV. The more experience that students gain from using The Art IN Sight Reading method, the less they will actually need to use it, because young musicians will eventually synergize all of the skills into a first reading and become independent and artistic sight readers.

V. The Art IN Sight Reading method will allow students to spend less time guessing, rote learning, and becoming frustrated, and more time joyfully creating musical art for themselves, for each other, and for their audiences.

Thank you for attending, and enjoy the rest of the conference at the Band Director's Workshop!

I would love to hear from you about your experience with or questions about The Art IN Sight Reading!

David Morrison at dmorriso100@hotmail.com

What students are saying about The Art IN Sight Reading…

In response to the Question,
What about The Art IN Sight Reading was helpful?

"It helped me count beats easier and learn how to play notes and dynamics without needing 32 billion tries to do it."

"Everything"

"line 2 with the pitches was helpful because I'm really bad at sight reading and playing the notes first helps."

"It went into great detail on how to break down new music."

"Splitting up the 5a and 5b was very helpful because it helped me put them together better."

"…I found how they break down the different parts super helpful."

"Showing the counts."

"#6, Dynamics, was super helpful because we can see what is inside the crescendo and decrescendo."

"… it broke down the small music piece very well and helped me learn it fast. Line 7 helped a lot."

"I like line 3 with the rhythm going down and up."

"The layers were helpful, and all the little hints and such."

"Breaking down the rhythms was really helpful…"

"I liked the pitch exercise especially…"

"…the melody was very nice."

"I think it was really helpful going through each part of sight reading step by step…It's like a check list, and check lists can be very helpful for remembering stuff in my opinion."

"I really liked…how easy it was to understand. All the steps overall were helpful and are great tips on how to sight read."

"I like how there was a 5a and a 5b to focus on the 2 different articulations individually."

"I love that it goes step by step, even with the things I might forget to look at…"

"Actually everything, I like how every line has its own thing…that really helps me out."

"Taking things slow and introducing things one at a time."

"I liked the instructions and the little visual lines. For me, line 3 was helpful with the counts and lines."

"…It isolated every problem that we need to address…"