

**Sight Reading Strategies Band**  
**Montana Music Educators' Conference**  
**Friday, October 16, 2020**  
**David Johnke, Presenter**

## **Why Is Sight Reading Important?**

As a music educator, you already know 😊. However, below is a list of reasons from drawn my experience and on Asa Burk's article ([Practicing Sight Reading Year-Round with Your Band | Cued In](#)).

1. Builds students' confidence in their instrumental/musical skills and abilities
2. Allows students to directly apply the fundamentals, techniques, and concepts taught in daily rehearsals
3. Helps students to gain more comfort in reading something new with expression and nuance
4. Gives festival adjudicators a window into your classroom teaching
5. Mixes up the rehearsal routine by providing something new to play/read completely through on a regular basis
6. Shortens the preparation time for learning pieces for concert, pep band, marching band, etc.
7. Gives students a greater sense of ensemble awareness
8. Students must demonstrate their skills in the context of a performance, encouraging accountability
9. Students learn to process, evaluate, and adjust their performance in real time

## **Preparing for Successful Sight Reading**

### **Teach/Drill the Fundamentals**

1. Note Names and Values
2. Reading Time Signatures
3. Counting/Playing Rhythms
4. Pitch Names and Fingerings
5. Reading and Identifying Key Signatures
6. Playing/Memorizing Common or All Major and Relative Minor Scales
7. Playing Chromatic Scales
8. Common Style and Tempo Markings

### **Resources I Use**

1. [musictheory.net](http://musictheory.net)
2. Breezin Thru Music Theory <https://breezinthru.com/>
3. Sight Reading Factory <https://www.sightreadingfactory.com/>
4. Hal Leonard Rhythm Flashcard Kit, Vol. 1 & 2, by Cheryl Lavender
5. Rhythm Vocabulary Charts, Vol. 1 & 2, by Ed Sueta
6. First Chorales for Band, by James Swearingen
7. Symphonic Warm-Ups for Band, by Claude T. Smith

## **Full Band Sight Reading Method**

If you have a method that works, you are on the right track! Mine is based on watching a sight reading adjudicator who worked with one of my bands fifteen years ago. I have used this approach ever since with great success, and it is always evolving.

This method stays within the District Festival Sight Reading procedure as stated on the second page of the instrumental adjudication form:

*"...the director nor the students may play, sing, clap, whistle, count aloud, or use any form of learning the music by rote."*

To view the instrumental sight reading form and procedure, click this link: [Forms](#) or go to <https://www.mhsa.org/>

**Below is an outline** of what I focus on and when during the sight reading process. ***Please reference the video shown during this presentation to better understand how to facilitate this with your ensemble.***

**Step 1 - Key, Meters, Style/Tempos, and Changes**

1. Identify the initial Key of the piece
2. Identify the initial Meter/Time Signature of the piece
3. Identify/Define the initial Style and/or Tempo Marking
4. Identifying any changes in key, style, and tempo
5. Road Map -- Repeats, D.S., Segno, Coda, D.C., etc.

**Step 2 - Get the initial key in the students' ears**

1. Reminder of the initial key as identified earlier
2. Play and sustain the tonic of the initial key of the piece
3. Play the scale that corresponds with the initial key of the piece
4. Play and sustain the first note of the piece
5. Review the tempo/style marking as discussed previously

**Step 3 - Silent Run Through (Not Playing)**

1. Conduct the students through the piece and remind them of the following:
  - a. No clicking of keys
  - b. No audible air and articulation of rhythms
  - c. Percussion air plays only

NOTE: I only do a silent run through at district music festival. In rehearsals, I encourage students to make audible articulations and phrasing (a.k.a. "sizzling"). Silence is practiced two to three weeks before the festival.

2. Point out the melodic lines and other lines that should be brought out, articulations, etc.
3. Point out Dynamic Markings
4. Point out any rallentandos/ritardandos

NOTE: If you have one or more students that get lost during sight reading, my students are accustomed to a two-handed conducting gesture on the beat before and the downbeat of each rehearsal mark.

**Step 4 - Ask the students if there are any questions**

**Step 5 - Play It!**