



**To Proficiency and Beyond:  
Functional Piano Skills for Preservice and Inservice Teachers**  
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**Functional Piano Skills:** Keyboard skills that allow musicians to effectively use the piano as a teaching tool in the classroom, as well as to enhance music performance.

### **Scales and Arpeggios**

- C, G, D, A, and E scales and arpeggios use similar fingering patterns
  - RH thumbs play the tonic and subdominant notes of the scale
  - LH thumbs play the tonic and dominant notes of the scale
  - Use LH fingers 5-4-2 when playing triads that contain 3 white keys
- The thumbs line up together in the F and B scales, as well as the black key scales
- Black key scales and arpeggios should start with finger 2 or 3 so that the thumbs play the white keys (F#/Gb major and Eb minor arpeggios are exceptions)
  - Use V (2-3) & W (2-3-4) fingering patterns so that thumbs play white keys

### **Sight Reading**

- Quick Analysis: Time signature, key signature, hand position changes, large intervals, or challenging rhythms
  - Locate similar melodic and/or rhythmic material; Repeated measures or melodic/rhythmic patterns
- Leave out or reduce musical material that will cause the tempo to slow down

### **Chord Progressions**

- Find the common tones between chords, then focus on the notes that move
- When notes/chords change, identify the interval (half step, whole step, third, etc.)
  - This will determine the fingering patterns for each hand
  - Root Position: 5-3-1 in the LH; 1-3-5 in the RH
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Inversion: 5-3-1 in the LH; 1-2-5 in the RH
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Inversion: 5-2-1 in the LH; 1-3-5 in the RH
- Identify root position and chord inversions
  - Use chord names or Roman numerals to label chords
- Common Chord Progressions
  - I IV I V7 I; I V vi IV; I vi IV V; I vi I V; I ii7 I6 IV; I vi ii V

### **Harmonization**

- Play the melody in one hand (usually RH) while the other hand provides harmony
- Harmonization Patterns: Blocked chords, broken chords, arpeggiated pattern, waltz pattern, Alberti bass, lament bass, boom chuck, western, tango, syncopated, etc.
- 2-Hand Accompaniment options:
  - LH plays the bottom note (or root) while the RH plays the remaining notes of the chord
  - Divide chord tones evenly between the LH & RH

## **Transposition**

- Quick Analysis: Time signature, new key signature, chords/inversions, intervals
- Transpose by scales degrees, intervals, or chord progressions
  - Use chord names, Roman numerals, or solfege syllables to identify notes

## **Score Reading**

- The tenor line is read and played one octave lower than what is written in the music
- If the texture becomes too thick, keep playing the outer voices
  - If all else fails, make sure to keep playing the bass line
  - Leave out the soprano line first; it is more helpful to play the supporting lines in the Bass, Tenor, and Alto voices
- Play the vocal line in octaves to double the pitches
- Play the bass line with select vocal parts
- Play the bass line of the accompaniment with select vocal parts
- Practice going back and forth between the vocal lines and the accompaniment

## **Score Reading Practice Strategies**

- **Read through each voice part separately**
  - Mark large intervallic leaps or intervals that singers may find challenging
- **Practice in 2-voice, 3-voice, and 4-voice combinations**
- **Zig Zag Reading**
  - Train your eyes to zig-zag from the bottom voice part up to the top voice part
  - This will make it possible to recognize chords by reading vertically, and shape phrases appropriately by reading horizontally
- **Scanning Technique (for practice)**
  - Ignore the rhythm and read from bottom to top, playing one note at a time
  - Play the bottom 2 voices (Tenor & Bass) simultaneously, then the top 2 voices (Soprano & Alto) simultaneously
    - You can also try this practice technique with other 2, 3, or 4-voice combinations
- **Marking Your Score**
  - Read Horizontally and Vertically
    - Write in chord names, Roman numerals, or intervals
  - Mark the beginning and end of phrases
  - Track the melody if it is shared between voice parts
  - Play vocal entrances (especially in polyphonic music)
  - Mark unison to divisi changes in texture; mark duets between the voice parts
  - Mark breaths in the score (these lifts can be modeled from the piano)

## **Accompaniment Reduction**

- Play outer voices (soprano & bass) or outline chords following the harmonic rhythm
- Condense wide intervals or revoice chords; eliminate inner voice movement
- Eliminate awkward hand position shifts, octaves, or large intervals
- Eliminate fast repeated notes or substitute slower note values (8ths for 16ths)