

Welcome to

The A-B-C Sight Reading Adventure!

An Innovative Approach to Accurate & Artistic Sight Reading

David Morrison & Judy Morrison
with the
Oliver McCracken Middle School Symphonic Band
Skokie, Illinois
Christopher DeStefano, conductor

Just imagine... You hand out a composition, conduct the downbeat...and your students perform the music accurately and expressively the very first time! If this sounds good to you, then you are ready to embark on The A-B-C Sight Reading Adventure! During this clinic, we will 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!

Our experiences with sight reading & what they can mean for YOU!

- I. Our experience with sight reading in the Elmhurst, Illinois music education system.
- II. The value of sight reading skills for programs everywhere.
 - 1. A huge amount of rehearsal and practice time will be freed up for students to improve as musicians, instead of laboriously chasing notes, rhythms, and the occasional expression marking.
 - 2. Both the quantity and quality of performance literature will vastly improve, thus enhancing the music-making experience for students, audiences, and directors alike.
 - 3. As their sight reading skills replace rote learning, students will experience a much greater degree of performance satisfaction.

Sight reading issues.

- 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, causing a frustrating disconnect between exposure to new material and mastery.
- III. Rehearsal time is both limited and extremely valuable.
- IV. Music educators are faced with the challenge of teaching students the skills necessary to play the instrument and to sight read while also attempting to prepare them for contests, auditions, and performance deadlines.

Sight reading solutions.

- I. If there were a system that involved taking a little time each day to teach sight reading, both students and teachers would save vast amounts of time in the long run. Hence, our presence here today.
- II. We are introducing a system that uses a small amount of rehearsal time to generate a vast amount of sight reading skill. Not only will the **A-B-C** sight reading method assist students in learning music for performances, but it will do so in record time!
- III. We are not just talking about note and rhythm accuracy in sight reading; we are also emphasizing artistry, and this is what makes our system unique. The **A-B-C** system gives students both a LOGICAL and EXPRESSIVE experience when learning to sight read.
 1. Director response to using this **A-B-C** sight reading system with high school students:
“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, Ronald Reagan High School, San Antonio, Texas.
 2. The **A-B-C** program is empowering, builds self-confidence, and makes rehearsal more rewarding, efficient, and fun. It is not only about reading accurate pitches and rhythms; it is also about elevating musical notation to communicative and expressive art.

Overview of the A-B-C approach.

- I. The **A-B-C** layered and logical approach to teaching sight reading.
 - A** = Perform a small exercise/excerpt as a pre-test of sorts.
 - B** = Work through a set of layered steps, adding one skill at a time.
 - C** = Return to A and perform the exercise demonstrating new-found knowledge.
- II. Goals.
 1. Learn how to sight read rhythms and pitches.
 2. Add on learning to read around the notes for written expression.
 3. Add on learning to perform with style and musicianship.
 4. Learn to synthesize these steps into a sight reading performance.
 5. Learn to apply the skills in real time on real music the first time...and every time.

Description of the A-B-C process.

- I. **Layered approach**—Breaks down the skills into easily digested, layered steps, adding them into the reading skill mix one at a time, so as not to overwhelm students with too much information all at once.
- II. **Soundbite pedagogy**—Provides short, concise, and clear explanations of each step, which prevent students from getting bogged down in large and complicated descriptions.
- III. **Looping**—Provides opportunity for feedback, review, and repetition as needed.

A-B-C process with the full band.

All excerpts are from **The Art IN Sight Reading**, but the process may be applied to any music.

Flute

7. Eighth in Line

A. Perform this line. Look ahead  while reading.

Andante

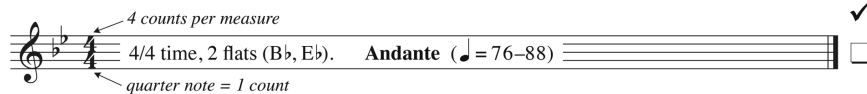


B. Study line 1, then play lines 2-7. ✓ each completed line.

1 Map

Observe time and key signatures, tempos, repeats, etc.

4 counts per measure
4/4 time, 2 flats (B $\flat$, E $\flat$). Andante (♩ = 76-88)
quarter note = 1 count


☐

2 Pitch

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

simile
find and finger the B's and E's before playing


☐

3 Rhythm

Tap foot and count. Then tap foot and play.


☐

4 Pitch & Rhythm

Combine lines 2 + 3, pitch and rhythm.


☐

5a Articulation

slur:
Connect slurred notes while maintaining steady air stream.


☐

5b Articulation

staccato:
Separate staccato notes.

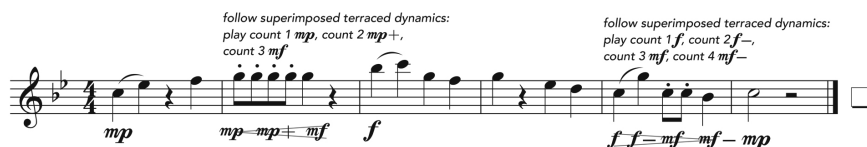

☐

6 Dynamics

static & fluid:
Static = maintain consistent volume until next change.
Fluid = make incremental volume changes over time.

follow superimposed terraced dynamics:
play count 1 *mp*, count 2 *mp*+, count 3 *mf*
mp *mp* *mf* *f*

follow superimposed terraced dynamics:
play count 1 *f*, count 2 *f*-, count 3 *mf*, count 4 *mf*-
f *f* *mf* *mf* *mp*


☐

7 Style/Musicianship

espressivo:
Perform expressively. Observe rit. (ritardando) = gradually slower while watching conductor.

mp espressivo with passion *f* *rit.* *mp*


☐

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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Snare Drum

7. Eighth in Line

A. Perform this line. Look ahead  while reading.

Andante



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

1 Map

Observe time signatures, tempos, repeats, etc.

4 counts per measure
4/4 time. Andante (♩ = 76-88)
quarter note = 1 count


☐

2 Pitch/Sticking

Create resonant tone while matching balance and blend. Observe stickings.

R L R L simile R L R L R R L R L R L R L


☐

3 Rhythm

Tap foot and count. Then tap foot and play.

R L L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

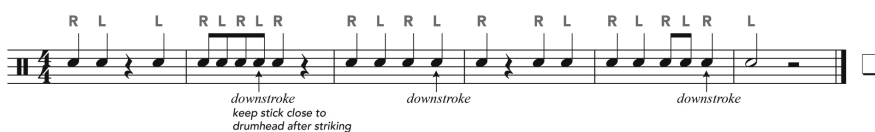

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4 Pitch & Rhythm

flam prep:

Play downstroke where indicated to position stick for grace note. Create resonant tone.

R L L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L


☐

5a/b Articulation

flam:

Start grace note stick close to drumhead. Start primary stroke stick higher.

R L L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L


☐

6 Dynamics

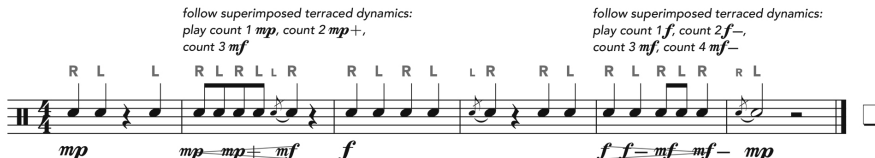
static & fluid:

Static = maintain consistent volume until next change. Fluid = make incremental volume changes over time.

follow superimposed terraced dynamics: play count 1 mp, count 2 mp+, count 3 mf

follow superimposed terraced dynamics: play count 1 f, count 2 f-, count 3 mf, count 4 mf-

mp mp-mf mf f f f-mf mf- mp


☐

7 Style/Musicianship

espressivo:

Perform expressively. Observe rit. (ritardando) = gradually slower while watching conductor.

mp espressivo with passion f rit. mp


☐

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 the initial exercise (line A).

First reading experience of the exercise/excerpt; a pre-test of sorts.

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/touch the notes found from the key signature.
- ☐ Play and hold each note while listening for accuracy, tone, pitch, blend, and balance.
- ☐ Establish accurate percussion sticking and basic roll strokes.

3 Rhythm

- ☐ Count and clap the rhythm while tapping foot, then tap foot and play (foot tapping will eventually become internalized).
- ☐ Observe fermatas, caesuras, and phrase marks.

4 Pitch & Rhythm

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

5 Articulation (and Rudiments for Percussion)

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

6 Dynamics

- ☐ Observe both static and fluid dynamic indicators.
- ☐ Observe the technique for terracing fluid dynamics.
- ☐ Observe 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 indications is as important as playing the correct notes and rhythms.
- ☐ Understand that ultimately, MUSICIANSHIP is why we do everything else.

C. Perform the initial exercise (line A) again.

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

Percussion roll pedagogy in the A-B-C process.

Snare Drum

3. Telegraph

A. Perform this line. Look ahead while reading.

Allegretto
 1 2 3 4 5 6
p elegante f p

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

4 counts per measure
 4/4 time. **Allegretto** (♩ = 100-108)
 quarter note = 1 count

1 Map
 Observe time signatures, tempos, repeats, etc.

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

3 Rhythm
 Tap foot and count. Then tap foot and play.

4 Pitch & Rhythm roll prep 1:
 Subdivide whole note in m. 4 into eighth note primary strokes and tap/air-stick as shown. Create resonant tone.

5a Articulation roll prep 2:
 Play primary (roll) strokes in m. 4.

5b Articulation roll:
 Buzz primary (roll) strokes in m. 4.

6 Dynamics static:
 Maintain consistent volume until next change. Observe roll notation.

7 Style/Musicianship elegante:
 Perform in an elegant and graceful manner. Use rapid sticking to musically smooth out roll in m. 4.

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

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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.

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.

Mallets

3. Telegraph

A. Perform this line. Look ahead while reading.

Allegretto
 1 2 3 4 5 6
elegante f p

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

4 counts per measure
 4/4 time, 2 flats (B♭, E♭). **Allegretto** (♩ = 100-108)
 quarter note = 1 count

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

3 Rhythm
 Tap foot and count. Then tap foot and play.

4 Pitch & Rhythm roll prep 1:
 Combine lines 2 + 3, pitch and rhythm. Subdivide whole note in m. 4 into eighth note primary strokes and tap/air-stick as shown.

5a/b Articulation roll prep 2:
 Play primary (roll) strokes in m. 4.

6 Dynamics static:
 Maintain consistent volume until next change. Observe roll notation.

7 Style/Musicianship elegante:
 Perform in an elegant and graceful manner. Use rapid single strokes to musically smooth out roll in m. 4.

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

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Applying the A-B-C process to performance repertoire.

A. Select and perform a phrase of music.

Select a specific phrase in performance music. The band performs that phrase while utilizing one of the following options:

- ☐ **Option 1**—unison worksheet. Isolate one part and work it with the entire ensemble.
- ☐ **Option 2**—isolated excerpt to be worked in sectionals.
- ☐ **Option 3**—mixed part group performance, where students perform each step as an entire ensemble regardless of differentiated parts.

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

Apply the layered **A-B-C** approach to option 1, 2, or 3 above.

- 1 Map** **2 Pitch/Sticking*** **3 Rhythm** **4 Pitch & Rhythm** **5 Articulation** **6 Dynamics** **7 Style/Musicianship**

*When utilizing option 3, ask students to work independently within the large group context while defining pitches and sticking.

C. Perform the excerpt again.

Ask students to play the excerpt again while utilizing new-found knowledge and skills gained in the layered approach. Repeat and loop as necessary.

Conclusions.

- I. The more experience that students gain from using the **A-B-C** method, the less they will actually need to use it, because they will eventually synergize all of the layered skills, while becoming independent and artistic sight readers.
- II. The **A-B-C** system 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.
- III. This is all possible through their **A-B-C** journey to find...

The Art IN Sight Reading!

Thank you for attending! Happy Holidays!!

About the Clinicians.

David Morrison



For nearly three decades, David Morrison built and maintained a nationally recognized band program at Prospect High School in Mt. Prospect, Illinois. Under his direction, both the Symphonic and Marching Bands consistently achieved top honors at state and national competitions.

During his 50-year teaching career, Mr. Morrison worked with bands ranging from beginners to college graduates. His ensembles have performed in both the Tournament of Roses Parade and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, as well as for U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. After retiring from public school teaching, Mr. Morrison was named director of bands at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Mr. Morrison's honors include the John Paynter Lifetime Achievement Award, the John Philip Sousa Foundation Legion of Honor Award, and the Phi Beta Mu Bandmasters Hall of Fame recognition. In 2003, he was named Illinois Teacher of the Year. He has been published in numerous music education periodicals, has presented at the Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra Conference in Chicago, and remains active as a guest conductor, clinician, and adjudicator both nationally and internationally.

Judy Morrison



Judy Morrison teaches music students ranging from beginners to college graduates. Mrs. Morrison currently instructs private clarinet and bass clarinet students in the United States and internationally, where she consistently guides her pupils to top positions in their respective school ensembles and honors organizations. Many of her students have gone on to attend premiere music schools and symposiums, ultimately becoming professional music educators and performers themselves.

During her career, Mrs. Morrison also taught band, choir, and general music classes. Most recently, she conducted clarinet choirs and coached woodwind ensembles at nationally acclaimed Ronald Reagan High School in San Antonio, Texas, and John Hersey High School in Arlington Heights, Illinois. She also worked with private students, chamber ensembles, and woodwind sections while assisting her husband, David, with his highly acclaimed band program at Prospect High School in Mt. Prospect, Illinois. Mrs. Morrison is an active clinician, coach, and adjudicator.

David and Judy Morrison are co-authors of ***The Art IN Sight Reading—A Layered Approach to Accurate and Artistic Sight Reading for Band.***

Also by David Morrison: ***The Band Whisperer—A Practical Guide to Making Beautiful Music.***

Both are published by the Neil A. Kjos Music Company (www.kjos.com).