



Seven Habits for Highly Effective Memorisation

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Develop the Habit of Understanding the Keyboard Memory Process

Secure memorising uses as many as possible of the different learning styles. All too often, students rely only on the tactile (physical) learning style, but used alone it is very unreliable when performing. Obviously the fingers must be trained to the utmost degree of proficiency but there should be the integration with other learning styles as well. Memory errors can be avoided by having accurate mental intent before playing. Incorrect notes and rhythms must be avoided in the first steps of learning the piece. Careful and accurate practice will lead to careful and accurate memory. A kind of 'automatic pilot' results when there are numerous repetitions of a thought, a physical gesture or a musical feeling. Therefore the student must be very careful about what information is to become part of their reflexes. This will include fingering and all other aspects of keyboard technique.

Learning styles to be incorporated in the memory process:

Visual

The accurate and complete reading of all elements in the score as well as the keyboard geography of the music. A few students also have photographic memory of the score, but it is very rare. More likely is the memory of where the passage occurs of the page.

Aural

The ear must anticipate and recognise the correct notes and rhythms while also being aware of articulation and the phrasing and dynamics implied in the score.

Tactile

(Kinaesthetic, physical) The training of the fingers, wrist, arms and upper torso in physical gestures that will result in technical security and musical projection.

Intellectual

The understanding of the theoretical basis of the music such as the key of the piece, the scale and chord progressions in that key, rhythmic patterns (including rests), melodic patterns, similarities and differences in the section being memorised and overall form of the piece.

Emotional

Think about and understand the mood of the piece. Memorise the emotion felt when playing specific phrases because that emotion will be communicated to the listener during a performance.

Develop the Habit of Setting Realistic Goals for Each Memory-Practice Session

It is better to achieve memory security of a few phrases than to have a hazy grasp of many phrases or a section or the entire piece. Time is actually saved by deciding to concentrate on a small accessible goal. Including the bar before and following the phrase being memorised. Then memorise the next phrase in the same way. Play the two memorised phrases plus one bar of the third phrase and so on. This process is very valuable in developing continuity. Always keep in mind that memory-practice concentrates first on detail, while playing a piece from memory focuses on the piece as a whole.

Develop the Habit of Constantly Improving Keyboard Techniques so that the Technical Requirements will be Possible in the Piece being Memorised

Music is built from scales, chord progressions, arpeggios and rhythmic patterns. Therefore the student should become very familiar with all these elements of the piece. Smooth scale and arpeggio techniques are essential if they occur in the piece being memorised. Scale fragments are easy to memorise and block or broken chords are also easily identified and retained. It is very important that the technique required of the piece be within the student's current potential. Serious memory problems occur when technical passages are too difficult. Muscular damage can also result.

Develop the Habit of Musical Listening and Musical Projection as the Process of Memory-Practice Unfolds

Make a 'musical map' of the piece. Including such elements as dynamics, balance between the melodic line and the accompaniment, bringing out the soprano melody within chords and bringing out the bass line.

Develop the Habit of Doing these Memory-Practice Steps at the Piano

- Memorise the fingering absolutely
- Block all arpeggios and broken chords
- Cluster practise all passage work
- Hands alone practise leading to hands alone memory of specific passages

This last concept is particularly important in contrapuntal music and in pieces with wide skips. Memory slips sometimes occur when there is a wide skip, so special attention should be given to memorising large intervals.

- Care should be taken with areas that are very easy technically. Often they remain only at the tactile memory level, so they are particularly subject to memory slips.
- Connecting phrases should be carefully memorised because a memory slip there, can lead the performer to the wrong section or the wrong ending.
- Half-speed memory is very revealing because there is no momentum to carry the fingers mindlessly forward.
- Be able to start the pieces at specific places.
- In tempo, play only the first beats of the piece.

Develop the Habit of Doing these Memory Practice Steps Away from the Piano

- Study the score away from the piano while 'hearing' the tones you plan to produce later
- Mark all key changes.
- Write the harmonic movement in the score.
- Search for accidentals. What is their function?
- Search for rests. Be aware of the power of silence.
- Notice similarities and differences in the melodic line.
- Sitting silently, imagine the physical gestures you would use to play the piece, but no finger actually moves.
- 'Play' the piece of wood of the piano, using all the gestures you would use if actually playing the piece.
- Play the piece in the air, holding the hands at keyboard level.
- Say the note names of the pieces aloud without playing.