One Step at a Time

Step One: Learn It!
- Identify the time signature and key signature.
- Look for patterns, label the sections.
- Choose a steady tempo and clap and count the rhythm of the piece.
- Play through the piece slowly; stop and mark trouble spots.
- Work extra hard on trouble spots; write in fingering, play slowly, play hands separately.

Step Two: Memorize It!
- Memorize one section at a time.
- Look for chords, intervals, patterns, any little clues to help your brain remember what to play next!
- Try playing each hand separately by memory.
- Move away from the piano; try closing your eyes and imagining yourself playing your piece.
- If you’ve really got it memorized, you should be able to write your piece out on manuscript paper without looking at it!

Step Three: Polish It!
- Bring out the different dynamic markings.
- Make sure your touch is appropriate – staccato, legato, etc.
- Think of what kind of a mood the piece should convey.
- LISTEN to yourself!

Step Four: Evaluate It!
- Did you convey the overall mood of the piece?
- Was the melody clearly projected?
- Were your notes and rhythms accurate?
- Were you able to play though the whole piece without pausing?
- Was the tempo appropriate?
- Were the dynamics appropriate?
- Was the touch appropriate? Did you play staccato and/or legato as indicated?
- Did your phrases breathe? Did you end the phrases nicely?
- Did the pedaling support the music?