

Milestones to Musical Mastery

1. Pre-trip Preparation

- ❑ Silent Study – have a good understanding of the piece before you begin playing it
 - Who is the composer?
 - During which musical time period was it composed?
 - What does the title of the piece indicate?
 - What is the time signature?
 - What is the key signature/key?
 - What is the tempo?
 - What are the musical markings? (Use a music dictionary, if necessary.)
 - What is the form? (AB, ABA, Introduction, Coda, Repeats, D.C. al fine, etc.)
 - Are there chord patterns? Scale passages?
 - Where is the melody?
 - What kind of accompaniment is used?
 - What is the starting hand position? Does the position change?
- ❑ Sight-Read
 - Set a very slow, steady tempo.
 - Play from beginning to end.
 - Try not to stop, repeat, or pause. Leave out notes, if necessary, but keep going.
 - Listen carefully and remember where you experience difficulties.
- ❑ Mark Trouble Spots
 - Divide the piece into and mark practice sections.
 - Use a pencil to mark specific trouble spots so you know which areas need more attention.
 - Determine what makes it a trouble spot so you know how to practice effectively. Rhythm? Fingering? Tricky notes? Jumps?

2. Master Notes, Rhythm, & Fingering

- ❑ Practice what you don't know...not what you already know!
- ❑ Practice slowly and carefully. Learn everything correctly the first time!
- ❑ Practice smart! Determine the best solution for trouble spots:
 - ALL – play hands separately, then together
 - FINGERING – pencil in comfortable fingering and use the same fingering all the time.
 - RHYTHM – pencil in rhythm and clap or tap while counting aloud.
 - DIFFICULT PASSAGES – use alternate rhythms, dynamics, articulation. Block chord patterns. Play slowly with the metronome.
 - POSITION CHANGES – practice moving hands silently to next position. Practice without looking – memorize how it feels.
- ❑ Build bridges by adding sections prior to and following trouble spots.
- ❑ Continue practicing practice sections individually, gradually connecting entire piece.
- ❑ Play the piece from beginning to end, listening for improvements and any remaining trouble spots.

3. Master Dynamics, Articulation, & Pedaling

- ❑ Make sure you understand all markings.
- ❑ Shape each phrase, giving direction to the music.
- ❑ Listen for proper balance between melody and accompaniment.
- ❑ For pedaling, practice left hand alone with pedal.

4. Master Interpretation & Tempo

- ❑ Gradually increase tempo. (Use a metronome, moving up 1 notch at a time.)
- ❑ Convey the mood and style of the piece. Is it Baroque? Classical? Romantic? Impressionistic? Contemporary? Other?
- ❑ Create a visual picture or story to go with the music.
- ❑ Add your own flare and spirit!

5. Master Memorization

- ❑ Memorize each practice section individually.
- ❑ Test for secure memory using these ideas:
 - Play only every other measure, “playing” the in between ones in your mind.
 - Play hands separately.
 - Play at a very slow tempo.
 - Play the practice sections in a “mixed-up” order.