

**Developing pedagogical material for piano  
sight-reading, for the context of Greek  
Conservatoire music education**

**Eleni Perisynaki**

**PhD**

**University of York**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research explores sight-reading in the context of Greek Conservatoire music education, leading to the creation of the first resources for sight-reading developed in Greece, focusing on the piano. Two books have been created to support teachers and piano beginner learners in Greece in developing sight-reading skills, addressing the absence of sight-reading resources and curriculum. An examination of formal regulation documents of Greek Conservatoires revealed no references to sight-reading except for assessment in the advanced levels, and there is no sight-reading curriculum available for any instrument in this context.

A preliminary survey, informed by sight-reading literature, explored the perceptions of instrumental teachers from one specific Greek Conservatoire. Building on findings from previous personal research with pianists, this provided insights towards practices for further instruments; the need for resources and curricula was also highlighted. A comparative analysis of sight-reading within the piano syllabi of international examination boards revealed parameters of a structured sight-reading curriculum. The principles and pedagogical underpinnings of my material were also informed by a review of piano sight-reading publications and by interviews with authors of sight-reading resources, who reflected on their creative experiences. Two sight-reading books for piano beginners were created and appraised by piano teachers in Greece and beyond, through an evaluative survey.

The different steps of the research contributed to creating a systematic framework and curriculum for developing sight-reading skills, from the beginner levels upwards. The pedagogical considerations of the devised resources, and the inclusion of cultural elements and music by under-represented composers, extend the discussion concerning equality, diversity, and inclusion, to sight-reading. The material addresses the pertinent need for resources and curriculum, initiating change in sight-reading pedagogy in Greece, with implications for the development of further material for the piano and other instruments, as well as for the Greek context and the wider domain.



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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author of the material. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. Study 1 has built on findings from previous personal research with pianists by extending the research questions to other instruments; this is made clear and acknowledged within the thesis. All sources are acknowledged as references. The content of the thesis, including the devised resources, are unpublished to date; I intend to submit a version of Chapters 5 and 6 for publication in academic journals, and envisage publishing the devised books as music education resources in Greece.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

In this chapter, the research context is introduced and discussed in relation to my previous experience as a learner and as an active instrumental music teacher in a Greek Conservatoire, where part of the present research was undertaken. The research purpose is explained, and the research context (a music Conservatoire in Greece) is introduced. The operating regulations of Greek Conservatoires regarding sight-reading are examined, justifying the necessity for further research in the field and the need for sight-reading resources.

### **1.1 Introduction of the researcher and research focus**

The focus of my research is to investigate practical parameters related to sight-reading in practice, within the context of Greek Conservatoire music education. My main interest is to explore sight-reading teaching within this context, aiming to develop relevant teaching resources for sight-reading, addressed to music teachers and piano learners in Greece.

My interest in this field was first sparked as a music learner, during my piano studies in a local music Conservatoire. As a music student, I was never taught sight-reading, despite it being described as a compulsory module of piano studies within the formal Conservatoire operating regulations (further details on the regulations are provided in section 1.3.3 and in Appendix 1). Despite of this lack of guidance and with little to no preparation, I was assessed in sight-reading through a relevant examination which took place approximately six months before the final exams for my degree in piano performance<sup>1</sup>.

My interest in this topic persisted during my postgraduate studies at the University of York for a Master's degree in Music Education, in the course Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching, which I commenced having had two years of experience in private piano teaching. During my studies, I became familiar

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<sup>1</sup> In the Greek Conservatoire system, a student is eligible for exams leading to a (piano) performance degree after completing the required years of study, as described in Table 1.1 in section 1.3.2 of this Chapter.

with approaches to sight-reading which were far from what I had experienced as a learner. I was surprised to realise that the development of sight-reading skills was an integral part of music tuition, and that sight-reading teaching seemed to be provided from the very first levels of instrumental studies in the UK, supported with sight-reading curricula and resources, ranging from graded books to digital material such as sight-reading apps. The plethora of available sight-reading publications with or without links to music examination boards (e.g. skill development material and specific examination board sight-reading specimen test books) was particularly astonishing, as I was not aware of any sight-reading resources in my home country.

The necessity for further research on sight-reading in this context became evident to me through personal reflection on these two vastly contrasting experiences: my experience as a postgraduate student and piano teacher in the UK, where sight-reading teaching is facilitated and supported, as opposed to my 'no-sight-reading training' experience as a piano learner. In order to acquire some understanding of this area of Greek Conservatoire education, I explored Greek piano teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards sight-reading through a small-scale research project during my MA studies<sup>2</sup>. This exploration of piano teachers' views indicated strong feelings of uncertainty regarding their role in sight-reading teaching. Teachers attributed this uncertainty to the content of the operating regulations relating to sight-reading, as no guidelines in terms of methods, curriculum, resources and teaching and examination processes are provided. In addition, the lack of any Greek sight-reading resources, such as books containing sight-reading pieces or sight-reading method books, was a significant issue mentioned by the piano teachers, highlighting the necessity for the development of relevant educational material.

My engagement with this topic through practical research strengthened my interest in the field and led to the establishment of a sight-reading class addressed to advanced piano students in the Conservatoire in which I became a piano and theory

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<sup>2</sup> This research was undertaken for my assessment for Module 3 in the University of York MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal teaching, for which I undertook an original research project exploring piano teachers' perceptions towards sight-reading in the same Greek Conservatoire and elements of sight-reading teaching in individual piano lessons, through interviews with the piano teachers and non-participant observation of the lessons. A copy of [this submission](#) can be accessed online.

teacher and accompanist, after my return to Greece. This was a personal initiative which was informed through my observation of advanced level students' lessons during the above-mentioned research project. In the observed advanced lessons, sight-reading was barely included; time limitations, focus on repertoire, lack of resources and of practical and methodological guidelines, were acknowledged by the piano teachers. Therefore, I proposed the provision of sight-reading training to the three piano students who were learning the piano with other piano teachers and were in their second year of their advanced studies at the time, in order to facilitate the development of sight-reading skills in preparation for their sight-reading assessment in the subsequent (final) year of their study. These three advanced students received specific sight-reading training from me for approximately one and a half academic years, through both group and one-to-one lessons which took place initially every other week and later, during the final term before their sight-reading assessment, on a weekly basis. In this initiative, the overall level of sight-reading skills and confidence in this area was initially observed as low, but students demonstrated significant individual progress throughout the course of the training. Although this does not intend to imply that they became experts in sight-reading, the development of their sight-reading skills was obvious by the end of the intervention, and they did receive preparation in aid for their sight-reading exam, as opposed to my personal experience as a learner.

My experiences, as described above, led me to a more detailed examination of the existing operating regulations of Greek Conservatoires which generated various questions, arising from the philosophy and the content of sight-reading statements within the regulations. As illustrated in the present Chapter (section 1.3.3), although sight-reading is stated as a compulsory module of instrumental studies, it is mentioned mainly as part of the curriculum of the advanced levels of study, suggesting that no previous teaching for the training of relevant skills, or sight-reading assessments, are provided. In addition, the absence of any further statements in terms of practical aspects of sight-reading, in agreement with those mentioned by the piano teachers, creates a vague context in terms of sight-reading teaching with potential impact on instrumental teachers' practices as well as on institutional (Conservatoire) policies.

Further details on sight-reading in practice and the necessity for further research are discussed in section 1.4.

## **1.2 The research purpose**

Based on the above personal experience as a piano learner, postgraduate student, and Conservatoire teacher, and through insights developed from previous personal research and discussions with colleagues in my home country and in the UK, the purpose of this research is to develop educational material for piano sight-reading in the Greek context. Considering in particular the absence of resources in my home country and the framework for sight-reading in Conservatoire music education in Greece according to the operating documents (detailed in section 1.3.3), I arrived at a primary, overarching aim (a):

- (a) To create sight-reading material addressed to piano learners in Greece, to support learners and piano teachers in the process of developing their/their pupils' sight-reading skill, starting from the early levels of piano studies.

To achieve this overarching aim, the following further aims were established:

- (b) To acquire an in-depth understanding of the existing framework in Greek Conservatoires.
- (c) To examine instrumental teachers' perceptions of practical aspects of sight-reading tuition in this context.
- (d) To explore the creative experiences of international authors<sup>3</sup> of sight-reading publications to inform the process of my material creation.
- (e) To review existing publications of sight-reading material, as well as the sight-reading specifications within international exam boards' piano syllabi to acquire insights concerning relevant principles and criteria.
- (f) (After creating the material) to collect feedback on the devised sight-reading material, also identifying areas for improvement within this material.

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'author(s)' has been utilised when referring to the creators of sight-reading publications within this thesis, instead of 'composers', as it encompasses the variety of material in their books, thus including non-musical material as well as the compositional content

To achieve these aims, three research projects have been deployed alongside a comparative analysis of sight-reading in examination boards' piano syllabi and a review of piano sight-reading publications: Study 1 explores Greek Conservatoire instrumental teachers' attitudes towards sight-reading; Study 2 explores international authors' reflections on their experience in creating sight-reading material, to inform my creative process; Study 3 is an evaluative survey where Greek and international piano teachers reviewed the sight-reading material I devised for this thesis (the two sight-reading books presented in Appendix 6). The three studies are presented in greater detail in Chapter 4. The research questions of the present thesis, to which these studies are aligned, are detailed in Chapter 2.

The following section (1.3) details the research context, introducing the Conservatoire where part of this research has been undertaken (1.3.1), explaining the levels of instrumental studies (1.3.2), and specifying the operational regulations relating to sight-reading (1.3.3). Within this framework, the necessity for further research on the topic is also analysed (section 1.4.).

## **1.3 The research context**

The following sections explain the research context. In section 1.3.1, the Greek Conservatoire is introduced, where part of the present research has been undertaken, while section 1.3.2 details the different levels of instrumental studies in Greek Conservatoire education. The specifications relating to sight-reading within the operating regulations of Greek Conservatoires are also outlined (section 1.3.3) in order to create a more holistic perspective towards sight-reading within this context.

### **1.3.1 The Conservatoire**

In contrast to UK Conservatoires which are selective institutions for high level talent development in their junior and senior departments, Conservatoires in Greece are more widespread and more regional institutions, providing music education to learners of all levels and ages.

Part of the present research was conducted with instrumental teachers working in a Greek Conservatoire situated in the region of Crete, where I am also teaching the piano. While the conservatoire might be identifiable due to my position

as a music teacher and online presence due to the online activity of the institution (i.e. in social media), I have endeavoured to ensure that the reputation of the Conservatoire would not be compromised in any way through the research, and participants were assured of their anonymity within this research. Ethical considerations and my reflection on my position as an insider-researcher in the Conservatoire are explained in Chapter 4.

The Conservatoire was founded in 2013, by its owner and Principal, who is a conductor, composer, and former member of the Greek Composers Union (GCU). Similarly to all music Conservatoires in Greece, this Conservatoire operates with permission of the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports and applies the operating regulations presented in the following section (1.3.3). The Conservatoire has around 200 students each year, who can participate in both formal and informal performance recitals with ensembles including Youth Orchestra, Junior Orchestra, Woodwind Ensemble, Brass Ensemble, String Ensemble, Advanced Guitar Ensemble, Junior Guitar Ensemble and the Children and Youth Choir. Further collaborations are organised by teachers or students (such as duets, trios, chamber music), or solo performance opportunities. Teaching staff includes teachers of various Western as well as Greek and Cretan traditional instruments, who provide weekly individual lessons within the conservatoire facilities. Group theory, harmony and music history lessons are provided, separately to the instrumental lessons, depending on students' level of instrumental studies.

At the start of the present research, the teaching staff of the Conservatoire consisted of the following active instrumental/vocal teachers: five piano teachers, two violin teachers, one cello teacher, two flute teachers, one clarinet teacher, one trumpet teacher, four classical guitar teachers, one vocal teacher, one percussion teacher (for modern drums and traditional percussion), one mandolin teacher (traditional), one bouzouki teacher (traditional), one Cretan lyra teacher (traditional), one electric keyboard teacher, one electric guitar teacher and one accordion teacher. Further teachers have had occasional collaboration with the Conservatoire (visiting from Athens) for instruments such as the viola, the oboe, the bassoon, and the trombone; however, there were no students of these instruments at the time.

### 1.3.2 Levels of instrumental studies

In Greek Conservatoires there are four levels of instrumental studies: Junior Beginner, Senior Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced (as translated by the researcher). The number of years per level of study does not depend on pupils' age and is not standardised for all instruments. It is possible for a pupil to remain in the same level for more years than those stated in the regulations, depending on their progress and on their exam results. After completing their advanced instrumental studies, learners are eligible for Degree exams in performance and, for those who opt for studies beyond the degree, for Diploma exams. In some cases, mainly regarding orchestral instruments, the award of a 'direct Diploma' in performance is also possible, without obtaining a performance Degree first. Table 1.1 illustrates the years of study per level as stated within the regulation documents in order to facilitate a more detailed understanding of instrumental studies within this context (Royal Decree 1957/229; Ministerial Decision 1987/500; Ministerial Decision 2007/1913).

Table 1.1 Years of study per instrumental level for each instrument

Type of Instrument	Years of study per instrumental level			
	Junior Beginner	Senior Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Piano / Violin / Guitar	2 years	3 years	3 years	3-4 years
Viola / Cello	2 years	2 years	3 years	3-4 years (viola), 3 years (cello)
Flute / Clarinet / Horn	1 year	2 years	2 years	3 years
Oboe / Bassoon	1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years
Saxophone	1-2 years	2-3 years	2-3 years	3-5 years
Double Bass	1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years
Trumpet / Tuba / Trombone	1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years
Percussion	No levels of study mentioned, only the statement: '2 years of study' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s.3, para. 226, p. 1753)			



### 1.3.3 Sight-reading within Greek Conservatoire operating regulations

This section provides an overview of the current operating regulations of Greek Conservatoires. In Greece, instrumental and theoretical music tuition within music Conservatoires has been determined since 1942 through a series of Royal Decrees, legislative Decrees and complementary legal frameworks released in later years, with further clarifications on specific aspects. The first example of formal operating regulations for Greek Conservatoires is the 1942 legislative Degree, regarding the ‘organisation and function of Thessaloniki Conservatoire’ – today known as ‘State Conservatory of Thessaloniki’ (Legislative Decree 1942/1445, s.2, pp. 884-888), which focuses on administrative and general matters, such as administration or teaching staff qualifications, without referring to processes or instrumental teaching practices.

Following this, the 1957 Royal Decree established the internal regulations of the same institution, addressing practical aspects of instrumental and vocal teaching, such as elements of the curriculum for each instrument, general modules of study and examinations (Royal Decree 1957/229, pp. 1735-1756). Regarding private music Conservatoires (meaning, Conservatoires which are not owned/operated by the state but are private enterprises, such as the institution described in section 1.3), the 1966 Royal Decree states the conditions for ‘the establishment of private music institutions’ (Royal Decree 1966/16, s.1, pp. 35-39), where brief references to aspects of music tuition are included, such as a list of the general modules for the students of any instrument. Finally, for aspects such as examinations, attendance and students’ responsibilities, it is stated that the regulations of the 1957 Royal Decree for the Thessaloniki Conservatoire apply (Royal Decree 1966/16, s.1, para. 13(2), p. 38).

According to the 1957 and 1966 operating regulations of Conservatoires, sight-reading – also understood by the term *prima vista* – is one of the general, compulsory modules of instrumental studies. More specifically, in the 1957 Royal Decree, sight-reading is mentioned among the following ‘general’, ‘compulsory’ modules: ‘Music theory, Solfège, Music dictation, Harmony, History of music [...], Musical forms and analysis, Counterpoint [...], Piano, **Sight-reading**, Transposition [...]’. (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 1, para. 1, p. 1736). Along the same lines, the 1966 Royal Decree states that:

all students [...] are obliged to attend the following modules of general education, irrespective of their area of specialisation [...]: 1) Music Theory, 2) Solfège, 3) music dictation, 4) **sight-reading** (*prima vista*), 5) harmony, 6) history of music, 7) piano (to an intermediate level), 8) practical teaching. (Royal Decree 1966/16, s.1, para. 10(2), p. 37).

In addition to the above extracts, any statements within the formal documents of regulations regarding instrumental sight-reading are presented in the researcher's translation in Table 1.2 below, categorised per instrument, to provide a clearer idea of the philosophy of the principles regarding sight-reading. Further details on the relevant sections as well as on the compulsory modules of each instrument are presented in Appendix 1.

Table 1.2 Sight-reading within the Greek Conservatoire formal regulations

<b>Sight-reading within the Greek Conservatoire formal operating regulations</b>				
<b>Instrument</b>	<b>General Module (GM)/ Not stated (NS)</b>	<b>Mentioned specifically (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Starting point/ Not stated (-)</b>	<b>Statements within the regulations</b>
Piano	GM	Yes	Advanced level: Year 2	'6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced level of study' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 91, p. 1744)
Organ	GM	Yes	Advanced level: Year 2	'6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced level of study' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 100, p. 1745)
Harp	GM	No	–	General modules: 'same as the piano' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 112, p. 1746)
Violin	GM	Yes	Advanced level: Year 2	'6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced level of study' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 122, p. 1747)
Viola	GM	No	–	General modules: 'same as the Violin' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 133, p. 1747)
Violoncello	GM	No	–	General modules: 'same as the Violin studies' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 142, p. 1748)
Double Bass	GM	No	–	General modules: 'same as the Violin' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 151, p. 1749)
Flute	GM	Yes	–	'5. Sight-reading' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 160, p. 1749)
Oboe	GM	Yes	Advanced level	'5. exercises in sight-reading and transposition' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 168, p. 1750)
Clarinet	GM	Yes	Advanced level	'9. exercises in sight-reading and transposition' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 177, p. 1750)

Sight-reading within the Greek Conservatoire formal operating regulations				
Bassoon	GM	Yes	Advanced level	'6. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 186, p. 1751)
Horn	GM	Yes	a. Intermediate b. Advanced	a: '8. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition' b: '5. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 194, 196, p. 1751)
Trumpet	GM	Yes	a. Intermediate b. Advanced	a: '5. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition' b: '8. Études for sight-reading and transposition for orchestra' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 203, p. 1751; para. 205, p. 1752)
Trombone	GM	No	–	General modules: 'same as the flute' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 215, p. 1752)
Tuba	GM	Yes	Intermediate	General modules: 'same as the flute' '3. Sight-reading' (within the intermediate level description) (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 221, p. 1753)
Percussion	GM	Yes	–	'2. Sight-reading' (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 227, p. 1753)
Guitar	NS – part of curriculum in each level	Yes	a. Junior Beginner b. Senior Beginner c. Intermediate	a: '5. PRIMA VISTA performance on guitar of the current Solfège exercises in the treble clef' b: '5. Sight-performance on the guitar of the current Solfège exercises in the treble and bass clefs' c: '5. Sight-performance on the guitar of the highest level Solfège exercises in all clefs –including treble, bass, alto, tenor and mezzo soprano clefs' (Ministerial Decision 1987/500, s. 8, para. 3, 5, 7, p. 4980)
Saxophone	GM	Yes	–	'6. Sight-reading, one (1) level' (Ministerial Decision 2007/1913, s. 2, para.3, p. 27205)

The regulation statements presented in Table 1.2 demonstrate a lack of a uniform policy or rationale towards sight-reading tuition across the various instruments, combined with an absence of articulated educational purposes. For some instruments, such as the piano and the violin, the starting point of sight-reading is specified – ‘from the second year of the Advanced level of study’ (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 91, p. 1744; para. 122, p. 1747). However, for other instruments such as the remaining string instruments, the statement ‘same as the violin’ is mentioned in terms of the general modules (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 133, p. 1747; para. 142, p. 1748; para.151, p. 1749), thereby leading to the assumption that the starting point of sight-reading is the same as the violin, namely the second year of advanced studies. The same applies to the trombone and the tuba, where general modules, including sight-reading, are described as ‘same as the flute’ despite significant differences between these instruments in terms of construction (brass – woodwind), technique, timbre, artistic function (bass – treble instruments), and repertoire needs, among other factors (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 215, p. 1752; para. 221, p. 1753).

In addition, discrepancies are evident in terms of the level in which sight-reading starts. For most instruments this is mentioned during the advanced level of studies (piano, organ, violin, strings). Similarly to the piano, for woodwind instruments, sight-reading is included within the advanced level of studies (except for the flute, for which this is not specified), along with exercises in transposition (oboe, clarinet, bassoon). Sight-reading and transposition exercises are also stated for the horn and the trumpet, where reference to sight-reading is made in both the intermediate and the advanced levels. For the tuba, sight-reading is mentioned only in the description of the intermediate studies, without being included in the advanced levels. In the later set of regulations (1987), performance at sight for the guitar is mentioned within the curriculum for every level of study (Junior, Senior Beginner and Intermediate); however, sight-reading is not stated for the advanced level, and it is also not specified as a general module; for the saxophone there are no relevant explanations besides that sight-reading lasts for one level. Finally, no statements are included in the official regulation documents relating to the assessment of sight-reading for different levels.

This generates numerous questions regarding the rationale underpinning the regulations, and instrumental teachers' role within this context: why are there discrepancies between instruments and how are these justified? Does the inclusion of sight-reading within the curriculum of early levels of the guitar (1987) reflect change in the philosophy of the regulations in terms of sight-reading provision? Are the teachers aware of any underlying principles, as these are not included within the regulations? And if so, how are these communicated to teachers, considering the absence of resources and sight-reading curriculum? Are there specific educational purposes and aims implied through the relevant statements? Why are there no statements regarding sight-reading assessment, considering that this is a compulsory module? Who is responsible for these and how is the teaching and the examination process determined and carried out?

Such questions highlight the necessity for research in the field of Conservatoire music education in Greece in general, especially in terms of instrumental teachers' practices within this context. This seems particularly pertinent in relation to sight-reading, due to lack of a uniform policy, curriculum, and rationale, as reflected in the various formal regulation documents. These regulations are not particularly informative for instrumental teachers, as no clarifications are provided in terms of educational purposes, teaching methodology, curriculum, and material, or expected outcomes in relation to the development of sight-reading skills. Potential confusion of instrumental teachers might be justified, as their teaching approach to sight-reading seems to depend largely on personal interpretation of the statements provided for each instrument.

To the best of my knowledge, some Conservatoires in Crete occasionally operate as examination centres for external (UK) exam bodies, such as [ABRSM](#) or [Rockschool](#), primarily for learners who are studying privately rather than in Conservatoires, although one system does not exclude the other. However, from my relevant experience and from discussions with colleagues throughout Crete, this does not seem to be very frequent; questions arise in relation to the understanding and practical application of the expected levels of such alternative systems and the accessibility and usability of relevant resources (for example, due to the language barrier). Finally, although this lies beyond the purposes of the present research,

review and update of the regulations currently in application seems imperative, since these were established more than sixty years ago, thereby leaving out a significant amount of music by contemporary composers, as well as substantial research findings within the field of music education. The following section focuses on Conservatoire sight-reading in practice, and on questions which suggest the necessity for further research in this context.

#### **1.4 Sight-reading in practice: The necessity for further research**

According to the operating regulations for the Greek music Conservatoires, sight-reading is one of the compulsory, general modules of instrumental studies (Royal Decree 1957/229; Ministerial Decision 2007/1913), with the exception of the guitar where sight-performance is mentioned within the curriculum description of each level (Ministerial Decision 1987/500, para. 3, 5, 7, 10, p. 4980 – Appendix 1).

Regarding the piano in particular, sight-reading is formally described as part of the general piano studies of advanced students, being stated as a compulsory module of the two final advanced levels of study: ‘6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced level of study)’ (Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3, para. 91, p. 1744 – Appendix 1). As an outcome of this statement, and due to absence of further clarifications within the regulations, or curriculum, the formal documents can be interpreted to indicate a lack of need for Conservatoires to provide sight-reading assessments and, therefore, sight-reading training, in any other levels. Sight-reading is often only assessed prior to the piano degree examination, usually as a separate test/exam, while in many cases any relevant training, seems to remain dependent on the specific teachers’ decision, intuition, and previous experience.

Thus, practically, sight-reading provision and training seems to depend largely on the internal – less formal – policy of each Conservatoire and on the understanding and interpretation of the regulations by instrumental teachers. Absence of any further pedagogical instructions within the regulations along with a lack of formal guidelines regarding the curriculum, subject matter, methodology, educational purposes, teaching material and resources, create an unclear context in which sight-reading is required to be provided, not only by piano teachers, but also by music teachers of any

instrument. How do music teachers perceive sight-reading and how do they interpret the relevant regulations? What are instrumental teachers' attitudes towards sight-reading and how do they act within this context, in relation to the provision of sight-reading training? Despite the formal statements that sight-reading is a compulsory component, no guidance is provided within the regulations in relation to the curriculum, nor to assessment, which generates both practical and philosophical questions: how are students are assessed and by whom? What should the level of the examined pieces be? Which are the assessment criteria? Why are these aspects not clarified through the regulations? Are these statements still relevant in the present day? Is there potential to facilitate change in the regulations on a national or an institutional level? In addition to this, who would be responsible for making changes to the current curriculum? Would the Principal have the power to decide on new processes to be applied within the specific Conservatoire, or must everything be ratified by the relevant Ministry? Further research could provide valuable insights on the existing context and on ways in which both teachers and learners are coping with this currently un-researched area of Greek Conservatoire education.

Further to this, the introduction of sight-reading in the curriculum at advanced levels seems to suggest that the development of sight-reading skills is perhaps not facilitated in earlier years of tuition and that a level of ability at sight-reading is something which advanced instrumental learners are expected to be able to achieve without any prior preparation and development of skills. Thus, underpinning sight-reading skills from foundational to more advanced levels is imperative, to enable the development of these skills as an uninterrupted continuum from the beginner to the advanced levels, through a systematic approach. Focusing on the piano, my creation of research-informed teaching material to support the development of beginner piano learners' sight-reading skills in the Context of Greek Conservatoire music education, will contribute decisively to this direction.

## **1.5 Summary**

This Chapter provides an introduction to the present thesis and the research context. The research focus is explained after the introduction of the researcher's relevant



background, as well as the purpose of the research; the overall primary and secondary research aims are also stated. The context of a Greek Conservatoire is described, where part of the present research was undertaken, outlining the years of study per level for each instrument within this context. The documents of the operating regulations for Greek Conservatoires are also overviewed in relation to sight-reading statements and specifications for the piano as well as for other instruments. The need for further research and for the development of sight-reading resources is proposed, supported with critical observations concerning the regulations and practical implications on instrumental (piano) teaching. The subsequent chapter (Chapter 2) discusses literature concerning parameters linking to sight-reading pedagogy; the emergent research questions and the thesis structure are also outlined.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses sight-reading in relation to research and music pedagogy literature. After establishing sight-reading as an important musical skill (section 2.1), key concepts relating to the complex sight-reading process are explained, focusing on the visual elements of perception (the eye function and movements), the eye-hand span and chunking (section 2.2). Parameters relating to the acquisition of sight-reading skills are also discussed, such as an early start of skills development and the distinction between sight-reading and instrumental skills (section 2.3). Strategies and involved musical skills are also explained, including rhythmic skills, aural skills, prediction, and ensemble skills, as well as further processes involved in the sight-reading process: observation, pattern recognition and looking ahead (section 2.4); sight-reading resources, keyboard awareness and playing speed are also considered (section 2.5). Finally, the emergent research questions are presented alongside the structure of the thesis (sections 2.6 and 2.7 respectively).

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to describe the process of playing music at first sight, various terms are encountered in research literature and in music pedagogy publications, with the most common terms being 'sight-reading' or the Italian *prima vista* (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016), both of which are utilised in the present thesis (the term *prima vista* is used within the Greek Conservatoire regulations, as presented in Chapter 1). Various definitions of sight-reading are found in literature (Kopiez & Lee, 2008; Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Waters et al., 1998), according to which sight-reading requires for the performer to play 'non- or under-rehearsed music at an acceptable pace and with adequate expression' (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016, p. 548), 'with little or no preparation' (Waters et al., 1998, p. 123).

Research as well as music pedagogy literature on sight-reading agree on the importance of this musical skill, for learners as well as music professionals (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Rosemann et al., 2016; Macmillan, 2015; McLachlan, 2015; Gordon, 2014; Spanswick, 2014; Zhukov, 2014a; Hallam & Gaunt, 2012; Cooke, 2011; Katz, 2009; Wristen, 2005; Rosen, 2004; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Kostka, 2000). More

specifically, Kopiez and Lee (2008) describe sight-reading as ‘a functional skill which is essential for all musicians involved in particular fields of western classical music culture’ (p. 41), while it is also perceived as ‘a useful craft’ (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016, p. 549), a ‘necessary skill’ (McLachlan, 2015, p. 139), and as ‘an integral part of the musical experience for all musicians’ (Wristen, 2005, p. 44). Good sight-reading skills are often an expectation or prerequisite for music professionals, such as performers in orchestras and accompanists, music theatre musicians and commercial recording musicians (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Hallam & Gaunt, 2012). In addition, Spanswick (2014) perceives sight-reading as ‘a skill of immense importance for both pianists and piano teachers’, also emphasising the need for systematic training: ‘if worked at consistently, it's arguably the most useful tool in a pianist's toolbox’ (p. 21).

The importance of sight-reading appears to be connected to the benefits of good sight-reading skills to the overall process of music learning. One of the stated benefits is that good sight-reading skills can speed up the process of learning new repertoire: the first approach towards a new piece becomes more effective, and a quicker move from the first steps of learning the notes towards the more musical elements of the piece is facilitated (Macmillan, 2015; McLachlan, 2015; Zhukov, 2014a; Cooke, 2011; Harris & Crozier, 2000). Learners’ independence in approaching new pieces is also promoted (Harris & Crozier, 2000) as well as a better musical understanding: ‘it is by far the most effective way of learning how to assimilate and understand logic, patterns and progressions of every kind’ (McLachlan, 2015, p. 139). Sight-reading is also viewed as a means to become acquainted with new repertoire, allowing the exploration of the seemingly endless repertoire possibilities of keyboard music, in an attempt to experiment with and to significantly increase awareness and knowledge (Rosen, 2004). Rosen (2004) supports that ‘the more music one can actually recreate for oneself, even informally, the richer one’s experience of the art becomes’ (p. 95), thereby viewing sight-reading as a useful tool to expand on engagement with repertoire, which in turn enriches musical experience.

The ability to sight-read effectively is also linked to ensemble participation and collaborative musical activities, where being able to play without previous rehearsal is often necessary (Katz, 2009; Wristen, 2005). Zhukov (2014a) parallels fluency in literacy to good sight-reading skills, stating that ‘as a core skill in music, sight-reading

has the potential to improve skills and thinking in music performance, such as [...] increased participation in music-making activities, [...] and lifelong satisfaction and confidence as a musician' (p. 70). Finally, for music education contexts where sight-reading is an assessed component, good sight-reading skills can contribute to better marks in music performance exams (MacLachlan, 2015; Harris & Crozier, 2000).

## **2.2 Sight-reading: A complex procedure**

Academic literature describes sight-reading as 'a complex transcription task involving a series of overlapping perceptual, cognitive and motoric processes' (Waters et al., 1998, p. 123). For the purposes of this section, the discussion will focus on the visual elements of perception and the processes associated with the function of the eyes and the initial grouping of the collected input and received visual information. Research has explored eye movements during the process of sight-reading and has sought to interpret these motions in relation to sight-reading accuracy (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Rosemann et al., 2016; Penttinen et al., 2015; Penttinen & Huovinen, 2011; Madell & Hébert, 2008; Furneaux & Land, 1999; Truitt et al., 1997; Goolsby, 1994a, 1994b; Sloboda, 1977, 1974).

The eye function and the initial processing/grouping of information appears to be of great importance for the sight-reading process, with significant differences observed between expert and novice sight-readers (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Goolsby, 1994a, 1994b). Specifically, the backwards and forwards eye movements (saccades) and rests (fixations) executed per second, which synthesise the image of the surrounding world, have been linked to the level of sight-reading expertise: fewer fixations have been measured for expert sight-readers, compared to the greater quantity and longer fixations of novices (less-skilled readers) (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Goolsby, 1994a, 1994b). Goolsby (1994b) also found that the skilled readers 'looked farther ahead, then back to the point of the actual performance' (p. 115) and that they perceived note groups, rather than fixating on individual notes; peripheral vision is also a source of perceived information (Goolsby, 1994b).

These findings link to the concept of the eye-hand span, which estimates the number of notes between the point of the eye position and the hand position

(Furneaux & Land, 1999; Sloboda, 1977, 1974). Expanding on findings about novice and expert sight-readers, Furneaux and Land (1999) found differences in the note index (namely the number of notes maintained in memory before their execution on the instrument), with skilled sight-readers having a larger note index than less-skilled readers. The obtained information is then categorised, through the process of 'chunking' (Furneaux & Land, 1999, p. 2435), into meaningful units which guide the visual processing of the score, also affecting the eye-hand span (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Furneaux & Land, 1999). Chunking enables the perception of 'multiple details of the musical score as a single piece of information' (Wristen, 2005, p. 49) and facilitates a contextual understanding and a 'telescopic approach' towards the music (McLachlan, 2015, p. 140) by translating single items into grouped items, for example by perceiving note groups (such as a scale, or arpeggio pattern) rather than single notes (Macmillan, 2015; McLachlan, 2015; Spanswick, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Wristen, 2005). Sloboda also identified musical phrases as such meaningful units, finding that research participants' eye-hand span tended to expand within the boundaries of a phrase (Sloboda, 1977). The eye-hand span is also linked to the strategy of looking ahead on the score, beyond the point of execution, which is discussed in section 2.4.5.3.

In addition to the eye function in the perception of visual information, the overlapping (motoric, cognitive and perceptual) processes which take place during sight-reading also relate to further skills utilised during that perception of musical notation, such as aural skills and the ability to create auditory representations, prediction skills, pattern recognition and problem-solving skills, amongst others (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Mishra, 2014; Kopiez & Lee, 2008; Waters et al., 1998; McPherson, 1994).

### **2.3 Sight-reading skills acquisition**

Researchers and educators have long debated whether good sight-reading ability is due to an inborn talent or a skill that is acquired through teaching; this is a significant question, due to its direct implications on the teaching and learning process: can sight-

reading skills be developed through practice and training, or is sight-reading ability an inborn trait?

Notions that good sight-reading is an inherent trait can be found in literature, including pedagogical books, in which good sight-reading skills are viewed as an innate characteristic of the selected few. For example, Kornicke (2021) makes the assumption that sight-reading is an inherent skill, and Westney (2003) perceives sight-reading ability as an innate trait, supporting that ‘some people are born with a specific knack: to play music at sight with ease and with impressive results’ (Westney, 2003, p.133).

Research in the fields of both music education and music psychology has sought to explore whether sight-reading is an inherent trait or an acquired skill (Williamon, 2004; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). Although sight-reading involves some components that are inherent, such as the working memory capacity, which is influenced by genetic factors (Meinz & Hambrick, 2010, p. 915), the majority of skills involved in sight-reading appear to be practice-related. This means that these skills, such as aural skills, mental representations, and prediction skills, can be developed through training, by incorporating appropriate strategies into teaching (Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b; Macmillan, 2010; Meinz & Hambrick, 2010; Kopiez & Lee, 2008; Kopiez et al., 2006; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). Even for inherent components such as the working memory capacity which may influence the level of sight-reading skills, relevant training and deliberate practice can still contribute to the development of sight-reading skills, even if it may not guarantee the complete overcoming of potential limitations (Meinz & Hambrick, 2010). As Kopiez and Lee (2008) support: ‘Excellence in sight reading is, therefore, the result of a combination of components assumed to be practice-related (sight-reading expertise and inner hearing) and practice-unrelated (speed of information processing)’ (p. 41). These authors propose considering ‘relevant factors from all levels of information processing, including variables influenced by training as well as those independent of practice’ (Kopiez & Lee, 2008, p. 44).

Emphasising the potential for sight-reading skills to be developed, Lehmann & McArthur (2002) describe them as ‘highly trainable’ (p. 135), supporting that relevant experience, engagement with repertoire and overall knowledge can explain relevant differences between learners with different levels of competence (Lehmann &

McArthur, 2002). This is in agreement with Lehmann and Ericsson's (1996 & 1993) previous research conclusions highlighting a positive correlation between the amount of time spent in sight-reading activities and the development of relevant skills, leading gradually to higher levels of accomplishment and expertise (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, 1996).

### **2.3.1 Starting early**

Considering the above findings which support that aspects of the sight-reading ability are positively influenced by training, questions may arise in relation to the appropriate starting point for relevant training. Kopiez and Lee (2008) identified a 'critical time window for optimal training', before the age of 15 (Kopiez & Lee, 2008, p. 56). Drawing connections to similar considerations in the domain of language development, the researchers found that sight-reading achievement can be reliably predicted by the amount of accumulated sight-reading practice within this time window, arguing that 'skill acquisition has to start early in order for the person to become an excellent sight reader' (Kopiez & Lee, 2008, p. 56). Although this should not be interpreted as a limitation for older or adult learners, it demonstrates how an early start is considered as particularly beneficial. In addition, Arthur, McPhee and Blom (2020) found a positive correlation between sight-reading expertise and an early development of relevant skills. As their research findings support, amongst the traits of expert sight-readers are 'certain characteristics related to their musical education [...], including early age of skill acquisition' (Arthur et al., 2020, p. 543). This idea of an early start for sight-reading skills development is also discussed in music teachers' trade publications (Spanswick, 2014), recommending relevant training from the first/beginner levels of music studies.

### **2.3.2 Sight-reading skills versus performance skills**

Literature makes a distinction between sight-reading skills and instrumental (performance) skills (Penttinen et al., 2015; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996; McPherson, 1994). Good performance skills can be helpful for the sight-reading process, for example due to good command of the instrument, while relevant limitations may also influence the sight-reading ability (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016). The level of general

performance skills appears to be perceived as the maximum level of sight-reading potential, while sight-reading practice determines the proximity of the two distinct levels. According to Lehmann and Kopiez (2016): ‘one can never sight-read beyond the level of rehearsed performance, but how close to this level one sight-reads or sight-sings appears to be a matter of training’ (p. 556).

The process of developing sight-reading skills is also not considered similar to the acquisition of performance skills, due to the differences in the context where they occur (long practice versus no practice) and the expectations for each (clear idea of practised repertoire, compared to the unknown elements of sight-reading pieces) (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). For beginners, in particular, McPherson (1994) emphasises that the sight-reading ability ‘should not be considered synonymous with the student’s overall ability to perform a repertoire of rehearsed music’ (p. 228). For non-beginners, advanced performance skills do not guarantee equally developed sight-reading skills; therefore, performance of well-rehearsed repertoire is also not indicative of sight-reading performance (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). This is also supported by Zhukov’s (2014b) research on advanced pianists, which found that their sight-reading skills were relatively low, in comparison to their highly developed performance skills. ‘Deliberate efforts to develop’ are thereby necessitated to lead to sight-reading excellence (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016, p. 556).

## **2.4 Strategies and musical skills involved in sight-reading**

Sight-reading literature proposes strategies to enhance the effectiveness of time spent on sight-reading activities, as well as contexts which seem to enhance the development of relevant skills, in order to facilitate the development of habits for an efficient approach to playing at sight (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Macmillan, 2015; McLachlan, 2015; Gordon, 2014; Spanswick, 2014; Zhukov, 2014a; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Sloboda et al., 1998; Waters et al., 1998; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996; McPherson, 1994; Booth, 1971). The following sections (2.4.1-2.4.5) detail some of the most commonly proposed skills and strategies linked to sight-reading skills development.



### **2.4.1 Rhythmic skills**

Research has identified a strong association between good rhythmic skills and rhythm perception with effective sight-reading, and rhythm training strategies have been proposed to facilitate rhythm realisation in performance at sight (Zhukov et al., 2016; Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b, 2006; Macmillan, 2015, 2010; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000; McPherson, 1994; Booth, 1971). In addition to good rhythmic skills being an important part of general musical skills, sight-reading has been found to be positively influenced by rhythm training (Zhukov, 2006; McPherson, 1994), which has been proposed as a significant part of a 'hybrid curriculum' for sight-reading, combined with style training and participation in collaborative activities (Zhukov et al., 2016, p. 157). Not only do good rhythm skills enable sight-reading accuracy (McPherson, 1994), but they also contribute to achieving a primary objective of effective sight-reading, which is to maintain musical flow and continuity while playing at sight (Zhukov, 2014a, Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Wristen, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Booth, 1971). Macmillan (2010) emphasises that 'rhythmic pulse and continuity distinguish good readers from bad' (p. 80), while continuity, lack of stops and musical flow have been viewed as 'more important than the accuracy of the notes' during performance at sight (Booth, 1971, p. 122.) The importance of 'maintaining fluency' (Harris & Crozier, 2000, p. 47) is also recognised as one of the challenges encountered during sight-reading (Harris & Crozier, 2000; Wristen, 2005).

### **2.4.2 Aural skills & auditory representations**

The ability to create auditory images through visual representations, also encountered as 'mental hearing', 'mental representation', 'inner hearing', 'audiation', or 'mental rehearsal' is also powerfully connected to the development of sight-reading skills (Mishra, 2014a, 2014b; Hayward & Gromko, 2009; Kopiez et al., 2006; Waters et al., 1998; McPherson, 1994; Gordon, 1989). This refers to the ability to look at the music and imagine how it sounds (Gordon, 2014; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Cooke, 2011; Hofmann, 1976). Research suggests that aural representations contribute to sight-reading accuracy, as they create 'auditory expectations' (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016, p. 552): the more the aural representation resembles the music, the more accurate is performance at sight likely to be (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Waters et al., 1998; Scripp,

1995; McPherson, 1994). Aural skills are, therefore, strongly connected to sight-reading achievement, as these facilitate the creation of mental representations (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Hayward & Gromko, 2009).

Sight-reading pedagogy sources recommend providing opportunities for learners to practise their 'inner hearing', by reading the score silently and to trying to hear it in their head. The aim is to create a mental impression of the written music, 'to hear (the music) in their mind's ear' (Fisher, 2010, p. 127), by imagining how the music sounds (Gordon, 2014; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Hofmann, 1976). The process of creating auditory representations is also implemented during the course of sight-reading performance, while simultaneously scanning the upcoming musical sections (Huovinen et al., 2018; Wristen, 2005; Furneaux & Land, 1999; Truitt et al., 1997; Goolsby, 1994a, 1994b) in preparation of what might follow 'ahead of the current point of execution' (Penttinen et al., 2015, p. 38).

Literature has linked mental rehearsal of specific parameters of sight-reading pieces, such as rhythms, challenging bars or even the entire piece, to sight-reading efficacy. More specifically, Waters, Townsend and Underwood (1998) showed that 'sight-reading ability is dependent on the facility to use auditory representations' (p. 147): the closer the resemblance of the internalised aural representation to the music to be performed, the higher the level of accuracy of the sight-reading performance (Waters et al., 1998; Scripp, 1995; McPherson, 1994). Aural skills are, therefore, strongly connected to sight-reading achievement, as these facilitate higher levels of efficiency in the process of creating mental representations of the written music (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Hayward & Gromko, 2009). Developing such skills (for example through aural training) has been viewed as a helpful tool contributing to more effective sight-reading (Mishra, 2014b; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Wristen, 2005; McPherson, 1994).

### **2.4.3 Prediction skills**

The ability to predict and anticipate what might follow within a sight-reading piece seems to be a positive predictor of sight-reading effectiveness. Sloboda (1976) demonstrated the strong effect of previous knowledge on the creation of expectations during sight-reading performance by identifying proof-reader's errors of sight-readers

who corrected notes which had been melodically altered by the researcher intentionally, because these alterations violated their musical expectations (Sloboda, 1976). Similarly, Lehmann and Ericsson (1996) proved the powerful impact of expectations based on previous knowledge through an experiment in which pianists successfully created sequences to fill in gaps in the printed music while sight-reading ‘based solely on the context of the current piece, their stored general knowledge, and their expectations’ (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016, p. 553).

The importance of overall musical knowledge and its influence on the sight-reading process is reinforced by literature. Aspects such as technical capabilities on the instrument (Hayward & Gromko, 2009; Sloboda et al., 1998), theoretical knowledge (Arthur et al., 2020; Wolf, 1976), or familiarity with diverse musical styles and stylistic characteristics (Zhukov et al., 2016; Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b; Madell & Hébert, 2008; Kopiez et al., 2006), are viewed as of great importance. Emphasis is placed upon theoretical knowledge, including awareness of music theory, harmony, structure and form, and stylistic/historical considerations, as they can influence the generation of relevant predictions for the music to be played at sight (Arthur et al., 2020; Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Mishra, 2014b; Lehmann and Ericsson, 1996; Sloboda, 1976). Arthur et al. (2020) also suggests that this ‘may be what facilitates the “chunking” necessary for increased efficiency in visual processing’ (p. 453).

#### **2.4.4 Ensemble skills and participation in collaborative activities**

Literature underlines the significance of participation in ensembles and in chamber music activities for facilitating sight-reading (Wristen, 2005; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). Various collaborative contexts are proposed for the development and practical implementation of sight-reading skills, ranging from sight-reading duets between similar-grade students (Macmillan, 2015, 2010; McLachlan, 2015; Fisher, 2010; Booth, 1971) and teacher-student duets (Watkins & Scott, 2012; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000), to group lessons (Watkins & Scott, 2012; Fisher, 2010), and participation in wider ensembles or accompanying activities (Zhukov et al., 2016; Macmillan, 2015; McLachlan, 2015; Zhukov, 2014b; Spanswick, 2014; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010, 2015; Kopiez et al., 2006; Keyworth, 2005; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, 1996; Wristen, 2005; Hofmann, 1976).

Lehmann and Ericsson's (1993, 1996) research explored piano accompaniment as 'it represents a standardized situation that captures the essential demands and constraints on expert sight-reading' (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, p. 182). The researchers found that individuals who had greater experience in accompanying and collaborative activities tended to be better sight-readers than those who primarily engaged in solo performance. Their research findings identified accompanying experience as a good indicator of sight-reading achievement (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, 1996). Zhukov (2016) further supports this argument by proposing a sight-reading curriculum, in which participation and collaborative playing activities form one of the three main areas of relevant training, alongside rhythm and style training. Most recently, Arthur, McPhee and Blom (2020) also found that differences in performance experiences, such as experience in solo repertoire, accompanying activities or ensembles, lead to differences in the development of sight-reading skills. Although the researchers did not conclude a strong correlation between collaborative playing and sight-reading expertise, they recognised that participation in such activities may play a significant part in the development of sight-reading skills 'at the beginner level' (Arthur et al., 2020, p. 453).

In addition to the contribution of collaborative participation to the development of sight-reading skills, relevant benefits have been identified in relation to the actual process of playing at sight. More specifically, participation in ensembles and collaborative activities has been claimed to contribute to a better sense of continuity and musical flow during performance at sight (Keyworth, 2005; Kostka, 2000). Keyworth (2005) suggests that ensemble playing and chamber music activities can contribute to the achievement of continuity and musical playing, resulting in fewer hesitations and corrections of note errors. This is further supported by Fisher (2010), who further supports that collaborative sight-reading activities allow for collaborative reflection and feedback on performance at sight, thereby leading to 'a broader, more thorough perspective than can be obtained by a single student' (p. 68). Sight-reading while playing with someone else can require further attention and alertness (Cooke, 2011), as it also demands careful listening and adapting to what others are playing (Macmillan, 2015).

Positive psychology-related effects have also been addressed in relation to sight-reading in collaborative contexts, focusing on aspects of confidence: 'Sight-reading practice as part of group lessons can make beginning readers feel safe: notes lost by some will be saved by others' (Watkins & Scott, 2012, p. 109). Benefits concerning motivation and enjoyment are also discussed, suggesting that the social environment and the creative context of collaborative playing may facilitate higher motivation than individual sight-reading tasks (Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Booth, 1971). Macmillan (2015) supports that sight-reading thus becomes an experience of 'making music together for enjoyment' (p. 20), while collaborative and ensemble playing is also perceived as 'most enjoyable and valuable' in recent research (Arthur et al., 2020, p. 453). Finally, McLachlan argues that 'the best way of all to develop excellent sight-reading is to do it with other musicians' and that playing 'unfamiliar music with others is a surefire way to stimulate your reflexes' (McLachlan, 2015, p. 141).

#### **2.4.5 Further processes**

This section focuses on the processes of observation, pattern recognition and looking ahead, which have been strongly associated with effective sight-reading and concern the performer's approach to the music before, during and after performance at sight.

##### **2.4.5.1 Observation**

Careful observation of the music to be played at sight in advance of performance has been proposed by research and music pedagogy literature as a helpful strategy which can positively affect performance at sight (Macmillan 2015, 2010; Gordon, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Keyworth, 2005; Wristen, 2005; Meffen, 2001; Harris & Crozier, 2000; McPherson, 1994). Different terms are encountered for this stage before the delivery of sight-reading, including 'observation' (Gordon, 2014), 'preparation' (Wristen, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; McPherson, 1994), or 'preview' (Fisher, 2010).

In McPherson's (1994) research, skilled sight-readers were found to exhibit 'the ability to seek information relevant to an accurate interpretation prior to the commencement of the musical performance', which has been viewed as the first step of a self-regulatory approach in sight-reading tasks (p. 229). Their preparation included observation of the key or the time signature, singing silently (in their head)

and identifying patterns, as well as considerations related to their instrument (McPherson, 1994). 'Studying the score away from the keyboard' has also been used to describe the same process (Meffen, 2001, p. 121). Meffen recommends this in order to collect information in advance, which would help the performer to acquire a first impression of musical elements to be performed, as well as an idea of physical aspects of playing.

Depending on level, this purposeful preparation may include paying attention to elements such as the key, the time signature, dynamics, expression markings, articulation, patterns, rhythmic and melodic elements, as well as to clues which reveal the character of the music (Macmillan, 2010; Keyworth, 2005; Wristen, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; McPherson, 1994), while identifying potentially challenging passages/elements and thinking about ways to achieve them is also suggested (Wristen, 2005). Through silent reading, careful observation of the score before playing at sight can also facilitate the creation of a mental (auditory) representation by imagining how the music may sound (Gordon, 2014; Keyworth, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000). In alignment with the above, Fisher (2010) acknowledges the value of this preparatory stage before sight-reading performance and advises to establish a 'systematic sight-reading preview routine' (2010, p. 128).

#### **2.4.5.2 Pattern recognition**

As stated previously, the identification of patterns is an important parameter of preparation, as it is directly linked with the processing of visual information (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; McLachlan, 2015; Furneaux & Land, 1999). The ability to identify patterns influences sight-reading efficiency (Spanswick, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Sloboda et al., 1998; McPherson, 1994), as it contributes to the process of 'chunking' of information into meaningful groups, rather than single units, and therefore to visual processing prior to and during sight-reading (Macmillan, 2015; McLachlan, 2015; Spanswick, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Wristen, 2005). Due to the positive effect of pattern perception on the sight-reading process, the literature generally encourages the development of strategies relating to the ability to identify patterns. More specifically, Fisher (2010) emphasises the importance of this ability, stating that 'it is essential for the pianist to be able to discern patterns' (p. 127). These may include

melodic or rhythmic patterns, note patterns such as arpeggios, accompaniment or scales patterns, or even repeated sections of music, which are then perceived as groups, rather than as single pieces of information (Spanswick, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010). Pattern recognition is also connected to fingering patterns, as ‘frequently occurring patterns (e.g., scales and broken chords) may have codified fingerings prescribed in pedagogic texts’, thereby also informing the selection of appropriate and effective fingering or finger combinations (Sloboda et al., 1998, p. 185).

### **2.4.5.3 Looking ahead**

‘Looking ahead’ refers to the scanning of the upcoming sections of the score, ahead of the current point of execution, by keeping ‘the eye moving slightly ahead of the actual music’ in order to prepare for what might follow (Gordon, 2014, p. 49). As mentioned previously, ‘looking ahead’ is linked to the eye function and the concept of the eye-hand span (Huovinen et al., 2018; Penttinen et al., 2015; Wristen, 2005; Furneaux & Land, 1999; Truitt et al., 1997; Goolsby, 1994a, 1994b). Research involving skilled and novice sight-readers has also identified differences in the length of forward eye movements, linking the ability to look further down the score and to retain in memory more notes ahead of the point of playing on the score to the level of sight-reading expertise, therefore suggesting that this may be a trainable skill (Arthur et al., 2020; Ylitalo & Puurtinen, 2018; Arthur, 2017; Penttinen et al., 2015; Furneaux & Land, 1999; McPherson, 1994; Sloboda, 1977, 1974; Booth, 1971). Arthur et al. (2020) emphasises the importance of background and contextual knowledge to support the chunking process of visual information by making the chunks more meaningful, arguing that ‘simply “looking ahead”’ may be ‘counterproductive’ (p. 449).

The strategy of ‘looking ahead’ is encouraged by music pedagogy literature, being perceived as ‘a great technique’ (Westney, 2003, p. 134) and a necessary strategy: ‘always reading ahead’ (Spanswick, 2014, p. 22); ‘pupils should be encouraged to read ahead’ (Harris & Crozier, 2000, p. 49); ‘read ahead as far as you safely can’ (Cooke, 2011, p. 139); ‘look ahead on the music – at least to the next beat or bar’ (Macmillan, 2010, p. 80). Keyworth (2005) suggests the use of covers moving along the score to hide musical parts which have just been played, thereby making the

eyes move forward. However, this approach is criticised by Harris and Crozier (2000), who argue that although this indeed makes the eyes look ahead, at the same time it is 'restricting the regressive or backward glances that are very much part of the overall scanning process' (p. 49). As explained in section 2.2, these regressive eye movements also contribute to the creation of an overall picture of the music, additionally including the information obtained through the peripheral vision (Goolsby, 1994b). The authors also argue that 'although eye movement itself cannot be trained' (Harris & Crozier, 2000, p. 46), eye movements are the result of reading habits, which can be developed to contribute to effective sight-reading.

## **2.5 Further considerations**

This section discusses further considerations, concerning sight-reading resources (section 2.5.1), keyboard awareness (section 2.5.2), and playing speed during performance at sight (section 2.5.3).

### **2.5.1 Resources of sight-reading material**

Appropriateness of the resources and material used for sight-reading is emphasised by literature (McLachlan, 2015; Pentinnen et al., 2015; Gordon, 2014; Spanswick, 2014; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). This concerns not only the level of the material, but also the types of resources and considerations of learners' motivation.

Careful selection and the grading of the sight-reading materials is advised and adapting the material to students' reading skills is considered of utmost importance (Gordon, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000). Appropriate selection and consideration of learners' overall level of skills may not only decrease any 'possible discomfort for sight-reading' (Gordon, 2014, p. 49), but it might also result in better quality in sight-reading performance, allowing for improved flow and higher level of accuracy (Gordon, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000).

Regarding the level of the sight-reading material, pieces at the same or at a slightly lower level than the learners' overall instrumental skills are generally viewed as appropriate, especially in beginning stages (McLachlan, 2015; Pentinnen et al., 2015; Gordon, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Lehmann



& Ericsson, 1996). Penttinen et al. (2015) suggests using simpler material, of a lower level than performance skills, supporting that 'understanding the processes underlying sight-reading performance does not necessarily have to start with musical material matched for its complexity with the [...] usual level of performance' (p. 49). In addition, the sight-reading skills of participants in Lehmann and Ericsson's (1996) research appeared to have developed with a gradual advancement of the musical material, 'starting with easier pieces early in their musical development and progressing to more difficult ones as the pianist attains higher level of general skills' (p. 23).

Relevant suggestions from music pedagogy literature are aligned with research findings. Starting with sight-reading pieces at a level of difficulty which is low enough, featuring elements that the learners are familiar with, is advised in order for the task to feel more achievable (Gordon, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010). Gordon (2014) emphasises that 'the key to improvement in this area is to choose music that is easy' (p. 48) so that it would be possible to read 'rhythmically, without breaking down, and with a high degree of accuracy' (p. 49). Fisher (2010) recommends the same approach for ensemble sight-reading contexts as well. Appropriate level of material may also have a positive impact on learners' encouragement, motivation, and overall attitude towards sight-reading (Gordon, 2014; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000).

In addition, instrumental teachers are advised to facilitate students' involvement into the selection process of sight-reading material, as this can have positive effects on psychology-related aspects of learning, such as on learners' engagement, motivation, interest, and confidence (Gordon, 2014; Macmillan, 2010; Renwick & McPherson, 2002; Booth, 1971). Supporting learners' initiative in selecting material for sight-reading is also advised (Cooke, 2011), while Spanswick (2014) emphasised the importance of creating a positive musical context for students' sight-reading activities by providing positive motivation, by selecting enjoyable and diverse musical material, by considering their preferences and by allowing space for imagination and curiosity; as Spanswick argues, 'many reading tests are somewhat dull and lacking in imagination' (p. 21).

In relation to the types of resource recommended within the literature, these include graded sight-reading publications, good quality musical material, and 'real'

music (Macmillan, 2010, p. 81) from composers of different musical eras (MacLachlan, 2015; Spanswick, 2014; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000). Resources 'with accompanying recordings' are also proposed (Macmillan, 2010, p. 82), as well as digital material, such as sight-reading apps (Pierce et al., 2021; Bovin, 2018). Focusing on digital material, Bovin's (2018) research identified an increase in the sight-reading development of eighth-grade band students (US) who used one specific web-based sight-reading app consistently within their band rehearsals, as opposed to the control group who did not use the app. The researcher recommends the use of this app for 'all music teachers, beyond just band directors' (p. 144), based on the flexibility of the app and the possibility to generate customised sight-reading pieces for any level and with any musical parameters.

In addition, Pierce et al. (2021) used 'a novel evolutionary algorithm' to produce sight-reading exercises, 'using models based on expert examples' (p. 1). The models included 'professionally written sight-reading exercises' (p. 1) appearing within relevant sight-reading publications<sup>4</sup>, which served as templates for the researchers for detailing the technical parameters within their levels of interest (Grades 1 and 2, for the flute). This algorithm operates by generating exercises based on the quantified technical parameters. Although such musical examples may cover the requirements of these levels, limitations are also evident, in particular relating to aesthetics and musical style. In addition, as acknowledged by the researchers, the algorithm generates monophonic melodies and therefore is limited. Further limitations concern the appropriateness of the generated combinations of note pitches: due to the increasing of pitch range, the produced combinations may lead to 'pitch sequences which are aesthetically or technically inappropriate' (Pierce et al., 2021, p. 10). Similar limitations concern the use of rests, which may affect phrasing and the overall structure of the music. Even though it can be argued that the use of technology may be perceived as enjoyable, particularly for younger learners, irrespective of the type of material selected for sight-reading, consideration of quality,

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<sup>4</sup> According to Pierce et al. (2021): 'Four books of sight reading exercises were selected, representative of the curricula of the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB), Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), and Trinity College. Grade 1 and 2 exercises were extracted from each book' (p. 3).

graded resources which promote 'systematic' and 'holistic' approaches is considered of utmost importance (McLachlan, 2015, p. 141).

### **2.5.2 Keyboard awareness**

For pianists in particular, keyboard awareness also influences sight-reading efficacy, as it is associated with the manipulation of the instrument without needing to look at the hands while playing. The terms 'keyboard topography' or 'keyboard geography' are frequently encountered in literature, describing the keyboard layout and the key patterns (Fisher, 2010; Wristen, 2005). Research supports the importance of good awareness of the keyboard in sight-reading, as it can contribute to the performer's ability to play without disrupting their focus on the score by looking at their hands (Wristen, 2005; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996; Banton, 1995). According to Lehmann & Ericsson (1996), keyboard players need to be able to move their hands and fingers appropriately without guidance from visual input, as 'relocating a current position in the music after looking at the keyboard and refocusing the eye' (p. 5), 'would break the visual access to the score and disrupt the continuous encoding of the music' (p. 6). In addition, Wristen (2005) emphasises that, alongside mastering basic motor patterns, 'gaining familiarity with the geography of the keyboard are thus prerequisites to sight-reading' (p. 45) and balancing the need to look at the score with the need to look at the hands is also emphasised (Wristen, 2005).

Music pedagogy literature also recognises the importance of keyboard awareness in sight-reading and encourages the inclusion of activities which promote the learners' familiarity with keyboard topography (McLachlan, 2015; Gordon, 2014; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010). Facilitating 'a solid sense of keyboard geography and topography' is emphasised alongside a 'kinaesthetic awareness' of hand and finger positions and movements on the keyboard (Fisher, 2010, p. 129). Reminders highlighting the need to avoid looking at the hands while playing at sight are also encountered, through relevant suggestions for teaching, such as 'keep your eyes glued on the printed copy rather than on your 10 fingers' (McLachlan, 2015, p. 140); 'keep your eyes on the music' (Macmillan, 2020, p. 80); 'don't look down at the keyboard any more than you can help' and 'look down only when absolutely necessary' (Cooke, 2011, p. 139); 'avoid looking at one's hands, only briefly glancing

at them during large shifts in position' (Fisher, 2010, p. 129) and 'find new hand positions without looking at the keyboard' (Gordon, 2014, p. 49). Fisher (2010) also proposes various activities to promote this awareness, such as playing with the eyes closed, in order to enhance the feeling of moving on the piano keyboard without visual access. Macmillan (2010) also proposes blocking the pupil's view by holding 'a sheet of paper' over their hands (p. 80). However, this suggestion does not appear to be consistent with Banton's (1995) research exploring 'the role of visual and auditory feedback during sight-reading of music', as the findings suggested that more errors were made under conditions of complete visual access to hands and fingers, compared to controlled visual access (Banton, 1995).

### **2.5.3 Playing speed**

Research has explored the relationship between playing speed and sight-reading efficiency. Lehmann and Ericsson (1993) did not identify a reliable correlation between pianists' selected tempi and sight-reading accuracy. However, their findings also indicated that a slower playing speed was employed even by skilled sight-readers, 'in order to explore and understand the structure of the music' (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, p. 193). Lehmann and Kopiez (2016) also claimed that playing at a fast speed raises 'the risk of making more mistakes' (p. 550), quoting findings from other research (Kinsler & Carpenter, 1995; Lannert & Ullman, 1945), which identified that a slower speed resulted in more fixations and fewer errors (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016, p. 550). In addition, Wristen (2005) recommends selecting a slow tempo when sight-reading tasks appear to be of greater difficulty or complexity, as this 'would allow students more time both for cognitive processing and to enact the appropriate motor sequences without unduly taxing the body' (Wristen, 2005, p. 47).

In addition, a correlation has been identified between the playing speed and the time index, namely 'the length of time between fixation and performance' (Furneaux & Land, 1999, p. 2435). Specifically, faster playing speed was found to reduce the time that the information needed to be retained in memory up to the point of execution, while slower speed increased the time index, for any level of skill (Furneaux & Land, 1999). As the researchers explain, 'this means that the length of

time that information is stored [...] is related to performance tempo rather than ability' (p. 2435), 'for all skill levels' (Furneaux & Land, 1999, p. 2439).

Music pedagogy literature also counsels against playing at a high speed while sight-reading. Specifically, selecting an appropriate playing speed is advised, in order to be able to achieve flow, continuity and accuracy, which would also allow players to cope with potentially challenging passages more effectively (Gordon, 2014; Spanswick, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000). Opting for a slower than optimum tempo is also encouraged, acknowledging the possibility of playing at sight at a slower speed (Spanswick, 2014; Taylor, 1994). Spanswick (2014) emphasises that an 'extremely slow speed is the key to eventually unlocking sight-reading skills and becoming fluent' (p. 22), and further elaborates on the importance of playing slowly by referring to some benefits of this approach. These include having more available time to look at the score while playing, making fewer mistakes, and achieving better continuity; the psychological benefit of the sight-reading task feeling less discouraging and more achievable is also identified (Spanswick, 2014).

## **2.6 The emergent research questions**

Considering the findings and pedagogical considerations emerging from literature, as well as the relevant parameters of the Greek Conservatoire context detailed in Chapter 1, the gap of resources relating to sight-reading may well be also recognised by current instrumental (piano) teachers in this context. Since I conducted my previous research (2016), I have continued to be involved in the same context as a Conservatoire piano teacher; I have also continued to engage in frequent, ongoing discussions with colleagues (piano teachers and instrumental teachers) in this Conservatoire and in further music education settings. It is noteworthy that nothing seems to have changed in recent years in relation to sight-reading in terms of formal regulations, curriculum, resources, and, potentially, practices, which has strengthened my belief that support is needed for and would benefit teachers and learners alike. Therefore, creating the proposed piano sight-reading material seems imperative in initiating change in terms of sight-reading pedagogy and the production of relevant resources in the Greek context.

Connecting to the literature considerations highlighted previously, the overarching pedagogical aims of this material would be:

- (g) to support the viewpoint that sight-reading is a skill which can be gradually mastered, rather than a 'one-off' challenge, disconnected with other aspects of the instrumental music lesson,
- (h) to provide support to piano teachers and learners through educational material utilising a systematic approach towards the development of sight-reading skills and strategies,
- (i) to encourage teachers to perceive the development of sight-reading skills as a continuum starting from the early levels and evolving continuously in all subsequent levels, rather than as a musical skill only relevant to advanced learners, as it currently appears within the Greek context,
- (j) to facilitate teachers' and learners' understanding and practical recognition of the co-dependent relationship of general music skills and sight-reading skills, and the mutual benefits of the development of one contributing to the development of the other.

This holistic continuum would thus need to be supported with relevant curriculum, facilitating the building of sight-reading skills throughout the course of the music (piano) studies, while being integrated within the overall musical knowledge and instrumental skills of piano learners at each level. Consideration of these points in conjunction with relevant literature, as well as considering the relevance and hierarchical importance of the questions in relation to the cultural context to which they are addressed, led to the following overarching research question, Research question 1; the context-relevant pedagogical considerations and related aims noted above in points (a)-(d) underpinning the three studies within this thesis, which have informed the further specific research questions (Research questions 2-5), below:

**Research question 1 (overarching aim):**

What would a resource need to contain, in order to support beginner piano learners in developing sight-reading skills in the Greek Conservatoire context?

**Research question 2:**

How is sight-reading presented in the piano syllabi of international exam boards, and how is progression developed within the first grades?

**Research question 3:**

How do instrumental teachers perceive sight-reading in the Greek Conservatoire context, beyond piano teachers? (Study 1)

**Research question 4:**

What are the processes involved in creating sight-reading material, from the perspective of expert authors of existing sight-reading publications? (Study 2)

**Research question 5:**

How would piano teachers evaluate sight-reading material, the creation of which has been informed by literature and by the findings of the previous research questions?

As stated previously, the overarching aim of the thesis (Research question 1) concerns the development of sight-reading resources for beginner piano learners in Greece. In addition to the considerations from literature, the research questions are aligned to support the overarching thesis aim and explore further parameters relating to the creation of such material. The significance of sight-reading and sight-reading skills development is supported by the structure and curricula/syllabi of international music exam boards, where sight-reading is an assessed element of performance exams for all instruments. Focusing on the piano, sight-reading is a compulsory component of graded music performance examinations of various boards, starting from the very beginner levels, and up to the diploma levels. Zhukov (2006) assumes that sight-reading teaching is more likely to take place within the lessons of less advanced learners, probably to support their assessment in relevant exams. This led to Research question 2, exploring sight-reading within the piano syllabi of international exam boards, and the progression of the sight-reading elements within the first grades.

The discrepancy between the approaches of exam boards and the Greek Conservatoire regulations presented in Chapter 1 could support the argument that sight-reading appears to vary across different cultures and music education contexts

in terms of its pedagogy and emphasis placed within the curriculum. Therefore, this question could be illuminating in facilitating a deeper understanding of elements which could support sight-reading teaching in the Greek Conservatoire context, by exploring the approaches and underpinnings of systems, such as music examination boards, which offer a structured curriculum to support the development of sight-reading skills and relevant assessments.

The research findings detailed in this Chapter support a clear distinction between general playing skills and sight-reading skills and the acquisition of each, and propose an early start to the facilitation of sight-reading skills development through relevant training. This seems to contradict the sight-reading content within the Greek Conservatoire operating regulations, where limited references are made for sight-reading in earlier levels of instrumental studies. For the piano in particular, sight-reading skills are only stated as assessed skills in the final advanced levels of piano studies, with no further considerations in previous levels, which suggests that learners are expected to be competent sight-readers due to their advanced instrumental skills. This led to Research question 3, which concerns Conservatoire instrumental teachers' perceptions regarding sight-reading in the Greek context. This exploration would provide useful insights about instrumental teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards sight-reading, their understanding of the relevant regulations and potentially their approaches. In addition, considering literature which supports that sight-reading teaching may frequently be based on teachers' intuition and relevant experience (Lehmann & McArthur, 2002), exploring instrumental teachers' perceptions is envisaged to expand my understanding initiated from my previous (MA) research with piano teachers, as explained in Chapter 1.

The final research questions (Research questions 4 and 5) are envisaged to support the creative process of the sight-reading material by exploring further parameters relating to the creation of such resources. Whilst considering specific elements highlighted by literature which would be supportive of sight-reading skills development, insights from the creative experiences of authors/composers of available sight-reading publications would further inform my material creation, alongside awareness gained from sight-reading curricula of established exam boards. The pilot testing process would collect feedback of the devised sight-reading material



from piano teachers in Greece and beyond. The following outline of the thesis structure explains how each of the above research questions are approached and presented within the thesis.

## **2.7 Thesis structure**

After discussing literature related to sight-reading processes and pedagogical underpinnings which led to the specific research questions in the present chapter, the theoretical framework of the research design is explained (Chapter 3), followed by methodological and ethical considerations of the research (Chapter 4), including my reflection on my role as an insider-researcher for part of this research, as well as an outline of the different studies undertaken for the purposes of this thesis.

Chapter 5 contextualises sight-reading by exploring the views of instrumental teachers within a Greek Conservatoire, focusing on teaching methodology, strategies and practical issues arising from their understanding of the existing regulations and conservatoire policies, as well as from their own experiences as music learners and teachers. This research builds on findings from my previous research with piano teachers in the Conservatoire during my MA studies (section 1.1), gaining insights into perceptions and approaches of instrumental teachers beyond the piano, thereby providing illuminating insights relating to the Greek conservatoire context which extend beyond those which could have been achieved through restricting the potential participants to the small number of piano teachers operating in this context. This study unveils elements which inform the subsequent design of my pedagogical sight-reading material within this context.

Chapters 6 and 7 have informed the creation of my sight-reading material. In Chapter 6, resources of published sight-reading material are reviewed and the experiences of international authors of sight-reading publications are explored; focusing on observations obtained from the reviewed sight-reading resources and on considerations which guided the authors' creative processes in terms of the building of content and the progression of the musical material amongst others, valuable insights have been gained towards aspects related to the informed creation of my own sight-reading material. In Chapter 7, a comparative analysis of exam boards' piano

syllabi is presented combined with an appraisal of the stated marking criteria; the sight-reading specifications and musical elements of the different exam boards have also been explored, focusing on grades from the preparatory, up to ABRSM Grade 3.

The findings of the above research projects and analyses have informed the development of my sight-reading material, namely two devised books for beginner piano learners. Chapter 8 establishes the material's creative principles, explains the rationale for various creative decisions and outlines the progression of the devised material, as well as the envisaged future material, per level. Chapter 9 contains a detailed analysis of the different components and activities which are featured in the books and illustrates these through specific examples from the devised material. Chapter 10 presents feedback on the devised books collected from Greek and international piano teachers through an evaluative survey; the two books can be accessed in Appendix 6 and are presented in the version in which they were sent to the piano teachers for appraisal<sup>5</sup>. The final chapter, Chapter 11, summarises the research by addressing the research questions and outcomes, and analyses the devised model for curriculum design which has been developed as a result. Elements of originality of the research are also identified, alongside implications arising for the material, the research context, and the domain. Future developments are addressed, as well as the potential for further research, dissemination, and research impact; limitations of the research are also acknowledged.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter contextualised the concept of sight-reading through literature from research and music pedagogy sources. The importance of sight-reading as a musical skill is established and relevant processes are discussed, including involved skills, strategies, and further considerations. The emerging research questions are outlined alongside the thesis structure. The next chapter (Chapter 3) details the theoretical framework of the research design for the purposes of the present thesis.

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<sup>5</sup> Greek piano teachers were provided with equivalent versions of the books in Greek, translated by the author.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter presents the philosophical foundations underpinning the present research on sight-reading which produced educational material for piano learners in the context of Greek Conservatoire music education. After an introduction to the philosophical foundations of research (section 3.1), the theoretical framework of the research design is provided, based on the ontological position of Constructionism (section 3.2) and on a post-positivistic epistemology (section 3.3). The subjectivist conception of social reality is discussed (section 3.4), as well as the interpretive perspective; risks and potential impact of this approach on the research are also acknowledged (sections 3.5). The employment of practitioner research is also discussed, alongside considerations relating to transferability, generalisability, validity, and reliability (section 3.6). Finally, parameters of qualitative research are presented, concerning research questions, data collection methods and data analysis (section 3.7).

### **3.1 Philosophical foundations**

The philosophical foundations of research include any underlying assumptions and philosophical ideas which underpin the overall research approach, from the research questions and methodology to the data analysis and conclusions (Denscombe, 2010). Varied perspectives towards the social world are represented by different philosophical assumptions and alternative perspectives, which are often 'incompatible' with each other (Denscombe, 2010, p. 117). Due to the implications of this background on the research processes and on the nature of the knowledge produced by the specific research, it is essential for researchers to understand and specify the philosophical foundations of a research project (Denscombe, 2010).

Through the identification of the research philosophy, the perspective towards the research topic is described in detail in this chapter. Not only does the philosophical background influence the research questions, methodology, the nature of data and data sources, but it also has an impact on the data analysis and the results. More

specifically, it sets ‘limits to what can be said, and what cannot be said, on the basis of the evidence arising from the research’ (Denscombe, 2010, p. 136) and determines the nature of conclusions ‘that can, and cannot, be drawn on the basis of the investigation’ (Denscombe, 2010, p. 117). For this purpose, concepts related to research ontology and epistemology are presented below in order to establish the philosophical foundations of the present research. The considerations for a researcher are outlined in respect to each paradigm; subsequently the specific and appropriate position for this research is defined and discussed.

### **3.2 Research Ontology: Constructionism**

Ontology involves the studying of being and of what exists. In the social sciences, ontology examines the nature of reality and of the social phenomena under investigation, along with the researcher’s beliefs about the nature of social reality (Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002). Through consideration of the principles of each of the two main, diametrically different, ontological positions, Realism and Constructionism, the ontological stance of the present research seems to accord with the characteristics of the Constructionistic perspective.

Constructionism (also ‘Constructivism’) views the world as ‘a creation of the human mind’ (Denscombe, 2010, p. 119). In contrast to Realism, which considers reality as an objective, external world, where ‘objects have an independent existence and are not dependent for it on the knower’ (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 6), in Constructionism reality is perceived as the result of human cognition and consists of ‘people’s constructions of the world’ (Gergen, 2011, p. 184), shaped by individual perspectives and interactions (Craine, 2013). Unlike the natural world – which involves observable events, measurable parameters and properties, structure and consistent (causal) relationships which can be predicted and reproduced – social reality cannot be determined by scientific concepts and methods, since it is constantly changing due to the complex nature of human behaviour and communication (Thomas, 2017; Blaikie, 2011a; Gergen, 2011).

Unlike Realism, which accepts one ultimate and definitive reality, Constructionism recognises ‘multiple realities’ and multiple perspectives towards the

world. The nature of the social world is 'historically situated' (Gergen, 2011, p. 184), depending on the cultural background, place, and time, and may vary between different groups, and therefore 'what is true, real, and good within one tradition may not be within another' (Gergen, 2011, p. 184). From this viewpoint, knowledge is a social construct, which is not transmitted or transferred, but is built through social processes such as communication, negotiation, and interaction (Thomas, 2017; Baskaran, 2013; Gergen, 2011). This ontological position is related to 'post-positivism', as well as to the 'subjectivist' approach towards social reality, which are further elaborated in sections 3.3.2 and 3.4 respectively.

### **3.3 Research Epistemology**

Epistemology is a philosophically established theory of knowledge. It refers to the human ability to acquire knowledge of the surrounding world and to the ways in which it is obtained. It is concerned with the 'bases of knowledge', such as 'its nature and forms', methods of knowledge acquisition and communication to others (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 6). Research epistemology has significant implications for educational research, as it affects the process of appropriate scientific procedures in order to lead to valid and reliable knowledge (Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002). The epistemological position of the researcher has an impact on their role, which is differentiated according to the principles of each of the two epistemological assumptions, Positivism and Post-positivism.

#### **3.3.1 Positivism**

Positivism supports that knowledge is objective and tangible and can be acquired through the methods of natural science. It can be directly observed through the processes of scientific research, which involve empirical investigation of phenomena through the senses, observation, and experiments. *Facts* occur through the investigation of hypotheses and theories which are valid only if they can be confirmed through empirical observation and can be reproduced. For this reason, use of reliable *tools* is necessary for data collection, in order to achieve accurate measurements. The main *aim* is to extract general conclusions and produce knowledge which is consistent and universally applicable (Thomas, 2017; Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002; Beck,

1979). Positivist epistemology is related with the 'Objectivist' approach towards social reality, and with quantitative research methodology.

Positivism assumes that the social world is similar to nature, with patterns, regularities, causal relationships and a specific order, which can be identified and analysed. Similar to the natural world, social reality is perceived as external, independent of people's individual perceptions, and its phenomena are discovered and analysed – but not created – by people. Processes of scientific research are utilised in order to investigate social phenomena, due to the successful explanation of the natural world by scientific methods.

In relation to the researcher's role, since positivistic research should be objective, it requires an impartial researcher, with a neutral role in the research process. The researcher should be an external, detached observer of the examined phenomena of social reality, who is non-participant to the research process in order to maintain an objective perspective. This need for objectivity is also present in the data analysis process, which should remain uninfluenced by any personal feelings, views and beliefs (Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002; Giddens, 1975).

### **3.3.2 Post-positivism**

In contrast to positivism, 'Post-positivism' holds a more human-centred perspective towards knowledge. It proposes that knowledge is personal and subjective and is the result of individual consciousness shaped by relevant experience. Post-positivistic research is not as absolutist as positivism-oriented research and is largely characterised by subjectivity, taking individual differences into consideration and acknowledging 'a pluralistic view of multiple, coexisting realities rather than a single reality' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 27). This is also reflected in the methodology and the means of data collection, which include participant accounts, interviews, and observation, amongst others.

Along these lines, perception of social reality is subjective, and 'the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals' (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 55). Society is perceived and interpreted by people in a personal way, by attributing different meanings to the various parameters of the social world, leading to the existence of different interpretations of social reality (Cohen et al., 2002; Beck, 1979).

Post-positivistic epistemology shares common elements with the ‘constructionist’ ontology (section 3.2), the ‘Subjectivist’ approach towards social reality (section 3.4), the ‘Interpretive paradigm’ (section 3.5) and qualitative research methodology (section 3.7).

In this context, since post-positivistic research is largely subjective, the researcher needs to be more involved in the research processes. This requires a non-detached, participant researcher who is involved in the process and with the subjects. Through interaction with the participants, the researcher aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the participants’ individual interpretations of the world. However, there would still be a need for objectivity within the data analysis process to avoid personal bias influencing the results (Cohen et al., 2002; Giddens, 1975).

### **3.3.3 Critical approach and epistemological position**

Although positivism-related methodologies have proven successful in the explanation of natural phenomena, they do not appear to be ideal as a means of research involving people, as human subjects should not be treated as experimental objects. In addition, they seem to lack sufficiency in explaining the complexity of human behaviour, as intangible elements of social reality cannot be fully perceived by empirical observation or measurements (Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002). Due to the complexity of human nature, social phenomena are in contrast to the order and predictability of natural phenomena, and this is even more intense in the context of education – and within this, in the context of music education – where the relationship between teacher/student and the process of teaching/learning are challenging and difficult to predict.

Although the potential lack of an absolute and universal answer to the research questions and absence of statistical analyses might create the impression that subjective research lacks rigour (Denscombe, 2010, p. 124), post-positivistic epistemology seems to lead to a more human-centred way to approach defining and understanding reality. In contrast to experimenting and creating hypotheses, the points of focus in post-positivist approaches are individuals and their perspectives. Individuals are examined as wholes, taking into consideration their views, values, motives for action and creativity, while multiple perspectives of the world are

recognised (Thomas, 2017; Gergen, 2011). This can lead to a more holistic understanding of the investigated phenomena, reinforced by the direct involvement of the researcher in any examined experience. This more humanitarian view of the world seems to be more fitting to the social aspect of the human nature, as social reality is viewed more as the result of a human initiation and actions rather than as the result of imposed, outer factors governed by general external regularities.

Therefore, a post-positivistic perspective along with elements of constructionism-related ontology have been considered appropriate for the purposes of the present research, the focus of which concerns aspects of practical instrumental music teaching. Individual perspectives and experiences will be analysed in an attempt to examine relevant phenomena from multiple perspectives, in order to acquire a deeper and more pluralistic understanding of sight-reading, which will subsequently helpfully inform the creation of relevant educational material. A subjectivist approach within an interpretative context will also be attempted, through the utilisation of qualitative elements and means, which will be discussed further in the relevant following sections.

### **3.4 Subjectivist conception of social reality**

Elements of a researcher's ontological and epistemological position are reflected in their conception of social reality. The selection of an approach is highly indicative of a researcher's philosophical background and has an impact on the choice of methodology, means of data collection and analysis (Cohen et al., 2011). In this research, a subjectivist approach towards social reality has been considered appropriate. This approach is linked with the ontology of Constructivism, the epistemology of Post-positivism, and the Interpretive paradigm, which will be further elaborated subsequently. Unlike Objectivism, where social reality is external, objective, and universal, subjectivists propose a human-created world, where multiple perspectives lead to different understandings of the world. Reality is not viewed as an ordered, independent natural world, where deterministic cause-and-effect relationships form regularities which allow for prediction (Cohen et al., 2002; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Mouly, 1978). In contrast, reality is perceived as the result of the



subjective experience of individuals and is unique and personal. The environment is shaped by human actions, which are the product of individuals' initiative, free will and creativity; these determine if and how people will operate (Cohen et al., 2011, 2002). Therefore, the uniformity observable in natural phenomena cannot be equally present in the social world, which is constantly changing due to multifaceted human interactions (Cohen et al., 2002).

In opposition to Objectivism, where knowledge is considered reliable when it can be proven by empirical evidence through observation and scientific measurement, in the subjectivist approach emphasis is placed on understanding the different interpretations of the world and discovering their subjective meanings, through individual cases examining individual or joint actions. The aim is to reveal meaningful relationships of elements relating to the social world, which shape human actions according to the individuals' goals and values (Cohen et al., 2002; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This represents a relativist reality, where the existence of multiple truths and sometimes conflicting values is possible due to multiple perspectives. Instead of seeking to discover general laws of universal applicability through 'nomothetic' methodology, a subjectivist approach seeks to gain understanding of individual interpretations by adopting an 'idiographic' methodology, which is based on individuality, and is accepting of diversity and of multiple perspectives (Barrett, 2014; Cohen et al., 2002).

### **3.5 An Interpretive perspective**

The Interpretive paradigm, an alternative to Positivism, relates to the subjective perspective towards social reality and to the ontology of Constructionism. Interpretivism views reality as 'a social creation' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 121) which 'is constructed and interpreted by people' (Denscombe, 2002, p. 18). Social reality is perceived as 'the product of processes by which human beings together negotiate the meanings of actions and situations' (Blaikie, 2011c, p. 767). Knowledge of the world is not something external to be discovered, but is the result of human conceptual ability, and is subjective, since it relates to people's personal beliefs, values and perspectives and occurs through individual interpretative processes. Therefore, it is possible for

many interpretations of the same thing to exist, which leads to the presence of multiple realities (Blaikie, 2011c; Denscombe, 2010).

The concept of *action* is central to the interpretative paradigm. *Action* combines behaviour along with its specific meaning, shaped according to one's motives, values and intentions. The main objective of research is to achieve a deep understanding of people's different interpretations of the world: Cohen et al. (2002) mention that 'the central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience' (p. 22). Thus, the individual is the focus of research, and the researcher aims to examine things from individuals' perspectives and ultimately, to achieve an internally informed understanding (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2002). In this sense, Interpretivism is described as 'idiographic' (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 7), since it is oriented towards discovery of the specific or individual, instead of seeking to identify general 'nomothetic' laws (Barrett, 2014; Taber, 2011).

### **3.5.1 Origins of Interpretivism**

The roots of Interpretivism are found in the work of Weber and Schütz, who 'sought to establish an objective science of the subjective with the aim of producing verifiable knowledge of the meanings that constitute the social world' (Blaikie, 2011b, p. 509). Weber uses the concept of '*Verstehen*' to describe interpretive understanding, which is viewed as an intellectual process (Bouterse, 2014; Roulston, 2005; Crotty, 1998).

Regarding the interpretation and explanation of phenomena, a distinction is made between natural events and human actions. More specifically, prediction is a process which can be applied widely in terms of natural phenomena. Since they obey specific universal regularities, it is possible to foresee the course of events, as well as various potential effects. However, the same does not seem to apply to the understanding of human actions, due to their dependence on the motives and values of the individuals. According to the concept of *Verstehen*, human actions can be understood when the specific motives which led to them are reproduced internally and relived empathically (Blaikie, 2011b). Empathy, in particular, is an essential part of the process of interpretation, since an inner experience alone does not lead to understanding as 'knowledge' by someone else, in the sense that the other does not

feel the same as the one directly experiencing the situation (Bouterse, 2014). Individual values are also significant to the interpretive process. A deeper understanding can be achieved by those who have similar value orientation, due to their value-related relevance. Thus, individuals' values are viewed as 'instruments in the service of understanding, which is here the causal interpretation of the actions of others' (Bouterse, 2014, p. 579).

### **3.5.2 Justification of the Interpretive perspective**

For social research, and in particular when exploring an educational context, the interpretive perspective appears to be the appropriate focus. Although the assumptions of the normative paradigm and of positivism might provide sufficient and accurate accounts regarding the natural world, they appear to be less appropriate to explain aspects of the complex social world. The view of human behaviour as the result of external factors of the past shapes a causality-focused approach towards events. This forms a reality which indicates a rather deterministic philosophy with focus on pre-determined facts, shaped by detached previous events which remain unapproachable, and thereby away from the social complexities, multiple connections, and relationships.

Furthermore, it might be worth considering to what extent the achievement of objective knowledge could indeed be possible within a social, or in this case an educational, context. Due to the participatory and subjective nature of social and educational research, it seems relatively unlikely for it to guarantee absolute objectivity. For example, could the researchers' values and expectations be isolated and extracted from the process of study to such a level that it would guarantee an impartial, objective view on the matter? Since researchers themselves are part of the social world under investigation, 'observations and explanations of the social world are inevitably coloured by expectations and predispositions that are brought to the research' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 122-123).

In contrast, regarding the production of knowledge, interpretive research aims to reveal various aspects of a multifaceted reality, as informed by the interpretation of the multiple perspectives of human behaviour. Research data emerges from direct experience with the topic of investigation. Relevant data includes the specific

meanings which underlie individual behaviours in specific times and places, making any knowledge locally and temporally determined. Thus, a basis is provided for comparison of relevant behaviours in various situations and contexts (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011, 2002). Therefore, the present research will approach examined phenomena from an interpretative viewpoint, taking into consideration any limitations or potential impact on research-related aspects which might occur due to its subjective nature. These will be further discussed in section 3.5.3.

### **3.5.3 Considering risks of Interpretivism and potential impact on research**

Denscombe (2010) identifies possible risks from the employment of an interpretive approach. The predominantly subjective nature of interpretive research creates issues of uncertainty and relativism in terms of the produced results. More specifically, since the interpretation of data is based on the researcher's specific perspective, it seems to lead more to partial, rather than general conclusions. Examination by a different researcher and, therefore, from a different perspective, might lead to a different interpretation of results. This means that within interpretive research 'there is scope for alternative and competing explanations, each of which can claim validity' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 123). In addition, due to its flexible design, which is constantly reformed throughout the course of research depending on the emerging findings instead of being fully determined beforehand (Robson, 2011), this type of research might be perceived as less rigorous. However, 'good interpretivist research actually calls for an approach that is very systematic and rigorous' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 124). Finally, the participatory form of interpretative research might allow for impact on the results, since participants – including the researcher – might react to the knowledge produced by altering their behaviour accordingly, in order to confirm or contradict the initial assumptions (Denscombe, 2010).

These risks need to be acknowledged and taken into consideration in order to reduce potential impact on my research process. As a researcher, I strive to approach subjectivity critically, aiming to recognise any preconceived ideas, personal biases or expectations that may be affecting my perspective towards a situation. Therefore, careful design of data collection processes, including data triangulation, in

combination with enough control over the means of data collection, for example through semi-structured interviews with open-ended, rather than totally free questions, are seen as necessary to safeguard data authenticity and validity (Cohen et al., 2002).

In addition, the consideration of language seems to be of utmost importance, since its use as a means to express and represent meaning can have a significant impact on data collection. For example, I recognise that the language used in responses is only representative of people at a specific place and time and it is highly possible that one person might not use the same words or way of phrasing when asked the same questions on different occasions. According to Matthews and Ross (2010, p. 23) 'knowledge can only be partial' and its meaning is negotiated with others through language. Therefore, I strove to use non-subjective language, which would not lead participants towards a specific answer, but rather invite them to express their opinions in depth, while also allowing space for the unplanned and the unexpected (Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002). Further considerations, also connected to ethical aspects of the research and my position, are detailed in Chapter 4.

### **3.6 Practitioner research**

Educational research is essential, as it allows for a better understanding of the process of learning. According to van Ernst 'all educational research should, in some way, help practitioners to better understand the process of learning' (van Ernst, 1994, p. 46). In fact, it has been considered a weakness of educational research that 'many researchers are no longer practitioners and do not translate their research findings into practice' (van Ernst, 1994, p. 46). Similarly, applied research is also essential in the field of Music Education, aiming towards the 'direct improvement of practice' (Bresler, 1996, p. 7).

Roulston (2005) identifies different terms which are used to describe applied research in a teaching context, with some of the most common including 'action research' (Zeichner, 1993; Elliott, 1991), 'teacher-research' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; MacLean & Mohr, 1999), 'practitioner research' (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), collaborative inquiry (Bray et al., 2000) and 'self study' (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

The common elements shared among the various definitions and terminology include the acknowledgement of the importance of critical reflection and the orientation of educational research towards positive change. The process and significance of reflection has been described extensively by Schön (1983), who identified three stages of reflection: before, during and after action. This continuous reflective process is proposed as a prominent feature of educational research, in order to enhance the effectiveness of practitioners' actions and aim for improvement.

However, a debate seems to have been present among researchers, regarding the validity of teacher research as a means to contribute to academic knowledge. This discrimination between practical research conducted by teachers and by academic researchers implies that knowledge is hierarchically rated and classified, which might disregard the various positive effects of applied teacher research and the benefits of an insider<sup>6</sup> perspective (Roulston, 2005, p. 182) in favour of research conducted by expert researchers rather than practitioners. Roulston (2005) also mentions that narrow definitions of research as a term 'discourage practitioners from engaging in teacher-research and prohibit the development of a practitioner-based stock-of knowledge grounded in teachers' knowledge and experience' (p. 167).

Arguments against practitioner-research have various central areas of focus, including the methods of research and the produced knowledge. The belief that practical knowledge 'does not contribute to the professional knowledge' is a prevalent criticism against practitioner research (Robbins, 2014, p. 200), according to which general theoretical knowledge is considered as more significant than knowledge which is related to and occurs from the detailed examination of a specific case (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Qualitative practice-related methodology, research techniques, sample sizes and the practitioners' qualifications to undertake research, have been challenged in terms of scientific significance and validity (Travers, 1958; Hodgkinson, 1957). Knowledge produced through these methods can be viewed as relatively informal and practice-oriented, rather than theory-oriented and, therefore, can be perceived as less academic 'with less rigorous standards' (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001, p. 299). In addition, applied teacher-research is claimed not to lead to scientifically

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<sup>6</sup> Relevant considerations are discussed in relation to my research in Chapter 4, sections 4.7 and 4.8.

valuable results due to lack of relevant expertise of the practitioners in the field of research (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

On the other hand, advocates of practical educational research support not only its means and methodology, but also the significance of their questions and of the knowledge produced. Practitioner research is thereby viewed as ‘not *less than* but *different from* traditional research’ (Robbins, 2014, p. 200). More specifically, Robbins (2014) supports that teacher-researchers should seek to examine significant questions which are directly related to practical issues. Teachers’ experience is often considered a powerful means to gain valuable practice-related knowledge; practitioner-researchers’ accounts indicate that they are close to and often involved in the lived reality of practical teaching, creating a bridge for the gap between isolated research and the actual complexity of the teaching process (Finney & Laurence, 2013). Thus, teacher-research contributes by exploring new paths through empirical investigation, which is informed by and strongly connected to existing relevant theory. In order to produce any knowledge, appropriate and rigorous methodological design is employed. Careful consideration of methods, systematic measurements or observational processes, adequate data analyses and detailed methodology description strengthen the research validity by enhancing data reliability, supporting the findings and allowing for replication (Roulston, 2005; National Research Council [NRC], 2002; Bresler, 1996).

### **3.6.1 Transferability, generalisability, reliability, and validity**

Practitioner research can provide insights into specific teaching contexts, aiming to find solutions to problems, which might be transferrable to similar situations in broader contexts (Barrett, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2010). Transferability of results does not seem absolute in music education, since it depends on the level of detail in the explanation provided by the researcher and, ultimately, relies on the readers’ ability to critically appraise the results and examine the extent to which any elements might be transferrable to other similar cases (Thomas, 2017). It is envisaged that some of the findings from this research might be of relevance and/or transferable to other institutions in the context of Greek Conservatoire music education, and that the devised material (as sole resources) could be utilised for the development of piano

learners' sight-reading skills within the present context, as well as beyond, for example by being of interest to users from other cultural backgrounds (such as the piano teachers of Study 3).

Lack of generalisability is another criticism regarding practitioner research results. It is commonly claimed that an idiographic case focused on individuals cannot allow for nomothetic generalisations and broad conclusions (Barrett, 2014; Robbins, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Cochran-Smith & Donnel, 2006). Thomas (2017) supports that due to the restricted size of a sample in practitioner research, broader generalisations are not advisable, since gaining detail does not guarantee that the same findings are necessarily true for any other similar case. Therefore, any general conclusions within these studies have been drawn in a descriptive and analytic manner, in relation to the research theoretical framework, while it is acknowledged that there is limited scope for generalisations due to the site-specific nature of this research. However, the basis of any general points has been rationally explained, allowing for potential extension of findings from the specific site to similar situations within a broader region of reference (Barrett, 2014; Cohen et al., 2002).

The notions of validity and reliability are also discussed in relation to qualitative research. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), 'the concepts of validity and reliability are multi-faceted' and there is a correlation between them: 'reliability is a necessary but insufficient condition for validity in research; reliability is a necessary precondition of validity' (p. 105). Denscombe (2010) describes validity as a 'vital' concern for the research and explains that it is closely connected to the accuracy of data and their explanations (Cohen et al., 2011; Denscombe, 2010), in order to ensure that 'the research is not based on poor data and erroneous interpretations' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 143). Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research, considerations about validity are different from the context of quantitative or scientific research. Thomas (2017) emphasises that addressing validity 'can become highly problematic when we are discussing any kind of interpretative research', (p. 145). Thomas further reports that qualitative researchers often 'question the whole notion of validity' (Thomas, 2017, p. 147); instead, in qualitative research it is advised to consider validity as a means to reflect on whether the research leads to new knowledge, through meticulous data collection from an appropriate sample, richness



of data and accurate data analysis (Thomas, 2017, Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher's objectivity is also emphasised (Cohen et al., 2011), as well as the notion that validity in qualitative research is also determined by the 'assessing community of readers' (Thomas, 2017, p. 148).

Similarly to validity, the notion of reliability is also stated as 'unworkable' for interpretive, qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 119), as it concerns the ability for the research method to reproduce the same results (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011). Denscombe (2010) explains that reliability concerns the data collection methods and techniques, which need to be 'consistent' and replicable (Denscombe, 2010, p. 144). In other words, in order for a research study to be viewed as reliable, it would need to yield the same results by following the same research process. Although this is applicable in scientific (quantitative) research, in interpretive research this is not entirely possible; as Thomas (2017) argues, 'you are interpreting on the basis of you being *you*, interviewing someone else being *them*. [...] Your "positionality" [...] will affect this interpretation, and you would not expect someone else to emerge with the same interview transcripts as you' (p. 145). Therefore, in qualitative research reliability relates to 'context- and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 120).

Within the present research, I strove to ensure that the research process is underpinned by validity, in terms of the research design, the methodology, the data collection process and the analysis, and that the emerging findings are reliable, detailed, and authentic to the specific research context. For all studies, data has been acquired from participants who were actively involved in the research context and who were representative of the examined population, through data collection processes (interview and survey questions) which strove to gain participants' in-depth and honest responses. Findings have been discussed in relation to relevant literature, acknowledging the site-specific nature of the research, while the analysis of findings has been underpinned by constant reflection upon my position as a researcher and personal biases. Considerations relating to my positionality as a researcher, objectivity and reflexivity are discussed in Chapter 4 (sections 4.7 and 4.8).

### 3.7 Qualitative approach

The employment of qualitative principles has been considered appropriate for the purposes of the present research. Qualitative research is associated with various terms which describe this approach in contrast to quantitative research. These include 'interpretive research', 'descriptive research', 'field-based research' and 'case study', among others, each of which can underpin 'the study of music education in its natural contexts, drawing on participants' knowledge and experiences' (Bresler, 1996, p. 5).

For interpretive research, the main purpose is to acquire in-depth understanding of individuals' meanings attributed to particular experiences, by examining them from various theoretical perspectives. Such research is also often described as naturalistic, phenomenological, hermeneutic or constructivist, since knowledge is constructed from the multiple interpretations of individuals regarding specific phenomena, as they occur within their natural context, as detailed in section 3.5 previously. Research purposes may also be emancipating, seeking to create change by viewing the world through particular perspectives, or may be deconstructive, aiming to question and critically examine assumptions that are considered universally true (Roulston, 2006).

Unlike quantitative research methodologies which usually reflect positivistic epistemological assumptions, qualitative research has a post-positivistic worldview. As discussed previously, qualitative research views the world as a human construction, which is based on and influenced by the cultural and personal background of individuals. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 3) describe qualitative research as a 'naturalistic' approach which seeks to examine individual interpretations within their original context and environment. Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative methodology primarily uses data sources in text form, rather than numbers, in order to achieve a more in-depth understanding of elements of the complex social world. Therefore, relevant means of data collection, many of which have been considered appropriate and utilised within the present research, include observation, journals, reflective notes, and interviews, among others. Further to this, the researchers themselves are inseparable from the research context, each carrying their own value system 'from which they observe and interpret' (Bresler, 1996, p. 6). A variety of

means are considered necessary in order to achieve a better understanding of the various meanings and perspectives of the participants, focusing on empirical and observational processes of data collection. Any data is analysed in detail and knowledge is constructed through inductive reasoning processes (Thomas, 2017; Roulston, 2006; Flinders & Richardson, 2002).

Inductive reasoning is one of the two main types of reasoning, with the second one being deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning or top-down logic is mostly found in quantitative research and is based on general rules which are assumed to be true. If these premises are true, then the argument is considered valid; if not, then it is considered invalid. During inductive reasoning or bottom-up logic, specific information acquired by the researcher through exploring the participants' experiences can act as evidence which leads to more general principles; this type of reasoning is frequently used in qualitative research. Although more information increases the credibility of the argument, knowledge emerging from inductive reasoning is not necessarily universally true since what is true for a specific case might not be true for any other case. Therefore, inductive arguments are described as strong or weak, rather than valid or invalid. Regarding social research, knowledge is considered 'provisional', acting as a base for further expansion (Thomas, 2017, p. 126); this would also be true in educational research.

### **3.7.1 Qualitative research questions, methods of data collection and data analysis**

In qualitative research three different types of research questions are employed, depending on the focus of the study: descriptive, analytic, and theoretical questions. Descriptive questions aim to facilitate the acquisition of a detailed description, an in-depth portrayal of an event, view, or phenomenon. Analytic questions examine the meaning of specific elements, aiming to reveal links, connections and relationships between them, ways in which they have an effect on each other and common or unshared aspects among different perspectives. Theoretical questions aim to create a better explanation and deeper understanding of a phenomenon by attempting to interpret specific events through various perspectives and to identify potential

association with other fields, through social, psychological, or economic extensions, for instance (Roulston, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

In qualitative research, data may be collected through a variety of methods, such as interviews, accounts, observation, and qualitative questionnaires, amongst others (Cohen et al., 2011). Depending on the research purpose, the researcher needs to decide which methods ('instruments') of data collection would be most appropriate in order to explore their research questions (Cohen et al., 2011). Literature on research methodology identifies strengths and limitations of the different data collection tools, also drawing connections to the types of data which may be acquired and the data analysis. The notion of 'neutrality' is emphasised in relation to the employed data collection instruments, so that they do 'not bias the results obtained using the particular data collection technique' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 150). Considering such parameters in advance is advised, in order to enable the researcher to make appropriate decisions and to devise the appropriate data collection tools for the purposes of their research (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011). The data collection methods employed for this research are detailed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3).

Qualitative data analysis processes are viewed as pertinent to the present research. Any data collected with the appropriate means are then analysed in an attempt to provide informative and accurate descriptions of the various aspects of the examined phenomenon. For this purpose, 'thick description' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 133) and thematic interpretative analysis are often utilised (Thomas, 2017; Denscombe, 2010). Thematic analysis includes systematic coding and categorisation of words and concepts which are encountered consistently, for example, within interview transcripts, in order to form perceptually related umbrella-themes. These are then further edited and reviewed creating sub-categories, to construct a thematic 'map' (Thomas, 2017, p. 246). It is advised to include illustrative quotations (complementing or contrasting) for each theme, while considering connections of ideas across different themes (Thomas, 2017). In interpretive research, the processes of analysis of findings and discussion are likely to occur alongside each other, by meaningfully synthesising emerging ideas (Thomas, 2017). It has also been considered important to identify any implications of results on the specific field of research, or on other disciplines, as well as to propose ways in which the research results might be

utilised as a starting point for future research (Thomas, 2017; Denscombe, 2010; Conway & Borst, 2001).

### **3.8 Summary**

Within this chapter the theoretical framework of the research design is presented, focusing on my philosophical position of a constructivist approach with a post-positivistic epistemology. The interpretive perspective of the research is explained, considering risks and potential impact of this approach on the research. Aspects of qualitative research have also been discussed, along with parameters such as transferability, generalisability, validity, and reliability, which link to methodological and ethical considerations of the research, as presented in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

This chapter focuses on methodological and ethical considerations of the research. The methodological considerations emerge from the theoretical framework of the research design detailed in Chapter 3, including the three developed studies, data collection methods and data analysis. Ethical considerations link to my experience as a researcher and my position in the music Conservatoire where part of this research was undertaken (Study 1), including positive aspects and potential challenges, and my reflection on my experience as a researcher in this context. The deployed processes of obtaining participants' informed consent are also detailed.

### **4.1 Methodological considerations**

The methodological considerations of the research presented in this chapter are aligned with the theoretical framework of research design detailed in Chapter 3. The following sections focus on parameters such as the three studies which emerged from the research questions (section 4.2), the employed data collection methods (section 4.3) focusing on interviews (section 4.3.1) and survey (section 4.3.2), including relevant considerations, and encountered challenges (section 4.3.3), and the process of data analysis (section 4.4).

### **4.2 The present studies**

In order to achieve the aims of the research and to explore the research questions (outlined at the end of Chapter 2), three research projects were designed, utilising the theoretical framework of research design presented in Chapter 3. Studies 1 and 2 focus on the identification of elements to support the overarching aim of developing sight-reading material for Conservatoire piano learners in Greece by informing my creative process. In Study 3, the devised material was evaluated through a survey review from piano teachers.

1. Study 1: 'Contextualising sight-reading through the views of instrumental teachers of the Greek Conservatoire'.

2. Study 2: 'Consulting creators of piano sight-reading material'.
3. Study 3: 'Analysis of piano teachers' evaluative survey reviews of the devised material' (two sight-reading books for piano beginners).

Study 1, 'Contextualising sight-reading through the views of instrumental teachers of the Greek Conservatoire', builds on findings from previous personal research focusing on piano sight-reading in the Conservatoire, by extending the research to various instruments. As explained in Chapter 1 (section 1.1), in my previous work, I explored (through interviews) piano teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards sight-reading in the same Conservatoire and observed elements of sight-reading teaching in individual piano lessons (through non-participant observation). Through Study 1, the exploration of similar aspects of instrumental sight-reading has enabled the development of my findings from the previous research, revealing further insights beyond the piano, linking to other instruments and instrumental teachers' practices, which has informed the process of creating my own sight-reading material (presented in Appendix 6). The findings of Study 1 are detailed in Chapter 5.

Study 2, 'Consulting creators<sup>7</sup> of piano sight-reading material', was developed after reviewing existing piano sight-reading publications, in order to further inform the framework of developing my own sight-reading material by deepening my understanding of procedures, considerations, and limitations as well as creative processes involved within the generation of this type of educational material. This qualitative research project has involved interviewing creators of existing sight-reading resources. Their professional experience in the field has been considered valuable and their advice has been viewed as particularly enlightening, especially in relation to practical aspects of the educational material creative process. For the purposes of this specific study, interviews with sight-reading material creators have been considered appropriate as a means to acquire as comprehensive and deep understanding of their experiences and processes as possible. The findings from Study

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<sup>7</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, the term 'author(s)' has been utilised when referring to the creators of sight-reading publications within this thesis, instead of 'composers', as it encompasses the non-musical material as well as the compositional content of their books.

2 are presented in Chapter 6 and discussed in relation to the connections that the creators' experiences made for me and my own creative process.

Study 3, 'Analysis of piano teachers' evaluative survey reviews of the two created books', utilised a survey through which the devised sight-reading material of the thesis was appraised by Greek and non-Greek piano teachers. This survey was designed as an adaptation to the Covid-19 restrictions which prevented the pilot-testing of the devised sight-reading books with piano learners. The survey aimed to collect feedback on the different components and pedagogical approach of the books, gaining insights towards piano teachers' understanding of the purpose and underpinnings of the material. The collected feedback is analysed in Chapter 10. In addition, the process of developing my own material necessitated the establishment of relevant creative principles as a basis guiding my creative approach. In order to develop an informed framework and set of principles, a comparative analysis of sight-reading specifications and relevant marking criteria within the piano syllabi of international music examination boards was undertaken, focusing on the first grades of piano studies. Findings from Study 2 also contributed to this approach (as discussed in Chapter 6, sections 6.5-6.6); the comparative analysis is detailed in Chapter 7.

### **4.3 Data collection methods**

Data collection methods of this research were selected according to the purpose and research questions of each study. The employed data collection methods included (a) interviews, and (b) a survey. These methods were considered appropriate, with a view to acquiring as detailed data as possible in relation to the research purpose and the questions explored through each study. As illustrated in Table 4.1, for Studies 1 and 2, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with instrumental teachers of a Greek Conservatoire, and with international authors of sight-reading publications, respectively; Study 3 collected feedback on the devised sight-reading material (presented in Appendix 6) from piano teachers in Greece and beyond, through a qualitative survey review.



Table 4.1 Data collection methods

STUDIES	PARTICIPANTS	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	MODE OF DELIVERY
Study 1	Instrumental teachers of the Conservatoire	Interviews (semi-structured)	In-person
Study 2	Authors of sight-reading publications	Interviews (semi-structured)	Online
Study 3	Piano teachers (In Greece and outside)	Survey (Qualitative survey reviews)	Online

The following sections detail the ways in which interviews (section 4.3.1) and survey (section 4.3.2) have been utilised in the present research alongside relevant considerations and encountered challenges, focusing on transcription and translation (section 4.3.3).

### 4.3.1 Interviews

For the research purposes of Study 1 and 2, semi-structured interviews with the participants were considered as appropriate tools for the exploration of the research questions, in order to facilitate a deeper understanding towards the participants' perspectives. In addition to this, qualitative interviewing was a method with which I was familiar through previous research I conducted during my MA studies<sup>8</sup>, and felt that this experience would support me in my role as a researcher in this context. After obtaining ethical approval from the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee of the University of York before the commencement of each study, informed consent was sought and gained from potential interview participants and survey respondents (further information about ethical concerns of this research is provided in section 4.9).

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<sup>8</sup> (a) How is sight-reading perceived in a Greek Conservatoire and which sight-reading strategies are incorporated in piano teaching?', and (b) 'An examination of musicians' experiences with Dyslexia in the school and music setting: challenges, compensatory strategies, attitudes and other implications'.

For the planning and execution of the interviews, suggestions and information from academic literature were taken into consideration, significantly informing the process of interviewing. Roulston's publications on qualitative interviews and reflective interviewing, and Thomas' research guide (2017), along with further relevant resources, have been particularly informative regarding both practical aspects and mental processes involved before, during or after the interviews (Thomas, 2017; Roulston, 2013; Roulston, 2010; Vamvoukas, 2010; King & Horrocks, 2009).

According to Cohen et al. (2011), 'Interviews enable participants [...] to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (p. 267). The aspects explored through interviews in qualitative research may concern 'facts or opinions or attitudes, or any combination of these' (Thomas, 2017, p. 202). Discussing the concept of 'quality' in qualitative interviewing, Roulston (2010) underlines the necessity for researchers to think carefully in advance about the research design, the interview questions and potential factors which may influence their formulation, as well as about the appropriate method of data analysis.

For the purposes of Studies 1 and 2 of the present research, semi-structured interviews were utilised, to benefit from the flexibility this type of interviewing offers to the researcher and 'the freedom to follow up points as necessary' (Thomas, 2017, p. 206). For this type of interview, literature advises to create 'schedules', namely lists of points or actual questions to guide the process, which would act as reminders of areas that need to be covered during the interview (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews also offers the opportunity for the researcher to explore further particular areas of interest, for example by asking follow-up questions and by providing verbal or non-verbal probes and prompts, as need arises. This could contribute to clarifications, further explanations and more detailed information from the interviewees, thereby enabling the researcher's clearer and more in-depth understanding of the explored area (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011).

Thomas (2017) shares further considerations, such as the need to build rapport by trying 'to put the interviewee at ease before the interview proper begins' (p. 202), and to pay attention to (and make mental or written notes of) non-verbal cues and clues from the interviewee's behaviour, which may inform further the meaning of

their verbal responses. Such aspects are also helpful to include within the interview transcriptions, to be considered during the process of data analysis (Thomas, 2017).

#### **4.3.1.1 The interviews of Studies 1 and 2**

For Studies 1 and 2 of the present thesis, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, as detailed in the following paragraphs.

##### **Study 1:**

For the purposes of Study 1, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four interviewees from the specific Conservatoire in Greece who expressed their wish to participate. As stated previously, the main aim was to build upon findings from my previous research on piano sight-reading (explained in Chapter 1), by exploring aspects such as instrumental teachers' awareness of the relevant regulations, perceptions and attitudes, practical aspects including difficulties and strategies, in relation to other instruments within the same Conservatoire. Instrumental teachers in the Conservatoire were approached and informed about the research purposes and four expressed their willingness to participate (further information about the interviews and participants of this study are detailed in Chapter 5). After obtaining informed consent<sup>9</sup>, the interviews were conducted in person, in a location chosen by each interviewee, in which they would feel comfortable to discuss the specific topic; the discussion was in Greek, their native language, to enable them to express their thoughts with greater comfort and ease, thus avoiding potential hesitation or lack of clarity or depth due to the language barrier. Data was recorded with a portable, digital audio-recording device and has been treated sensitively and stored securely, in compliance with the AHEC procedure.

The interviews were transcribed in Greek and the transcripts were sent to the participants via e-mail for approval. Relevant amendments predominantly included clarifications of meaning, replacement of sections which seemed rather vague or were expressed through informal language of speech and, in one case, the answering of two additional questions. The suggested amendments, comments and suggestions were incorporated within the Greek transcripts prior to their translation into English by me

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<sup>9</sup> The relevant consent form and information sheet are provided in Appendix 1.

(the interview questions can be found in Appendix 3). Relevant challenges are identified in section 4.3.3.

### **Study 2:**

In Study 2, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with international authors of piano sight-reading publications, after the review of sight-reading resources. As previously stated, the purpose of the study was to explore the authors' experiences with creating this type of material, in order to inform further my own creative process. Potential participants were identified on the basis of their published piano sight-reading output and were invited to participate in the study via email, introducing the researcher and explaining the research purpose.

Three of the four participants took part in an online (individual) interview, while one participant provided written responses to the interview questions, as they requested. The interviews were scheduled at a convenient time for each participant considering different time zones, as the authors were based internationally; online interviews were also necessitated, due to the restrictions of COVID-19. As stated in Chapter 6, informed consent was elicited before the commencement of the study; the interviews were audio-recorded, and the data was stored securely and treated with sensitivity according to the AHEC procedure. As previously, the interview transcription files were sent to the participants for approval or potential amendments, which were incorporated into the transcripts prior to the data analysis. The interview questions for Study 2 are provided in Appendix 4.

#### **4.3.1.2 The interview questions**

For the semi-structured interviews (Studies 1 and 2), an interview schedule was developed in advance, outlining the focus areas of the interviews. For each area/theme, particular questions were also generated in order to support the interview process, while providing space for follow-up questions and probes as needed during the interviews. For both studies, the interview questions included open-ended as well as short-answer questions, the general structure of which can be seen in the appendices (Study 1, Appendix 3; Study 2, Appendix 4). The structure of the interview schedules was intended to act more as a guide, rather than as a strict linear diagram, acknowledging the fact that the flow of the conversation could lead to

different directions, in alignment with the literature considerations stated previously (Thomas, 2017). Therefore, for both studies, the order of the questions was not the same for all participants, as it was largely dependent on the overall course of the discussion.

In both studies, further questions were generated from the responses of the participants, which led to follow-up questions. Helpful probes were also provided in cases where these were considered necessary, in order to gain greater detail regarding participants' statements. For example, when one instrumental teacher (Study 1, Participant 2) mentioned sight-reading duets between their pupils as a practice to promote sight-reading within the lesson, I further asked 'How do they respond to this interaction?', to acquire a more in-depth understanding of their experience. Finally, in addition to the questions, positive body language and encouraging, verbal and non-verbal prompts were utilised during both the in-person and the online settings, including friendly facial expressions, smiling, and nodding gestures, amongst others, to create a positive and welcoming interview environment.

#### **4.3.2 Survey (Study 3)**

For the purposes of Study 3, a qualitative survey review was conducted with piano teachers in order to collect feedback on the sight-reading material devised as part of the thesis. The survey was designed as an adaptation of the initial plan of pilot-testing the material with piano learners, which was not feasible at the time due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

As explained in Chapter 10, potential respondents were identified and approached via email from a wide network of colleagues in Greece and beyond, including (private and/or Conservatoire) piano teachers from various Greek cities, as well as piano teaching members of staff at the University of York, Graduate Teaching Assistants and PhD candidates from the University of York Music Department; alumni from the University of York MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching course and members of the Music Education Forum of the University of York Music Department also participated. The survey was developed both in English and in Greek, to enable participants to provide as informative feedback as possible without being

limited from the language barrier. The Greek responses were translated in English by the thesis author.

The platform of Google forms was selected in order to overcome potential implications concerning the survey, such as hesitance to participate, as it was likely that this format would be more familiar to the Greek participants, than the Qualtrics platform for example. After obtaining ethical approval from the University of York AHEC, the survey was piloted in both versions (Greek and English) and checked for clarity and potential adaptations; relevant amendments were made resulting in the final version which was distributed to the respondents (presented in Appendix 5). Further detail about the survey is provided in Chapter 10 (section 10.3).

#### **4.3.2.1 Various considerations and survey questions**

Advice from research literature was sought for the development of the survey, in particular from the publications of Cohen et al. (2011) and Thomas (2017). Considering that anonymity usually 'encourages greater honesty' in participants' responses (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 129), the survey was anonymous, and this was made clear to the respondents in advance, through email communication before the commencement of the survey, as well as within the introduction of the survey which elicited the respondents' informed consent. It was envisaged that issues concerning the survey return rate or non-respondents would not be encountered (Cohen et al., 2011), as the survey was disseminated only to piano teachers who had previously agreed to provide feedback. In addition, although the survey sample (19 respondents) was not large, it was inclusive of piano teachers with different amounts of piano teaching experiences, backgrounds, and teaching contexts, as detailed in Chapter 10. It was not sought to reach generalised conclusions from the data, and it is acknowledged that the survey findings are representative only of the specific sample of piano teachers.

In alignment with the research purpose, this qualitative survey was developed for piano teachers to provide feedback on the thesis author's designed material through their evaluated reviews. The decision to collect feedback through a qualitative survey was based on the consideration that 'qualitative, less structured, word-based and open-ended questionnaires [...] can capture the specificity of a

particular situation’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 247). Thomas (2017) advises to think about the wording of the questions in relation to the kind of response that is sought to be received, emphasising that due to the absence of human interaction, which occurs for example in interviews (and can lead to prompts and probes for more clarity or detail), clearly presented questions can elicit useful responses for the research.

The survey questions were developed taking into consideration relevant suggestions from research methodology literature, resulting in the following categories of questions:

- (a) close-ended questions (such as dichotomous ‘Yes/No’ questions)
- (b) single or multiple-selection questions,
- (c) rating scale questions (Likert)
- (d) open-ended questions.

Closed-ended questions included questions which might have needed a short answer (for example about the number of years of their teaching experience). For any dichotomous questions such as ‘yes/no’ questions or where selection of one of two opposites was requested, I provided further options, such as ‘other’ or ‘maybe’ and/or ‘I don’t know’, in order to avoid ‘respondent bias’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 251; Thomas, 2017). Figure 4.1 illustrates this approach through an example of a survey question:

16.4. Could this book/section of the book be used as a handbook or method book?\*

(such as by approaching pieces through sight-reading first, and then working on them as repertoire pieces)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maybe.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don’t know.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

Figure 4.1. Example of a dichotomous question (Study 3 survey)

The selection questions included single- and multiple-answer questions, asking the respondents to select one or as many boxes as appropriate. In these questions I endeavoured to provide a wide range of potential responses (Cohen et al., 2011). A relevant question example is provided in Figure 4.2 below.

20.1. How do you envisage that you would use the book in your teaching?\*

Please tick as many boxes as you wish. [multiple checkboxes]

<input type="checkbox"/>	In specific sight-reading activities in a separate part of the lesson.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In sight-reading activities which then evolve into repertoire practice.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In combination with a method book or repertoire pieces.
<input type="checkbox"/>	As a method book itself.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In one-to-one lessons.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In group lessons.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

Figure 4.2. Example of a multiple selection question (Study 3 survey)

Rating scale questions explored respondents' perceptions 'along a continuum' (Thomas, 2017, p. 221). Likert scales were used to collect feedback, particularly on how useful, appropriate, or helpful different book elements were viewed by the respondents. Rating scales from 1 to 5 were primarily used, containing a middle point on point 3; scales with an even number of points were also used (with 4 or 6 points), which did not include a midpoint and therefore the responses indicated the respondents' position towards one of the two ends of the scale (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011). Relevant examples of a five-point scale (Figure 4.3) and an even-number scale (Figure 4.4) are presented below:

6.4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful did you find the questions in the table of "The Achievement Criteria"??\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very useful

Figure 4.3. Example of a five-point rating scale (Study 3 survey)

17.7. On a scale of 1 to 6, the level of difficulty in the learner's part was:\*

1=Too difficult, 2=Difficult, 3=Sometimes challenging, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Appropriate, 6=Very appropriate

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Too difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very appropriate

Figure 4.4. Example of a six-point rating scale (Study 3 survey)



Finally, due to the research purpose (the collection of piano teachers' feedback on the devised books), open questions were utilised in order to enable the respondents to provide their answers freely with as much detail and explanation as they wanted, thereby capturing the 'authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty' which are primary characteristics of qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 255). Thomas (2017) counsels to think about open questions within a survey 'in the same way that you think about unstructured interviews', drawing attention to the need for the questions to be carefully considered in advance, as – unlike the interview – the survey does not provide the opportunity for further stimuli, clarification or prompts to the respondent.

Balance was sought between closed and open questions and the number of each, so that the participants would not be overwhelmed by the written input required due to the qualitative nature of the survey. In addition, I considered that open-ended questions are likely to demand more time to complete (Cohen et al., 2011). I made the respondents aware of the estimated completion time of the survey by providing a relevant note in our communication and within the survey introduction; I also ensured to enable the function which allowed the respondents to complete the survey in more than one sitting, alongside instructions on how to achieve this. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 5.

### **4.3.3 Transcription and translation: Considerations and challenges**

During the process of transcribing the interviews from Studies 1 and 2, and translating the data provided in Greek, namely the interviews conducted in Study 1 and the data obtained through the survey with Greek piano teachers, various challenges were encountered.

Regarding the interview transcription process, efforts were made for the final transcripts to be as clear and as accurate representations of participants' sharing of experiences as possible. This was a challenging process, as the audio version of each conversation 'filters out important contextual factors, neglecting the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview', including gestures, eye contact and overall body language (Mishler, 1986, in Cohen et al., 2002, p. 281). In addition, the typed-out form of the interview omits significant elements, such as the tone of voice, any pauses, or

emphasis on specific words/phrases, amongst others, which can be informative in conveying the interviewee’s meanings in more detail (Thomas, 2017). In an attempt to include such elements, relevant editorial phrases have been incorporated (in parentheses) within transcripts. This is illustrated through the following Table (Table 4.2) containing transcript extracts from Study 1, indicative of such editorial additions:

Table 4.2 Indication of elements ‘beyond words’ within interview transcripts

Indications of elements ‘beyond words’	Interview extracts
Indication of pauses	‘Twice before the degree... (pauses to think). That’s too late. I think that it should be examined from earlier levels’
Indication of laughter	‘In this context, children can sight-read [SR] quite a lot, with songs and tunes they already know... But the point is to also SR pieces they don’t know (laughs)’
Indication of emphasis (also in <i>italics</i> )	‘SR should be a little, not a little, <i>quite</i> (with emphasis) easier than pupils’ instrumental skills for a piece they’ve practiced’
Indication of gestures affecting meaning	‘[...] when you can’t see very well, you can’t exactly identify the note, but you see, you know... (draws direction lines in the air) [...] you recognise if it’s going up, or down’
Clarifications informed by my insider position within the institute	‘we had been informed about this (means: an ABRSM representative had informed the teachers of the Conservatoire)’

Roberts (1997) highlights that ‘we are transcribing people when we transcribe talk’ (p. 170). This further supports the necessity for a transcriber to consider elements beyond speech which might contribute to the meaning of words. In addition to this, interviews contain elements from the cultural background of the speaker, ranging from language expressions and figures of speech to cultural-specific information, which has an effect on the transcription and translation process. Regarding the Study 1 interviews, challenges were encountered mainly in terms of the translation of informal, daily expressions and phrases used by the interviewees. In such cases, the specific phrases were replaced with semantically equivalent English expressions. A frequent example was an everyday Greek expression – in translation: ‘(That’s) fine’ – commonly used by the speakers. Within the transcripts, this phrase was translated as

'all right', 'thank you', or 'okay', depending on the case, in order to avoid any contextual confusion arising from the English literal translation. In addition, editorial explanations have been incorporated within the translated transcripts, mainly in relation to content referring to the Greek cultural background of the participants, in order to allow for a deeper understanding of the interviewees' statements. This is illustrated through the following extracts:

- 'I provide pieces which are simple, such as 'Nefeli's Tango' (a popular song of the 90s)'
- 'If a pupil is asked to play a 'tsamikos' or a 'kalamatianos' dance (types of traditional dances) [...]'
- 'Milo moy kokkino' (in translation: 'My red apple', a well-known traditional song related to 'kalamatianos' dance).

Challenges relating to translation were also encountered in relation to the survey responses in Greek (Study 3). Due to the survey format, it was not possible for the piano teachers' responses to be supported with non-written elements, such as the speaking tone, body language or other elements which could be observed during an interview, for example. Despite this, during the translation process of the survey responses, I strove to maintain the tone expressed by the respondents in written form and any language-related nuances within the translated version of the data.

Finally, the written responses of one participant author in Study 2 might be perceived as a limitation, as the written format did not allow for follow-up questions or probes for clarification or further explanation; however, it can be argued that the written responses were a concise and condensed form of their potential verbal answers to the interview questions.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Through each study a large amount of data was acquired. Interview data (Studies 1 and 2) was transcribed from speech recordings to Word files, and the survey data were exported to a spreadsheet. The transcription files were printed and analysed by hand, as I felt that this was a preferable method for me to approach the interview data; the survey data was analysed digitally (not in print). For the data analysis, interpretative

thematic analysis was deployed, informed through guidelines and suggestions from research-related literature on the analysis of qualitative data, especially those of Cohen et al. (2011), Robson (2011), Thomas (2017) and Maxwell & Chmiel (2014).

The first phase of analysis included careful reading of data and initial coding, which was primarily guided by the interview or the survey questions. Indicative codes were assigned to interview phrases or larger sections, while it was possible for phrases to be labelled with more than one code, in an attempt to reduce the amount of raw data without distorting meaning. During this phase, colour-coding and tangible or digital labels were also utilised, in order to make codes stand out more and, therefore, to facilitate the identification of themes. Both during and after the initial coding phase, comments and memos were added, where considered appropriate. These predominantly consisted of ideas occurring during coding, thoughts on potential relationships between data within the same or across different sources (for instance, between two or three interviews), links or contrasts between statements, reminders to refer back to and link with specific points of other data sources, as well as personal reflective questions sparked by specific data. Such memos and comments were noted both at the side of the original text as well as on separate pages.

The second phase of analysis consisted of the identification of repeated themes emerging throughout the data. This phase began with re-reading the data and examining the assigned codes carefully in order to form thematic categories. During this process, semantically related codes and phrases were grouped together and placed into the same thematic category, while it was possible for specific phrases to fit within more than one theme. Patterns and regularities were sought to be identified, while contrasting data and single cases, which did not necessarily fit into a broader category, were also considered valuable. An example of coding is presented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Example of coding

Study 1, Interview 1	Codes/Labels
<p><b>Question:</b> <i>How do you teach sight-reading to your pupils?</i></p> <p><b>Answer:</b> ‘I start around the <u>first term</u>. I also have <u>books</u>, which could be anything, but in the <u>same level</u> or usually slightly <u>easier</u>. So, if a pupil is on level 5, the SR piece which I will provide will be of level 3. We <u>always</u> move some <u>levels down</u>... so, we work through <u>books</u>, we also work through <u>music software</u>, Smart Music, which is computer-based membership software which has exercises with accompaniment. So, it has a backing track with piano accompaniment, which also helps a lot and it <u>makes it more fun</u> for the pupil. Very frequently, <u>my pupils ask for Smart Music</u>... They <u>seek</u> this type of SR practice in <u>comparison to having a score</u> on the stand and me saying “Come on, let’s play”.’</p>	<p>Early start</p> <p>Material/Resources (books)</p> <p>Level of pieces – same or easier</p> <p>Level (<u>always</u> lower than instr. skills)</p> <p>Material/Resources (music software – Smart Music)</p> <p>Fun – student motivation</p> <p>Student attitudes (positive – Smart Music)</p> <p>Student attitudes (less positive – score)</p>

The iterative process of coding facilitated a deep understanding of participants’ views and experiences, while this was further enhanced by the intentional inclusion of participants’ direct quotes within the chapters where data is reported. This has retained the connection to the collected data and has enabled a more accurate representation of ideas and concerns, as expressed by the participants. Further to this, data analysis has been enhanced through enabling participants to read the relevant chapters to which they have contributed. Acknowledging the possibility of different views and interpretations, allowing participants to view their data within the context of the whole chapter has been viewed as essential, in order to promote openness and reflexivity.

The subsequent sections focus on ethical considerations of the research and present my reflection on my position as an insider-researcher (section 4.5 onwards).

## **4.5 Ethical considerations**

The following sections complement the methodological considerations discussed earlier in this chapter, which emerged from the theoretical framework of the research design (Chapter 3), by detailing ethical considerations of the research. As previously stated, part of the present research has been undertaken in a music Conservatoire in Greece (Study 1), where I have been working as a piano and music theory teacher and accompanist, and where I have also proposed and provided sight-reading training for advanced piano learners, as explained in Chapter 1 (section 1.1). The following sections focus on ethical considerations, such as my perspective from my position in the institution and my previous experience as an insider-researcher in this Conservatoire (section 4.6) as well as on positive factors and potential challenges of this role (section 4.7). A reflection on my research experience is also presented (section 4.8), alongside ethical considerations related to participants' informed consent (section 4.9).

## **4.6 The institution and my perspective through my position**

The specific Greek Conservatoire has been deliberately selected considering my teaching position and my previous research in the same institution, including two research projects, the first exploring sight-reading elements in advanced piano lessons, and the second investigating parents' motives, reasons, and expectations for enrolling their children in a music programme for early years which I devised and developed.

My previous experience as a researcher and my position in the institution enable understanding of instrumental teachers' perceptions and approaches to sight-reading in this context, by extending the exploration from my previous MA research with pianists to various instruments. In particular, this Conservatoire provided a range of dynamic educational settings where sight-reading naturally takes place, such as the student orchestras and a range of different ensembles<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the active involvement of instrumental teachers in these sight-reading contexts, provided a

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<sup>10</sup> Youth Orchestra, Junior Orchestra, Woodwind Ensemble, Brass Ensemble, String Ensemble, Advanced Guitar Ensemble, Junior Guitar Ensemble, and the Children and Youth Choir.

unique ground for exploring relevant practices, compared to other Conservatoires and music schools in the area. Further to this, the Conservatoire location provided the opportunity to acquire an understanding of this educational context as it occurs within a region away from the Greek capital, yet in one of the biggest cities of the country, which could be representative of further music institutions across the country.

In addition, this research has been informed by my work as a piano teacher in this Conservatoire and in the UK, and my experience of these two contrasting contexts in relation to sight-reading has been very illuminating. Having been educated as a pianist in the context where there was no sight-reading tuition (in the same region of Greece, but in a different Conservatoire) and having also witnessed systematic sight-reading training taking place in the UK, I have been striving to transfer the gains of my experiences to my piano teaching, as well as to the Conservatoire in terms of practices, and to my personal network of instrumental teacher colleagues within or beyond this institution. My approach to sight-reading as part of my one-to-one piano lessons and in my group sight-reading lessons which I devised for advanced learners, as well as interactions and communications with Conservatoire colleagues, indicated scope for my research on this topic to support pedagogy in the Greek context, and that the research-informed output (the sight-reading material devised for and presented within this thesis) would address the lack of relevant resources for pianists, thereby aiding piano teachers and learners in other Greek Conservatoires across the country.

#### **4.7 Considerations relating to the researcher's position**

Some of the considerations that I kept in mind in relation to my position as a researcher and as an insider to the specific institution were informed by literature about research methodology. Aspects which were brought to my attention in particular linked to the researcher's objectivity, reflexivity, and parameters involved in the researcher-participant relationship, as well as to the perception of the 'insider'- 'outsider' position as a fluctuating continuum, rather than as two opposite polarities.

Achieving objectivity in educational and social research is identified as a challenge for the researcher, and as an important aim to work towards. In contrast to scientific and quantitative research where objectivity can be absolute, in social

research the researcher is advised to strive for 'some level of objectivity' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 93), considering that the researchers 'are themselves part of the world they seek to study' and therefore 'achieving a completely objective stance on the social world is not possible' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 91). Reflexivity is in this sense viewed as an essential quality of the researcher, in order to be able to acknowledge personal values, beliefs, vested interests or assumptions, and to think about how these may influence the ways in which the researcher might perceive things (Berger, 2015; Denscombe, 2010; Mercer, 2007). Denscombe explicitly links objectivity to open-mindedness, by highlighting that 'the notion of objectivity also carries with it the idea of being open minded' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 82), and advises researchers to also be 'self-reflective' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 81), to be able to realise the impact of personal background on the interpretation of their findings.

Although maintaining a detached position is equally challenging due to the connection of the insider-researcher with the topic of exploration, aiming for a degree of detachment is advised, alongside caution to avoid 'being blinded by the obvious' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 92). This connection and familiarity with the research topic pose to the researcher the risk of perceiving their own perspective as universal, and thus falling into the trap of not questioning certain aspects (Mercer, 2007). Therefore, approaching the topic from a fresh perspective is recommended as good practice, linking to the need for self-reflection advised by literature (Denscombe, 2010).

Determining the researcher position as an 'insider' or as an 'outsider' can be challenging due to the complexities often involved in aspects of research, such as the sample identification and data collection, amongst others. A less strict perspective towards the positioning of the researcher as either outsider or as an insider has been proposed in recent years, emphasising the need to perceive this position as a continuum, where the level of insiderness and outsidership may fluctuate depending on aspects of the research (Chhabra, 2020; Crossley et al., 2016; Trowler, 2011; Breen, 2007; Hellawell, 2006; Carter, 2004). Terms such as the researcher 'in the middle' (Breen, 2007), or the 'in-betweeners' (Chhabra, 2020) propose a more flexible approach towards the researcher's position, recognising the challenge in limiting the approach to aspects of research strictly from one of the two opposite ends of the spectrum. More specifically, concerning research in higher education institutions,



Trowler (2011) acknowledges that “‘insiderness’ is not a fixed value’ (p. 1) and agrees with the perspective of a continuum proposed by previous research (Carter, 2004, Labree, 2002), while Chhabra (2020) supports that an ‘in-betweener’ position would enable researchers to ‘pragmatically utilize the insider status, which enables privileged access and empathic understanding’ (p. 315). The significance of reflexivity in this context is emphasised and the necessity to acknowledge aspects where an insider approach prevails over the outsider, and vice versa, and the benefits and potential disadvantages of each (Crossley et al., 2016; Breen, 2007; Hellowell, 2006).

Such considerations have been of particular relevance for me, as I struggled to position myself as solely one or the other. For the first study of this thesis, where I explored instrumental teachers’ perceptions towards sight-reading within the Conservatoire, I understood that I was more an insider-researcher, due to my position in the institution; however, my position felt more flexible in relation to the two other research projects of the thesis: Study 2, where I interviewed international authors of piano sight-reading material, and the evaluative survey (Study 3) of the material I devised, in both of which I collected data from people beyond the Conservatoire (composer/authors and Greek/non-Greek piano teachers). Due to my position in the Conservatoire, further considerations are outlined relating to the role of an ‘insider-researcher’, to inform my approach in this context, and to draw useful connections to the other undertaken research projects.

Focusing on the insider position more closely, it is acknowledged that it enables access to the research context (Mercer, 2007); it also supports potential for rapport with participants, due to familiarity and the researcher’s existing relationship within the research context. Strong rapport can be viewed as a positive factor contributing to richer data and potentially more in-depth understanding of participants’ views (Ross, 2017; Mercer, 2007). However, caution is advised by research methodology authorities about potential risks arising from a more conversational approach, particularly in interview settings, pointing out the need for the insider-researcher to remain neutral and avoid (over)sharing their own opinions and for setting boundaries between the researcher’s beliefs and the participants’ input (Mercer, 2007). Ross (2017) acknowledges that probes and follow-up questions may not entirely serve the interview or research purpose, but they may be needed at

the time to acquire a deeper understanding, or to extend what is being shared in order to potentially draw broader considerations. In that sense, a researcher's interventions and sharing of personal experiences may not necessarily benefit the data collection but may create a context of relatability for the participants and encourage them to further elaborate on their responses.

The relationship between the insider-researcher and the participants has also been viewed as both a positive factor and a challenge. Mercer (2007) draws attention to participants' preconceptions towards the researcher 'as a result of their shared history' and the potential influence of this on the views which emerge from participants (Mercer, 2017, p. 13). In contrast, Berger (2015) supports that the insider-researcher's shared experience with the participants makes them 'better equipped with insights and the ability to understand implied content, or 'more sensitized to certain dimensions of the data' (Berger, 2015, p. 223); this could result in more informed interview questions being constructed in the first instance, as well as to a more in-depth interpretation of data due to shared experience, for example by being able to sense less obvious meanings. A similar view is expressed by Ross (2017), who claimed that the participants may thus feel a 'deep validation of experiences' due to the researcher's empathy and insider understanding (Ross, 2017, p. 328).

Attention has also been drawn to potential gains for the insider-researcher, as the participants' input and strategies can benefit the researcher in terms of their own practices (Ross, 2017), as well as support their research. This final consideration has been of particular relevance to my research, especially in relation to Study 2, through which I envisaged that international authors' experiences of creating sight-reading material for pianists would provide valuable insights to inform my own creative process. These considerations have informed my reflection on my experience as a researcher in this context, which is presented below.

#### **4.8 Reflection on my researcher experience**

My experience as a researcher throughout the different stages of this thesis, as well as my position as an insider-researcher during Study 1, required a constant reflexivity, in advance, during, and after research. Keeping in mind considerations highlighted by

literature, such as those presented in the previous section (4.7), I identified both positive factors and challenges through reflection on my experience as a researcher in this context.

Some parameters linked to my position in the Conservatoire and as an 'insider' researcher facilitated aspects of the research process, which may have been more challenging to achieve as an outsider. My position within the Conservatoire enabled me to gain access to the research context and to approach potential participants perhaps more easily than if I was an outsider researcher approaching the institution for the first time. This had a positive impact on obtaining consent from instrumental teachers, due to our previous acquaintance and professional relationship. In addition, the data collection process and the building of trust in the relationship as interviewer-interviewee was facilitated, as the Conservatoire teachers may have been more open to being involved in my research and in sharing more in-depth insights than, perhaps, to a stranger, as they were aware of my identity as a person and as a teacher, who was and continues to be committed to making a positive difference to the pedagogical culture of the specific institution.

My awareness of parameters and procedures of the institution and the particular educational setting has also enabled broader understanding and deeper insights concerning the research topic; this has led to a holistic view of the topic in this context, also informed by my previous research. Awareness of some participants' further teaching and settings of involvement allowed me to tailor the interview questions to each participant in order to gain further insights into their perceptions and approach towards sight-reading. Finally, linking to my position, the research findings and output (the devised sight-reading material) could be welcome by colleagues, especially by piano teachers, as a helpful tool and resource to support this element of piano studies.

The aspects which demanded my constant reflexivity during the research, which are perceived as 'challenges' in this reflection, are aligned with the relevant considerations identified by the literature discussed above in section 4.7. In each study I conducted, I strove to maintain objectivity prior to commencing the research and during the data collection process, as well as during the analysis and interpretation of findings. This required continuous reflexivity and asking myself questions about my

own assumptions, values, and beliefs, which I strove to recognise and where appropriate to overcome, alongside personal biases due to my own experience and knowledge on the topic. Through reflective notes, I reminded myself of the need to remain objective and that I should investigate my topic without regarding my own awareness as complete, as the participants may share information beyond my knowledge. I also investigated and questioned my own preconceptions relating to the institution or the participants, particularly in relation to the two interview studies (Study 1, Chapter 5; Study 2, Chapter 6).

In addition, focusing on Study 1, I pondered upon potential challenges of my insider position, both for my colleagues, as well as to myself as the researcher. In particular, I was careful with my approach to colleagues in order to avoid issues due to my position and authority as a researcher, such as potential hesitancy to participate and/or to share their views, or possible intimidation through being interviewed by a colleague. I also contemplated the ways in which I might be perceived by the participants and strove to maintain a neutral attitude throughout the research.

While planning each study, taking place either within the Conservatoire or with independent participants, I designed my interview or survey questions with care, trying to view my topic from different perspectives. During the interviews, I aimed to provide space for participants to express their opinions and asked open questions to invite informative input. I kept into consideration the need to draw distinct lines between my own beliefs and participants' views during the collection and the analysis of data, while considering the need to be alert in recognising occasions where personal preferences or participants' assumptions of the researcher's preferences might influence their responses. As noted earlier, Mercer (2007) suggests that researchers carrying out interviews should avoid sharing their personal opinions or give information which might influence the participants' responses. Occasions where I may have shared aspects of my own experience during interviews were intended to either provide some form of contextualisation, or to demonstrate relatability and empathy and thus encourage further elaboration on responses. Such occasions have been filtered through Mercer's advice, by maintaining reflexivity during the data analysis and exercising caution while interpreting participants' data. Probes and conversational elements also led to building better rapport with the participants; I

approached these from a reflexive perspective as well, to further consider whether the interviewees' responses reflected their possible assumptions of what I would approve, or whether they seemed to reflect their honest opinions.

#### **4.9 Ethical concerns and obtaining consent**

Prior to the commencement of each study, ethical approval was elicited from the University of York Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee (AHEC), in compliance with the University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act (2018). For the participants of each study, relevant consent forms and information sheets were produced, which were also assessed, reviewed, and approved by the Committee; these detailed the research purpose and aims, the process of data collection, storage, and potential uses of the data. The consent forms and information sheets for each study can be found in Appendix 2.

For each study, potential participants were approached either via in-person communication (Study 1), via email (Study 2), or both (Study 3), and a preliminary explanation was provided about the purpose of the research and their potential role in this context. Those who expressed interest to be involved in each study received an email with further information and they subsequently provided signed informed consent; for the survey participants, a set of consent questions was also included at the beginning of the survey. Participants were offered anonymity (the Conservatoire also remains anonymous), and their participation was on a voluntary basis, with the right to withdraw at any point prior to the submission of this thesis. The participants were assured that they would not be put under pressure or harm (physical or psychological) and that the reputation of their work would not be compromised in any way. They were also informed that the collected data would be treated ethically and sensitively. Informed consent was also elicited from the Head of the Conservatoire where Study 1 was undertaken. Finally, interview participants received copies of their interview transcriptions for approval or for potential amendments before becoming part of my analysis (Study 1 and 2), and the survey responses were anonymous (Study 3).

#### **4.10 Summary**

This chapter focused on methodological and ethical considerations of the research. Informed by the theoretical framework of the research design presented in Chapter 3, the methodological considerations concern the three studies of the research, data collection methods and the process of data analysis. The outlined ethical considerations link to my experience and my position as a researcher in the Conservatoire, including my reflection on these aspects; ethical concerns and the process of obtaining informed consent are also outlined. The following Chapter (Chapter 5) presents the findings from Study 1, discussing Conservatoire instrumental teachers' perceptions towards sight-reading.

## **CHAPTER 5: STUDY 1: CONTEXTUALISING SIGHT-READING THROUGH THE VIEWS OF CONSERVATOIRE INSTRUMENTAL TEACHERS**

This study explores aspects of instrumental sight-reading teaching within the context of Greek Conservatoire education, through interviews with instrumental teachers of the specific Conservatoire which was introduced in Chapter 1. After introducing the research (section 5.1) and the purpose of the study (section 5.2), methodological and ethical aspects are outlined, and inclusion/exclusion criteria are explained (section 5.3). Research findings are presented (section 5.4) and discussed in relation to literature (section 5.5), focusing on teaching methodology, strategies and practical issues arising from participants' understanding of regulations and Conservatoire policies, and from their experiences with sight-reading as learners and teachers (sections 5.5.1-5.5.7).

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study builds upon findings from previous personal research with piano teachers in the Conservatoire conducted during my MA studies, by extending the research to various instruments. As explained in Chapter 1, my previous work explored piano teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards sight-reading, the employment of sight-reading strategies within advanced piano lessons, as well as their personal experience with sight-reading as learners. Through the present study (Study 1) the examination of similar aspects of instrumental sight-reading has been extended to include teachers of orchestral instruments, in order to gain more holistic insights relevant to sight-reading teaching approaches within the Greek Conservatoire context. This study informs the creation of my sight-reading material by broadening beyond the piano the awareness built from my previous research findings, and thus providing illuminating insights towards relevant practices of other instruments, where sight-reading is likely to occur in contexts such as within ensembles or chamber music activities.

## **5.2 Research background and purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study is to explore sight-reading in relation to various (orchestral) instruments beyond the piano in the specific context of one Conservatoire in Greece. More specifically, my previous research examined ways in which piano sight-reading is taught within the Conservatoire, as well as relevant strategies incorporated into individual lessons of advanced piano learners. Piano teachers' relevant strategies were identified, along with aspects from their experience with sight-reading as music students, personal attitudes towards sight-reading, views on its relationship with accompanying activities, as well as potential sight-reading benefits for students and teachers. After the observation of one-to-one lessons (of all levels) of four piano teachers in the Conservatoire, interviews were conducted with the piano teachers, where significant uncertainty was noted regarding various aspects of sight-reading teaching. Their approach to sight-reading was predominantly the result of their intuition or/and of their previous experience as learners, and a strong need for further support and guidance was expressed by the piano teachers, including relevant resources. Drastic changes were also claimed as necessary, in relation to both the general context of Conservatoire music education in Greece, and specifically to Conservatoire parameters and policies relating to sight-reading.

With a view to acquire a more holistic understanding of relevant aspects beyond the piano, the exploration was extended to include instrumental teachers of various orchestral instruments. The aim was to explore instrumental teachers' perceptions, attitudes and parameters related to their practical approach towards sight-reading and sight-reading teaching, which would provide insights useful for creating my sight-reading material. Further insights, relating to the instrumental teachers' personal experience with sight-reading during their years as learners and potential effects of these experiences on their teaching approach, would also inform the process of creating my resources by highlighting aspects to consider relating to the specific context.



## **5.3 Methodology**

For the purposes of this research project, individual semi-structured interviews with instrumental teachers of the Conservatoire were conducted, focusing on their experiences with various aspects of sight-reading, both as teachers and as learners. The collected data have been analysed through interpretative thematic analysis.

### **5.3.1 Participant recruitment**

Potential participants, instrumental teachers in the Conservatoire, were invited to take part in the study through in-person contact and information about the research project, via personal e-mails, as well as through an open invitation and call for potential participants circulated within the Conservatoire. Teachers who expressed their interest were informed about the research purposes, as well as about the processes involved in this project through direct discussion as well as through a project information sheet, which provided a more detailed description of the research context and of the participants' role within this. For those who demonstrated willingness to participate, informed consent was elicited through a signed consent form and information sheet (Appendix 2), following the ethical approval procedure detailed in Chapter 4.9.

Participation in the present study was on a voluntary basis and the participants maintained the right to withdraw at any time, prior to the submission of my work. Anonymity was offered to all participants, including the name of the Conservatoire. Therefore, use of labels such as 'Participant 1' and 'Participant 2' or 'P1' and 'P2', have been employed as a means to maintain identity confidentiality.

### **5.3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Specific inclusion criteria were applied for the participants of this project. The participation of teachers of various orchestral instruments was sought, in order to gain a more holistic view towards the area of exploration. A more heterogeneous sample allows the investigation of the research questions from the perspective of multiple types of instruments, thus providing a wider range of relevant practices. To support the research aims, potential participants needed to be teachers of Western classical musical instruments. Teachers of traditional Greek or Cretan instruments were

excluded, due to the different notation system of their genre, which is predominantly based on improvisation; vocal teachers were also not included, due to the different nature of sight-singing compared to instrumental sight-reading. Teaching experience was another inclusion criterion, as the interviewees were asked to share elements of their practical teaching and to recall relevant information from their teaching experience. Finally, teaching experience with students of all levels was regarded as desirable, without being an exclusive criterion.

### **5.3.3 Interviews**

For the research purposes of this project, semi-structured interviews with the participant instrumental teachers were considered appropriate for the investigation of the research questions, as this would provide the opportunity to acquire a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. Data was recorded with a portable, digital audio-recording device and it has been treated sensitively and stored securely, in compliance with the AHEC procedure.

All interviews were conducted in person, taking into consideration relevant suggestions and information from academic literature, as acknowledged in more detail in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.1). The interview questions included both open-ended and short-answer questions, as presented in Appendix 3. The general structure and the order of the questions were intentionally flexible, in order to maintain the flow of the conversation and to provide space for prompts and follow-up questions depending on each participant's input and the course of discussion.

After the transcription process was complete, the participants were granted access to their interview transcription file; their suggestions for amendments, such as meaning clarifications and specification of any vague verbal sentences, were incorporated within the transcripts prior to their analysis. One participant (P3) also provided written responses to two clarification questions via email. The collected data was analysed through interpretative thematic analysis, which led to thematic categories of semantically related emerging themes, presented in section 5.4. A more detailed description of the data analysis process, the initial coding and the formation of thematic categories is illustrated in Chapter 4, alongside a specific example of coding, indicative of the labelling process of the participants' responses.

### 5.3.4 Participant description

For the purposes of this research, the participation of music teachers of various Western instruments was sought. Four instrumental teachers were involved in the study, all being active members of staff in the Conservatoire when this study was conducted. Relevant details concerning each participant are provided in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1 Participants' description (Study 1)

Participant number	Instrument/s taught	Ensemble teaching	Years of experience	Pupils' levels
P1	Woodwind	Yes	More than 10	All levels
P2	Woodwind	Yes	More than 5	All levels
P3	Brass	No	More than 10	All levels
P4	String	Yes	More than 10	Beginners, Intermediate

Some practical limitations need to be acknowledged, in terms of the sample size and consistency. More specifically, the number of string teachers at the Conservatoire was rather limited, with only two violin teachers and one cello teacher available at the time, while there were no viola or double bass teachers. From these, only one teacher agreed to participate in the study. Further to this, during the same period, there were few bass instrument teachers (one cello teacher – no double bass, bassoon, trombone or tuba teachers), in comparison to the active teachers of melodic instruments (two upper string teachers, three woodwind teachers, and one brass teacher). Therefore, the participants' sample consisted exclusively of teachers of various melodic instruments.

## 5.4 Findings

Research findings are focused on the following themes, which emerged through the processing of the interview data: instrumental teachers' awareness of the formal

regulations and relevant opinions; perceptions and attitudes towards sight-reading; practical aspects of sight-reading teaching, such as resources, strategies and relevant challenges; participation in ensembles and potential impact on the development of sight-reading skills; instrumental teachers' experience with sight-reading as learners and suggestions for change. Within each of the above broader themes, further thematic categories were identified, to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of each participant's perceptions and experience with sight-reading.

### **5.4.1 Awareness of regulations and opinions**

At the beginning of the interview, teachers were asked whether they were aware of the formal sight-reading regulations, stated within the operating regulations of Greek Conservatoires. The following sections illustrate the participants' level of awareness of formal regulations and their opinions about the regulation content.

#### **5.4.1.1 Awareness of sight-reading regulations**

All participants claimed to be aware of the relevant regulations<sup>11</sup> which establish sight-reading as one of the compulsory modules of instrumental studies, but their responses revealed different levels of understanding. P1 and P2 seemed to have *accurate awareness*, as they mentioned sight-reading as a 'compulsory module' which is examined prior to the final examination of the instrument, either for a Degree, or for a Diploma – in case of a direct Diploma – as stated within the regulations; P3 seemed to have *partly accurate awareness*, as they linked sight-reading only with simultaneous transposition and to the acquisition of the performance Diploma (not of the Degree); finally, P4 indicated a rather *vague understanding* of the relevant regulations: 'I think that it is taught in the advanced levels... somewhere between the final three advanced levels'.

#### **5.4.1.2 Opinions and feelings towards regulations**

All participants expressed strong feelings concerning the existing regulations, which they considered 'old' and 'outdated' (P4), leaving out any teaching methods developed since 1957 (P2). Critical statements such as 'I think this is wrong. Completely wrong, our system' (P1), 'the regulations [...] have basic shortcomings in

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<sup>11</sup> Detailed in Chapter 1.

general' (P2) and 'it is not very clear here, in Greece [...]. Our system doesn't seem very organised' (P4) indicate these teachers' disapproval of the regulations, as well as of the philosophy of the music education system in general. Feelings of dissatisfaction towards the regulations were also expressed. These were described as insufficient, as they seem to provide no instructions, information, or guidelines regarding fundamental aspects of sight-reading teaching, such as the curriculum, teaching methods and approaches, as well as resources and teaching material.

Another common complaint among all participants was in relation to the starting point of sight-reading. The introduction of sight-reading during the advanced levels of study was considered 'the most important weakness' (P2) of the regulations, as 'that's too late' (P4) as 'sight-reading cannot be taught in such a short period of time' (P1). Concerns about the teacher's role in this context were also revealed: 'it all rests on the teacher, with all the benefits or problems this might imply' (P2); 'there are teachers who, unfortunately, follow this' (P1). Finally, some teachers feel that this insufficiency has not only affected them as pupils and as teachers: 'I have experienced this as a learner and I'm also experiencing this as a teacher (P3), but it might also have an impact on their pupils as well, in terms of skills development: 'pupils will have to face any deficiencies of the teaching system' (P2), but also in terms of their psychology: 'sight-reading lessons is the last thing that pupils should be thinking about right before their degree, because it will feel like a burden' (P1).

#### **5.4.2 Perceptions and attitudes towards sight-reading**

Instrumental teachers expressed their thoughts on various aspects of sight-reading. All participants consider sight-reading skills as necessary, due to their significance in terms of practical application/utilisation in multiple contexts and activities during both their student and their professional years. Some instrumental teachers also expressed their perceptions of sight-reading aims: for P2, sight-reading involves the creation of an 'auditory representation' of the music piece, which is informed by observation of the material processed prior to performance at sight, while P3 supports that the aim is for pupils to 'learn how to behave in a context where they have to sight-read'. Various thoughts on the role of the teacher were also mentioned: sight-reading 'also has to do with the teacher' (P4); the teacher should create for pupils 'a context where

they'll be able to respond' (P3), and 'every student is unique, completely special and needs to be approached in a completely different way' (P1). Finally, P4 expressed their perception that sight-reading 'is also a psychological thing', which both involves and can be affected by psychology-related aspects.

The following sections outline further perceptions of these instrumental teachers in relation to aspects such as the starting point of sight-reading training and activities, as well as contexts in which the teachers believed that the development of sight-reading skills is facilitated.

#### **5.4.2.1 Sight-reading can be taught: An early start**

It was a shared belief among all participants that sight-reading can be taught. Some teachers stated this with confidence, sometimes also claiming that this is necessary: 'sight-reading can certainly be taught', 'sight-reading is necessary and should be taught' (P1); 'it absolutely can be taught' (P3); 'it can be taught', 'it can surely be developed' (P4). Even though P2 initially expressed uncertainty as to whether sight-reading is exclusively a matter of tuition, P2 also supported that 'undoubtedly, various skills can be developed, which will guide the pupil to significant improvements in sight-reading-related aspects', concluding that sight-reading 'needs to be taught'.

The start of sight-reading teaching from an early level was also viewed as important by all participants. Based on their involvement in music activities with children in the early years, P3 shared the belief that an early start of sight-reading development is possible even in very young ages, by responding to familiar symbolic notation at sight. P2 also supports that it is possible to sight-read from 'the second music piece that a pupil gets, provided that it contains elements of the first piece they have already played'. An early start was also believed to lead to more effective sight-reading, since 'it becomes more natural. Like breathing' (P1). Finally, P4 suggested that an early start is a practice of a 'good teacher', while earlier examinations were viewed as helpful in terms of students' preparation for the final sight-reading exams (P4).

#### **5.4.2.2 Contexts facilitating sight-reading learning**

Instrumental teachers also mentioned contexts in which they believe that their pupils learn to sight-read. According to their responses, as well as from their overall

interviews, the following ways were mentioned in which instrumental students are believed to develop sight-reading skills:

- (a) Within the individual lesson (P1, P2, P3, P4): through specific sight-reading pieces and activities, with new pieces introduced through sight-reading, through sight-reading duets with the teacher or with a classmate,
- (b) Through participation in ensembles (P1, P2, P3, P4): orchestras, wind ensembles, mixed instrument ensembles, accompanying activities, group sight-reading activities, such as ensemble sight-reading, sight-reading duets, or trios,
- (c) By themselves (P2): 'by downloading a score and trying to play it',
- (d) Through instrumental practice: (P1, P2, P3, P4): by practicing new pieces of repertoire,
- (e) Through going to the instrumental lesson unprepared (P2): going to the lesson without having practised at home.

### **5.4.3 Sight-reading in practice**

Instrumental teachers also shared practical aspects of their approach to sight-reading. The main themes which emerged focus on teachers' sight-reading teaching practices, material and resources, sight-reading strategies, and encountered difficulties and challenges, which will be elaborated in the following sections.

#### **5.4.3.1 Do you teach sight-reading? How?**

All participants responded positively when asked whether they teach sight-reading to their pupils. Each teacher mentioned elements of their practical approach, in which starting early was a common trait of all respondents. Indicative descriptions of their individual practices are provided below:

- Participant 1:

P1 starts teaching their pupils sight-reading after the first term. Sight-reading is utilised as a means to introduce a new piece: 'we have a go in the next piece, which the pupil hasn't learnt yet'; specific sight-reading activities are also included in their lesson, such as through apps with accompaniment or through duets with the teacher. P1 also provides group sight-reading opportunities in the ensembles which they lead.

- Participant 2:

P2 views sight-reading teaching as something imperative: 'I do teach sight-reading, of course; I couldn't do otherwise'. They stated that they start to teach their pupils sight-reading 'from the second lesson in which they are able to read notation' from previous pieces. Sight-reading is employed as a means to approach a new piece, during which pupils are asked to perform the music 'as well as they can, according to their knowledge and level, taking into consideration any elements that it might include'. Specific sight-reading activities are also integrated within the lesson, both for beginners and more advanced pupils, while sight-reading duets between two students are also frequent in P2's lessons. P2 also provides systematic group sight-reading opportunities in the ensembles which they lead, tailored to the level of each member of the ensemble.

- Participant 3:

P3 supports an early start of sight-reading teaching. Elements of sight-reading are employed from 'the first level', through observational activities on pupils' new pieces. When presented with a new piece, pupils have to observe and explain musical elements which they have encountered in previous lessons. Once they have acquired knowledge of several basic musical elements, then specific sight-reading pieces are introduced: 'I then start providing sight-reading pieces exclusively'. P3 includes sight-reading duets between the teacher and the learner and expressed willingness to develop further group sight-reading activities in the future.

- Participant 4:

P4 claims to have very limited experience with sight-reading teaching, mainly because their pupils are predominantly beginners who are not required to take sight-reading exams. However, although no separate sight-reading pieces are provided, elements of sight-reading teaching are applied within their lessons, particularly through the employment of sight-reading strategies when approaching a new piece. Reflecting on relevant practices, P4 stated: 'I guess I do show them how to sight-read in my own way, although I don't ask for this separately'.



### 5.4.3.2 Material and resources

Participants were also asked about the material and resources they utilise for sight-reading in their lessons. The following material resources were identified:

(a) Sight-reading books:

P2 and P3 mentioned utilising specific books for sight-reading in their instrumental lessons, referring to ABRSM publications. P3 mentioned that they use this material as part of the preparation of some private pupils who take relevant exams, while P2 claimed that they find 'helpful the fact that it is graded'. P1 also owns the ABRSM sight-reading books, but they choose not to follow the course of one specific book, as they prefer to work with pieces that they select 'depending on the pupil's needs'.

(b) Curriculum pieces:

All participants viewed any curriculum resources or method books as sources of sight-reading pieces. In cases where sight-reading is used as a means to approach a new piece for further practice, pieces from the curriculum of each pupil's level can be employed as the main material (P1, P2, P3, P4), while any pieces of lower levels are believed to be appropriate for sight-reading activities. More specifically, both P1 and P2 mention providing pieces that they find themselves, which they think that 'will be beneficial for [...] pupils in terms of sight-reading' (P2), while P3 specified that any piece can be used for sight-reading purposes, 'provided that it doesn't include any unknown elements for the pupil'.

(c) Other material:

Music Software: P1 utilises 'Smart Music' as a tool for sight-reading, which also provides piano accompaniment.

Own material: P2 mentioned creating sight-reading material for the members of their woodwind ensemble. Through arrangements, P2 aims to ensure that individuals' parts 'correspond to their level', in order for everyone to be actively involved in the group sight-reading process of the ensemble.

Material of pupils' preference: this includes songs which they 'might have heard [...] on the radio' (P4) or 'that the pupil will ask for' (P1); 'film music or a pop song they might want to play' (P3); material pupils might have acquired through their own

initiative: 'they'll download pieces, songs, scores they might like' (P2), and arrangements of familiar tunes: 'they often ask for [X instrument] arrangements of well-known melodies of Western music' (P2).

As previously stated, the participants expressed two views in relation to the appropriate level of the sight-reading pieces suggesting: (a) sight-reading pieces of the same level as the pupil's instrumental skills, and (b) sight-reading pieces of a lower level than the pupil's instrumental skills. Both same-level and lower-level pieces were equally considered as possible, depending on the aim of the sight-reading activity, the pupil's level, and skills. Same-level pieces were suggested for sight-reading a piece from the curriculum of the pupil's level for future practice (P1, P2, P3, P4), or for beginner pupils. On the other hand, in cases of intermediate or more advanced students, opting for material of slightly lower level was considered preferable (P1, P2, P3, P4). P3 perceived this as a condition which will allow an effective sight-reading performance: 'if we want a piece to be performed effectively – the level of the piece should be lower than what pupils can achieve in terms of instrumental skills'. Further to this, P4 stated that sight-reading pieces of a lower level can lead to fewer technical difficulties, thus making the sight-reading task more achievable, while also increasing pupil's confidence: 'they can be confident that "I'm going to make it and I'll play this well"'. An additional, less frequently applied option was provided by P2, who acknowledged the possibility of providing 'pieces slightly above their level', from a more 'experimental' perspective, as a 'challenge' to the pupil, depending on the level of relevant skills demonstrated in the lesson.

Finally, in terms of material availability in the Greek market, P3 addressed the absence of any Greek relevant resources, mentioning that 'there aren't any' graded sight-reading books, neither any [brass instrument] method books. P3's comments on the lack of Greek material are particularly illuminating:

[Tutor and sight-reading books] for every level, they are foreign. There are no Greek books, neither for beginners, nor for advanced levels. There are some method books [...] but these focus on technique. They don't include pieces, nor are they sight-reading books, these are something different. They relate to instrumental technique. In Greece, that's an issue.

Viewing this response alongside the participants' previous responses, where they stated that they have and/or use sight-reading books, the teachers referred to international publications, such as by ABRSM (P1, P2, P3); these resources are not available in the Greek language. Therefore, while there may be musical material available to these teachers, they may be unable to gain maximum benefit from the publications if their language skills do not enable them to understand any instructional guidance in English within the publications.

#### **5.4.3.3 Strategies**

Participants also identified strategies which they might encourage their pupils to use while sight-reading. The following categories of sight-reading strategies and helpful suggestions were identified: general strategies, and strategies linked to rhythmic elements, technique, expression, and other parameters, as presented in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 Instrumental teachers' sight-reading strategies and suggestions

Types of strategies		Stated by	Beginner (B)/ Intermediate (I)/ Advanced (A)/ General (G)/ Not Stated (N/S)	Mentioned elements	Quoted interview responses
<b>GENERAL OBSERVATION</b>	Specific time for observation	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G)	Specific time for score observation prior to sight-reading (SR <sup>12</sup> )	'Two minutes', 'a quick read-through the music', 'two, three minutes, potentially even one', 'with and/or without the instrument', 'for one-two minutes, to make a plan in their mind'
	First impression of the piece (visual)	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G)	Scanning the score, title of the piece, a general impression	'To scan the score', 'a potential title', 'looking at it more broadly, more as a whole', 'to look at the score without being intimidated'
	Observation of ...key	P2, P4	(G)	Key signature, identification of key, key changes, accidentals	'Key signature', 'any accidentals', 'key changes', 'additional accidentals'
	...time signature	P2, P3, P4	(N/S)	Time signature, time signature changes	'Time signature', 'time signature changes', 'to notice if the time signature is 3/4 or 4/4'
	...notes	P1, P2, P3	(B)	Note recognition, observation and realisation of note values, 'difficult' notes, fingering	'Looking at the notes', 'notice the note values which the piece consists of', 'if there are any 'difficult' notes', 'any notes which are achieved with more complex or unusual fingering'
	...notation symbols	P2	(N/S)	Dotted notes	'Notice the dot'

<sup>12</sup> SR = Sight-reading. 'SR' is used for abbreviation purposes in the table.

Types of strategies		Stated by	Beginner (B)/ Intermediate (I)/ Advanced (A)/ General (G)/ Not Stated (N/S)	Mentioned elements	Quoted interview responses
RHYTHMIC ELEMENTS	...Rhythm and pulse	P2, P4	(B), (A), (G)	Rhythmic patterns realisation, complex rhythms, steady beat	'How to count the specific rhythms', 'triplets, quintuplets', 'finding patterns', 'placing their notes on the beat', 'keeping a steady beat'
	...tempo	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G)	Playing slowly, tempo markings, selection of speed	'SR is as if I'm left in an unfamiliar room with the lights off, so I'm not going to start running', 'in a slower speed', 'you don't need to play in the actual speed of the piece', ' <i>Allegro</i> ', 'start in a speed which is more relaxed', 'in more advanced levels [...] you'd be hoping for a speed [...] closer to the tempo indication'
	...no stops & ignoring mistakes	P2, P3, P4	(G)	Ignoring mistakes, moving on, no stops	'To ignore mistakes', 'they know that they should move on', 'they know that they shouldn't correct their mistakes', 'to move on from a mistake', 'without getting stuck'
EXPRESSION	Style & character	P2, P3	(A)	Music style (no character indications mentioned)	'The piece itself', 'march'
	Era & composer	P2, P3	(A)	Awareness of era and composer's characteristics informing performance	'a great amount of information', 'aware of how to perform the piece accordingly', Beethoven', 'Mozart', 'Tchaikovsky', 'Romanticism', 'Baroque', 'Classical era'
	Dynamics & expression	P1, P2, P3, P4	(B), (I), (A)	Dynamics: symbols, meaning, expression markings, dynamic changes	' <i>p, f, cresc., dim.</i> ', ' <i>rit.</i> ', 'more obvious for more advanced levels', 'beginners don't do that initially', 'depending on how far they've come'

Types of strategies		Stated by	Beginner (B)/ Intermediate (I)/ Advanced (A)/ General (G)/ Not Stated (N/S)	Mentioned elements	Quoted interview responses
	Melody	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G), (I), (A)	Phrase identification & shaping, phrase length, melody line, melodic patterns & repetitions, melodic progression & variations	'To recognise the phrases', 'recognise its ending point', 'reach a peak', 'musical phrases', 'repetitive elements', 'a main phrase can be repeated in a piece', 'alterations', 'to separate phrases'
TECHNIQUE	Articulation & tonguing	P2, P3	(G)	<i>Legato, staccato</i> , more complex articulation	'(articulation) one of the most important elements', 'should be noticed [...] from the beginning', 'articulation goes hand-in-hand with the note', 'integrated in the sound production', 'without articulation or tonguing, the sound lacks a clear starting point', 'right tonguing, single, double, triple'
	Breaths	P1, P2	(G), (I)	Placement of breaths, breaths shaping phrases	'I try to pretend that I'm speaking, so where I need to breathe, that's where my breath will land', 'will shape the musical phrases'
	Other technical elements	P2, P3, P4	(G), (B)	Fingerings selection, positions, overblowing, bowing	'Unusual fingerings', 'which fingers they'll have to press', 'specific bowings', 'in which position', 'pressure of the lips might be wrong so another note sounds'
OTHERS	Theory & harmony	P2, P4	(A)	Harmony, harmonic progression	'To use their knowledge of harmony to group the notes [...] to play any melodic patterns more easily', 'highlighting the specific harmonic progression', 'for a pupil to be able to sight-read, they have to know theory well'

Types of strategies		Stated by	Beginner (B)/ Intermediate (I)/ Advanced (A)/ General (G)/ Not Stated (N/S)	Mentioned elements	Quoted interview responses
	Auditory representation, Inner hearing, mental practice	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G)	Mental practice, Inner hearing development	'Mental preparation', 'without having to play it on the instrument', 'sing it in their head', 'to create an auditory representation of the score', 'look at the score...can you hear it?', 'sing Solfège in their mind'
	Position on the score & looking ahead	P2, P3, P4	(G)	Awareness of position on the score, looking ahead	'Ahead of what they are actually playing', 'their fingers will have to follow their mind, not the opposite', 'to know where they are on the score', 'not lose track of where the ensemble is playing', 'eyes should move forward'
	Aural skills	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G)	Solfège singing, pitch perception, utilisation of aural skills	'Solfège is a key condition for SR', 'good Solfège skills also matter', 'to look for the right sound', 'when they can read something correctly, they can play it right', 'by ear', 'apply aural skills'
	Structure & form	P2, P4	(A), (G)	Knowledge of musical forms and structure, notation symbols/markings	'They should be aware of the form of the piece'; 'structure and form of a Menuet', 'repeat signs', ' <i>dal segno</i> ', 'Sonata'
	Making notes on the score	P1	(G)	Making notes on the score	'They have a pencil at hand so they can make notes'
	Imagining the music	P1	(N/S)	Visualising the music, imagining	'Creating a picture', 'stories', 'visualising each piece', 'it becomes easier [...] to remember what happens in every section'

Types of strategies		Stated by	Beginner (B)/ Intermediate (I)/ Advanced (A)/ General (G)/ Not Stated (N/S)	Mentioned elements	Quoted interview responses
	Ensemble activities	P1, P2, P3, P4	(G)	Orchestras, wind ensembles, mixed ensembles, duets, accompanying activities	'Group sight-reading', 'participation in orchestras', 'playing in an ensemble', 'various instruments'

As illustrated in the table above, some of the stated strategies were instrument-specific, for example these relating to technique, while most strategies find relevance across instruments, for example those relating to observation. In addition, some strategies were mentioned in relation to pupils of specific levels, such as the recollection of knowledge about musical structure and forms for advanced learners, while other strategies were believed to be applicable at any level.



### 5.4.3.4 Difficulties and challenges

Instrumental teachers reflected upon potential challenges and difficulties encountered by their pupils during sight-reading activities. As illustrated in Table 5.3 below, the identified challenges were grouped into four broad categories: general challenges, technique-related issues, level-specific difficulties, and psychological challenges, which are presented alongside participants' quoted responses.

Table 5.3 Sight-reading difficulties and challenges stated by the instrumental teachers

Challenge Category	Specific challenge mentioned	Stated by	Instrumental categories	Quoted interview responses
<b>GENERAL CHALLENGES</b>	Time management (ineffective)	P1, P2	Woodwind	'Sometimes there is remaining time in these two minutes, but other times they might not be enough', 'they might also not realise that/how time passes by... especially younger pupils'
	Observation (insufficient/ineffective)	P2	Woodwind	'Not observing the piece as they should'
	Tempo selection (inappropriate/fast)	P1, P2	Woodwind	'Most people are in a hurry when sight-reading (SR <sup>13</sup> ); that's a very big issue', 'fast playing'
	Looking ahead (absent)	P3	Brass	'Issue in being able to perform the task of their eyes moving forward faster than their paying'
	Concentration (low level)	P2	Woodwind	'How concentrated or absent-minded a pupil is', 'lack of concentration and absent-mindedness'
	Sense of pulse (not steady)	P3	Brass	'When they find difficulties, they slow the tempo down, while when they have, let's say crotchets, they speed up'
	Continuity / Flow (disrupted/stops)	P2	Woodwind	'Stopping while SR'
	Mistakes (inappropriate management)	P2, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'Correcting mistakes', 'repeating section where a mistake happened'

<sup>13</sup> SR = Sight-reading. 'SR' is used for abbreviation purposes in the table.

	Pitch (inaccuracies)	P1, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'Many accidentals'
	Overall rhythmic accuracy (inconsistencies)	P2, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'Rhythm is one of the main challenges that pupils have to face', 'another big issue is the rhythm', 'placing the notes in their right place on the beat', 'issues with [...] short notes', 'difficult rhythmic patterns'
	Level of familiarity with musical elements	P4	String	'For repeats and signs such as <i>'dal segno'</i> , it depends on their level of familiarity: they might be unaware of where to go next', 'knowledge of structure and form'
	Prioritising certain elements over others	P2, P4	Woodwind, String	""Now I have to play the correct notes"", 'those who have difficulty in bowing will not be able to pay any attention to that (articulation), they'll just play the notes'
	Mental representation (different from written music)	P2, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'The score might potentially be different to what I have in my head. Now, this is where the most stops occur and where the most problems are noticed while SR a familiar tune', 'make sure to play it the way it's written, not the way you hear it in your head; because there might be potential auditory misconceptions'
TECHNIQUE-RELATED	Articulation	P2, P4	Woodwind	'Not always easy', 'some do this more successfully than others'
	Challenging notes production	P3	Brass	'Difficulty of playing large intervals'
	Breath placement	P1	Woodwind	'It's something that they don't really think about', 'especially for wind instruments, our breaths are vital'
	Fingering selection	P1, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'[X instrument] [...] has many secret fingerings'; 'during SR pupils have to interpret this as well, how they will cross the break between these registers', 'using the wrong fingerings for sharps or flats'
	Bowing/position selection	P4	String	'Those who have difficulty in bowing...will just play the notes', 'there are also children who make mistakes because of wrong bowing', 'where you'll decide to play this... in which position'

	Production of appropriate pitch/ overblowing	P3	Brass	'Another note might be produced because of the pressure, which might be a different note to the one we wanted', 'the pressure of the lips might be wrong so another note sounds'
<b>LEVEL SPECIFIC BEGINNERS</b>	Note values (inaccuracies, inconsistencies)	P1	Woodwind	'Misinterpreting values, ignoring dotted notes, quavers, crotchets, these are some initial difficulties'
	Pitch & sense of key (unclear, limited)	P2, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'That's another difficulty in the first levels'
	Performance of dynamics and expressive elements (ignored)	P1, P2	Woodwind	'Beginners don't do that initially'
	Phrases (lack of shaping)	P1	Woodwind	'A beginner pupil cannot distinguish phrases so evidently'
	Structural markings (ignored/ little familiarity)	P2	Woodwind	'Ignore a repeat sign'
	Keeping track with position on score	P2	Woodwind	'Losing track of where they are on the score [...] happens quite a lot'
<b>LEVEL SPECIFIC INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED</b>	More complex rhythmic patterns realisation	P2, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'On more advanced levels, rhythm issues refer to more complex rhythmic patterns'
	Application of mental observations (low level)	P1	Woodwind	'How fast they remember things which they mentally noted before playing', 'the pupil is asked to remember the breaths, that's slightly more difficult'
	Expression and interpretation (limited awareness/planning)	P1, P2	Woodwind	'Issues such as "I'm not aware of what I'm playing"'
	Harmony realisation (low level)	P2	Woodwind	'In terms of harmony...ignoring clues'
	Structure/form awareness (limited)	P2, P4	Woodwind, String	'Issue in terms of structure or form of the piece'
	Other score information (ignored)	P2	Woodwind	'Ignoring clues such as style, composer, title which provide much helpful information'
	Lack of expectations	P2	Woodwind	'They are unaware of what they might expect from the piece'

<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES</b>	Stress-related (stress, keeping calm, nervousness)	P2, P3	Woodwind, Brass	'Stress, especially during exams', 'not being able to stay calm', 'Pupils see a page filled with quavers and semiquavers and panic'
	Confidence (lack of trust in abilities, insecurity, feeling ashamed/shyness)	P2, P3, P4	Woodwind, Brass, String	'lack of trust in their abilities', 'confidence issues', 'psychology related aspects and insecurities', 'pupils just need to understand that when SR they stand on their own, they don't have anyone else's help', 'a pupil who doesn't have confidence and who feels that they can't make it can have a thousand problems', 'there are also some pupils who think "Miss, I can't, I want to practice this at home first" and they can't function', 'they say "Miss, this is too hard"'

Reflecting on the above-mentioned challenges, P2 and P3 suggested that some of the experienced difficulties might be the result of their pupils' previous learning experiences. P2 pointed that difficulties such as rhythmic inconsistencies and stops during sight-reading performance might be attributed to pupils' early tuition 'when, for some reason, they might not have learnt to count right'. Further to this, P2 supported that 'deficiencies from previous years of learning' (either with the same or with another teacher), and teaching weaknesses in terms of enhancing pupils' confidence in their abilities 'will inevitably be obvious in the more advanced levels', which, in turn, 'also affects their sight-reading'.

#### **5.4.4 Ensemble participation and impact on sight-reading aspects**

Instrumental teachers also shared their attitudes towards ensemble participation of their students; their perceptions about potential impact of such activities on sight-reading skills were also explored. All participants expressed positive attitudes towards participation in ensemble activities which was viewed as 'highly necessary' (P2). Various ensemble contexts were identified in which the teachers encourage their pupils to participate, ranging from duets between the learner and the teacher or between similar-level students, to quartets and quintets, larger ensembles, and orchestras.

Ensemble participation was perceived as a valuable, realistic setting in which sight-reading 'becomes a habit' (P1) and teachers believed that relevant skills are developed significantly, due to their direct implementation within the ensemble context. Such activities were claimed to provide numerous opportunities for sight-reading practice, especially when a new piece is introduced to the ensemble. In this context, participation in ensembles was viewed as a way of 'building professional skills' (P2), as students are required to sight-read, in the same way that they would be requested to play at sight in the setting of a professional orchestra. In addition, it was supported that within an ensemble, the focus of sight-reading performance cannot be limited to playing the correct notes, but it is oriented towards the inclusion of further musical elements, particularly in terms of intonation (P1, P4) and musical flow (P2). In this context, learners may be able to overcome more easily any previously encountered challenges, such as maintaining a steady pulse, rhythm-related issues, struggling to keep up with the music or stopping to correct mistakes (P1, P2, P4).

Collaborative aspects from participation in ensembles were also mentioned by the instrumental teachers, and psychological benefits were highlighted, especially in terms of motivation and confidence. The participants supported that simultaneous peer sight-reading requires interaction and coordination with the other participants (P1, P2, P4), thereby making sight-reading 'a group thing' (P2). Self-awareness (P2), adaptation (P1, P2, P4) and reflection skills were claimed to be developed during sight-reading performance (P2), as these skills need to be utilised for individual learners to contribute effectively to the overall group result.

All participants expressed the belief that the psychological benefits of ensemble participation have a positive effect on the development of sight-reading skills. The collaborative nature of ensemble and group sight-reading activities was perceived to create an enjoyable and highly motivational environment for learners to play at sight, while maintaining high levels of engagement and interest (P1, P2, P3, P4). According to P3, participation in such activities is a strong motivation for learners, whose 'willingness (to participate) urges them to respond better'. Playing with others is also claimed to have a positive effect on confidence-related challenges. In addition, individual sight-reading parts are usually easier within an ensemble than the solo repertoire provided within the one-to-one lesson, which makes sight-reading more achievable, while enhancing participants' confidence in their abilities. Thus, feelings of 'shyness' or 'shame' were thought to be gradually 'eliminated' (P1, P2), within an environment in which 'weaker sight-reading skills are being nurtured' (P2). P4's account of the positive impact of ensemble participation on learners' psychology, motivation, and confidence, is particularly illuminating: 'being in a group is helpful [...], because you aren't all by yourself. There's a team with you'.

#### **5.4.5 Teachers' experience with sight-reading as learners**

When invited to share their personal experience with sight-reading, all participants admitted that they were not taught how to sight-read during their instrumental studies. Their accounts are particularly enlightening:

P1 was 'never taught sight-reading' during their instrumental studies in Greece and did not receive any preparation for the sight-reading exam in the final advanced level. P1 attributed this to the fact that they were 'always a good sight-reader', therefore their 'teachers didn't think it was necessary' (to teach them how to sight-read). When expectations and requirements of advanced sight-reading skills in P1's undergraduate studies abroad were not met, their instrumental teacher there started to provide them with sight-reading training.

P2 was also never taught sight-reading during their instrumental studies in Crete and admitted total ignorance of what sight-reading even was, until their advanced studies: 'I didn't know until I was in the advanced levels. I had never come across the word'. P2 asserted that this might have been a general situation attributed

to weaknesses of the teaching approach they experienced: 'in my first years of study here [in X city], I doubt if teachers were even familiar with the term (sight-reading)'. During P2's diploma studies in a 'non-provincial conservatory', good sight-reading skills were taken for granted and expected in such advanced levels: 'if you couldn't sight-read, then they wouldn't accept you as their pupil'. During P2's diploma studies, their teacher provided sight-reading opportunities within the lesson, primarily when repertoire pieces were introduced.

P3 shared little information about their experience with sight-reading as a learner; they claimed having received no preparation or guidance for the sight-reading exams: 'There was no preparation. They (the teachers/examiners) took for granted that they'd give me that piece that day of the exam and I should be at a (an instrumental) level which would enable me to play it'. The same applied for P3's transposition exam: 'they only told me "You should also do the transposition, go up a major second", without further guidance or relevant training in advance.

P4 was not taught sight-reading, although they mentioned relevant elements in their lessons, such as approaching a new piece through sight-reading. P4 believes that their sight-reading skills were developed through participating in ensembles and orchestras: 'I learnt sight-reading in ensembles' and 'I had performed at sight many times in orchestras'.

#### **5.4.5.1 Reflection on learning experience and impact on teaching**

Reflecting on their experience as instrumental learners, participants shared their personal interpretation of their sight-reading skills development, which seems to have been predominantly based on personal initiative and intuition (P1, P2, P3). As P3 stated, their sight-reading 'was developed intuitively [...] throughout the years'. The employment of strategies such as playing unfamiliar pieces (P1, P2, P3) and mental practice (P3), participation in ensembles (P2, P3), general practice (P2, P3) and the overall development of their musical perception and maturity (P2), were also reported as elements which contributed positively to the development of their sight-reading skills.

The teachers' reflections revealed the impact of their personal experience with sight-reading on their teaching approach. P1 acknowledged that their teaching

approach towards sight-reading was influenced by their teacher's methods (abroad), while P2 stated that their lack of sight-reading training as a learner motivated them to seek ways to support their students: 'This is the reason why I try to fix things as a teacher, for my pupils, by introducing them to sight-reading from the very beginning'. Finally, P3 pointed out that the various 'insufficiencies' of the Conservatoire music education system which they experienced as a learner, are still evident from their experience as an instrumental teacher, suggesting that the situation might not have changed: 'I have experienced this as a learner and I'm also experiencing this as a teacher; change towards improvement is believed to be largely dependent on teachers' own curiosity and initiative.

#### **5.4.6 Revisiting the regulations: Suggestions for change**

At the end of the interviews, the instrumental teachers were invited to revisit the formal framework of the regulations, in order to share potential suggestions for change. Various recommendations for improvement and updating of the existing regulations were made, along with suggestions for more fundamental changes. Regarding the improvement of the regulations content, an early start of sight-reading provision was a shared idea among the participants. The introduction of sight-reading exams from earlier levels, either beginner (P1, P2) or intermediate (P4) levels, was also proposed, both as a means of preparation towards the final exams, and of monitoring the continuous development of relevant skills.

Updating the instrumental curricula was also advocated, in order to include more contemporary repertoire in both rehearsed performance and sight-reading activities. Further changes were viewed as necessary, focusing on sight-reading resources, teaching methodologies, curriculum, and a more systematic provision of sight-reading teaching. More specifically, acknowledging the possibility that 'many musicians haven't been taught sight-reading' and therefore 'it's difficult to know how to do this', unless they have engaged into personal research and into other educational systems and approaches, the inclusion of guidance regarding teaching methodologies is perceived as 'imperative' (P3). In addition, the development of a specific curriculum has been proposed to support teachers in relation to the relevant



skills which students need to develop in each level, as this is provided for prepared repertoire (P3, P4).

Along similar lines, suggestions were made for the creation of relevant educational material and resources (P2, P3, P4) to which teachers and pupils could refer in terms of the expected level of skills development per grade; this would also support and inform the selection process of further appropriate material by teachers. Finally, P2 elaborated further on the idea of an integrated sight-reading training, by proposing the incorporation of relevant elements within various aspects of the instrumental lesson, along with dedicating a separate part of the lesson specifically to sight-reading activities, 'a part for fun'.

## **5.5 Discussion**

The findings from the instrumental teachers' interviews revealed their perspectives towards sight-reading, aspects of their practical teaching approaches and their experiences with sight-reading as teachers and as learners. Several themes emerged from the findings; this discussion focuses on (a) teachers' awareness and understanding of the regulations (section 5.5.1); (b) resources (section 5.5.2); (c) the perception of sight-reading as an inherent trait or an acquired skill (section 5.5.3); (d) an early start of the sight-reading skills development (section 5.5.4); (e) sight-reading strategies and supportive skills (section 5.5.5); (f) participation in ensemble and collaborative activities (section 5.5.6); (g) teachers' suggestions for change (section 5.5.7). Within the discussion some connections are also made to my previous research on piano sight-reading, through comparison of the responses of the two participant groups of piano and instrumental teachers. Due to the overall similarity of the views expressed by the two groups, the piano teachers' views have not been reported more extensively, as this study focuses on the views of instrumental teachers; occasions where discrepancies have been identified between the two groups, are also included.

### **5.5.1 Levels of awareness and understanding of the regulations**

According to instrumental teachers' responses, three levels of understanding were noticed in relation to the relevant statements of the formal regulations: *accurate understanding*, *partly accurate understanding*, and *vague understanding*. Similar

observations were made in the piano teachers' answers, in which varied understanding was also evident. This generates various questions which relate to the interpretation of the formal documents: what would the implications of this differentiation be on the teachers' role in terms of sight-reading provision? Could this be also the case for further instrumental teachers, beyond this specific Conservatoire? How are such differentiations explained and who is responsible for ensuring awareness and understanding of the relevant formal documents: teachers themselves, and/or the institution? Such questions might be worth investigation by future researchers in the field of Greek Conservatoire education, in order to gain a clearer perspective of further aspects of music education within this context.

### **5.5.2 Resources selection and level of material**

The instrumental teachers mentioned a variety of resources for sight-reading material, ranging from graded sight-reading books of exam boards (ABRSM) and repertoire/curriculum pieces used for sight-reading purposes, to also including material of their pupils' choice, such as songs, downloaded scores or familiar tunes. This is in agreement with recommendations from pedagogical literature on sight-reading, which suggest using 'graded' method books (Harris & Crozier, 2000, p. 50) 'introducing one point at a time' (Booth, 1971, p. 122). Encouraging learners' initiative and active engagement into the selection of sight-reading material can have a positive impact on motivation, interest, and confidence (Gordon, 2014; Macmillan, 2010; Renwick & McPherson, 2002; Booth, 1971), thereby also on their attitude towards sight-reading.

Regarding the level of sight-reading pieces, teachers claimed to select material of a slightly lower level than the pupil's instrumental skills, or of the same level, such as when using sight-reading to introduce new repertoire pieces. Using sight-reading to approach new repertoire was also found in my previous work with piano teachers. This view is supported by literature about sight-reading teaching, which suggests using pieces of the same (Fisher, 2010) or of a slightly lower level (McLachlan, 2015; Gordon, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Keyworth, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Booth, 1971), while it is pointed out that the level of pieces should not be 'too difficult'

(Booth, 1971, p. 123) to avoid a negative effect on students' confidence and sight-reading achievement.

Research also makes a distinction between sight-reading skills and instrumental (performance) skills (Penttinen et al., 2015; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996; McPherson, 1994), emphasising but they 'should not be considered synonymous' (McPherson, 1994, p. 228), or equally developed (Zhukov, 2014b). This contradicts what three of the participants of the present study experienced as learners, as it appears that they were expected to be competent sight-readers due to their advanced instrumental skills.

Finally, a lack of relevant Greek resources was acknowledged by instrumental teachers, who described this as an 'issue' (P3). Similar concerns were expressed by the previously-asked piano teachers. Although teachers claimed to make use of diverse resources for the sight-reading purposes of their lessons, it is notable that these resources are from external exam bodies (ABRSM), while there is complete lack of any Greek sight-reading publications to support the development of sight-reading skills within the Greek Conservatoire music education system. This could be perceived as a context of 'freedom' for teachers to explore the available repertoire for their instrument to search for sight-reading pieces, as well as to facilitate pupils' active engagement in the selection of relevant material. However, questions might be raised in terms of potential reasons for this lack of (Greek) resources: how are teachers' choices informed and what aspects do they prioritise when selecting the material? To what extent might this lack affect their practical approach to sight-reading, for example by discouraging them to engage into such activities due to the added burden of putting together their own curriculum? Also, could this be a reflection of the way sight-reading is perceived or valued within the music education system in Greece?

Finally, it might also be worth reflecting upon the extent to which the available graded publications would be appropriate, or equally effective, within a quite different cultural context. It could be argued that language might be a barrier in utilising resources written in other languages (for example, English), both for learners and teachers, also raising concerns related to accessibility. Further links could be made in relation to the musical content as well; for example, to what extent would students find relevance in the available publications, particularly in the beginner levels, which

usually – although not exclusively – involve younger learners, and might present more varied repertoire choices (rather than at the more advanced levels which have more strictly specified requirements leading to the performance degree/diploma exams)? Could cultural contextualisation of the musical content, or lack thereof, impact the level to which students (especially beginners) might relate or respond to the presented material (for example by using a familiar children’s tune) and therefore, on their sight-reading achievement? Considerations about cultural relevance as an underpinning principle of the devised material of this thesis, are presented in Chapter 8 (section 8.3.6.).

### **5.5.3 Sight-reading ability: An inherent trait or an acquired skill?**

The perception that sight-reading is an inherent trait was the implied reason for the lack of relevant training for one participant (P1). As P1 stated, the fact that they were ‘a good sight-reader’, led their teacher to believe that it was not necessary to teach P1 how to sight-read; the same was claimed by one of the piano teachers of my previous work. As detailed in the literature review (Chapter 2), although similar notions can still be traced in some teaching methodology books, in which sight-reading is reportedly viewed as an innate characteristic (Westney, 2003, p. 133), research has concluded that the ability to sight-read is primarily linked to skills which can be developed through appropriate strategies and training, such as rhythm and aural skills, mental representations and prediction skills, amongst others (Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b; Macmillan, 2010; Meinz & Hambrick, 2010; Kopiez & Lee, 2008; Kopiez et al., 2006; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). This aligns with the expressed views of the instrumental teachers interviewed in this research, who supported that sight-reading can (and should) be taught, as discussed in the following section (5.5.4).

### **5.5.4 An early start**

In the present study, all participants expressed the view that sight-reading skills can be taught and developed. This was combined with a strong common belief that sight-reading training should start from the very first stages of instrumental learning, in order to become a more natural process within students’ musical progress and overall skills development. The same belief was strongly supported in the previous interviews

with piano teachers, who considered an early start of sight-reading training crucial in order to achieve a continuous, gradual development of relevant skills from the beginning levels upwards<sup>14</sup>. This idea is in agreement with literature proposing an early integration of sight-reading skills development and the ‘critical time window for optimal training’ (Kopiez & Lee, 2008, p. 56), detailed in Chapter 2.

### **5.5.5 Sight-reading strategies and skills related to sight-reading development**

Literature places particular emphasis upon the significance of conscious application of sight-reading strategies during sight-reading practice. The specific strategies mentioned by the participant teachers of the present study agree with the proposed recommendations of both pedagogical books written for teacher and relevant research findings. More specifically, the employment of key-strategies prior to sight-reading performance, such as pattern recognition, grouping of information into meaningful units (chunking), rhythm realisation, and observations of musical elements on the score, such as key identification and expressive markings, seems to be viewed as highly valuable due to their positive effects on sight-reading accuracy (McLachlan, 2015; Gordon, 2014; Zhukov, 2014a; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Sloboda et al., 1998; Waters et al., 1998; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996; McPherson, 1994; Booth, 1971).

#### **5.5.5.1 Auditory representations and the significance of aural skills**

‘Mental practice’ was mentioned by the instrumental teachers as a helpful tool in students’ preparation to approach a sight-reading piece. The importance of the ability to create mental representations of the written music is emphasised by literature (Gordon, 2014; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Hofmann, 1976). During sight-reading, this process is combined with the simultaneous scanning of upcoming musical sections (‘looking ahead’), to prepare for what might follow

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<sup>14</sup> Excerpt from previous research findings, for further contextualisation: ‘An early start is considered crucial (by the piano teachers), because a belated beginning of sight-reading teaching, at the advanced levels, deprives students [of] the opportunity to gradually develop the necessary skills and build on their knowledge. It is also mentioned that sight-reading teaching should be present throughout all levels, without gaps after the beginner levels – during the intermediate studies – until the advanced levels’.

(Huovinen et al., 2018; Penttinen et al., 2015; Wristen, 2005; Furneaux & Land, 1999; Truitt et al., 1997; Goolsby, 1994a, 1994b), which was another strategy mentioned by the instrumental teachers.

As detailed in Chapter 2, mental rehearsal of specific rhythms, of difficult sections or of the whole piece, has been positively linked to sight-reading efficiency (Waters et al., 1998; Scripp, 1995; McPherson, 1994). This is reflected as a shared belief among the participants of this study, who value the utilisation of aural skills in sight-reading tasks. Specifically, when discussing sight-reading strategies, participants referred to applying singing and Solfège, as well as learners' pitch perception skills to facilitate sight-reading. The importance of enhancing aural skills through relevant training is identified by research and pedagogical literature on sight-reading, to support the development of sight-reading skills (Mishra, 2014b; Fisher, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Wristen, 2005; McPherson, 1994).

#### **5.5.5.2 Previous knowledge and anticipation skills**

Broader musical knowledge has been viewed as another significant influencing factor of sight-reading effectiveness by existing research, which was also evident in instrumental teachers' responses. Whether it refers to technical abilities, such as advanced instrumental capacity and ease in fingering selection (Hayward & Gromko, 2009; Sloboda et al., 1998), to theory and harmony awareness (Wolf, 1976), or to familiarity with stylistic, historical and structural characteristics (Zhukov et al., 2016; Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b; Madell & Hébert, 2008; Kopiez et al., 2006), previous knowledge seems to significantly influence the sight-reading process. Insufficient previous knowledge and ineffective habits might be potential reasons for the manifestation of relevant difficulties during sight-reading, such as weak rhythm perception as addressed by instrumental teachers (P2, P3), while competent levels of overall musical knowledge are linked to the creation of effective expectations during sight-reading activities; effective expectations and accurate predictions, in turn, facilitate sight-reading effectiveness (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Mishra, 2014b; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996; Sloboda, 1976).

The instrumental teachers of the present study, as well as the piano teachers of previous study, claimed to employ strategies related to theory and harmony

awareness, along with stylistic and historical knowledge, primarily for intermediate and more advanced students. This is in line with relevant literature which stresses the reinforcement of such background knowledge in order to enhance students' prediction skills, the importance of which was discussed in the previous paragraph. Particularly in terms of stylistic characteristics, exposure to diverse musical styles is viewed as a powerful means to promote informed guessing during sight-reading performance (Mishra, 2014a, 2014b; Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b; Kopiez et al., 2006; Wristen, 2005).

### **5.5.6 Ensemble participation and collaborative activities**

All participants expressed highly positive attitudes towards participation in ensembles and collaborative activities, referring to a variety of relevant opportunities in which their students are strongly encouraged to engage. This does not come as a surprise, considering that all four participants are active ensemble members, while three of them are responsible for teaching and leading different student ensembles. They acknowledged that participation in such activities seems to contribute positively not only to the development of sight-reading and collaborative skills, but also to various psychological aspects, such as motivation and confidence.

The teachers' insights are supported by research findings, which underline the significant impact of ensemble participation on the development of sight-reading skills. As detailed in Chapter 2, collaborative playing, whether it involves participation in smaller or larger ensemble settings, from duets to orchestras (Wristen, 2005; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996), or in accompanying activities, has been found to contribute to higher sight-reading achievement (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996, 1993). Collaborative activity supports an enhanced sense of musical flow, reduced hesitations, and fewer corrections of mistakes (Keyworth, 2005; Kostka, 2000), as well as psychological benefits, such as greater confidence, motivation and enjoyment (McLachlan, 2015; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Macmillan, 2010; Booth, 1971).

Considering these findings from research literature, it is positive that these participants claimed to be encouraging their pupils to participate in opportunities for collaborative playing, either within the lesson (for example through duets between the teacher and the pupil, or between pupils), or beyond the lesson, such as in

chamber music and ensemble activities. Piano teachers in my previous research had also acknowledged the positive impact of participation in collaborative activities. Even though participation in such contexts was claimed to be encouraged by piano teachers, it might be worth thinking about the extent to which piano pupils would be provided with such opportunities throughout their learning years, in comparison to the number of similar opportunities available to the students of other, orchestral, instruments. In other words, would it be equally possible for piano learners to benefit from such collaborative activities as learners of other instruments? It could be argued that the variety of such settings appears to be significantly wider for orchestral instruments than for the piano, where focus on solo repertoire frequently seems to be prioritised.

This question seems even more pertinent when viewed in relation to the observations of the previous research, where sight-reading teaching provision in the observed piano lessons seemed to be decreasing as the students' level increased. Could this be interpreted to suggest a different extent of sight-reading skills facilitation between pianists and other instrumental learners? And, if so, could this imply that sight-reading skills of instrumentalists might be developed through a different, more progressive/systematic course, compared to piano learners? Finally, to which factors could this rather asymmetrical provision of piano sight-reading teaching be attributed? Further reflection and investigation of this topic – which extends beyond the purposes of the present research – might be viewed as beneficial, in order to enable deeper understanding of the impact of potential practical differences in opportunities between the piano and orchestral instruments on the development of sight-reading skills.

### **5.5.7 Reflecting on suggestions for change**

The participants were invited to share their reflective thoughts about the content of the formal regulations regarding sight-reading and to suggest potential recommendations for change, if needed. Various ideas were expressed, focusing on different practical, methodological, and pedagogical aspects of sight-reading teaching, concerning the availability of resources, the inclusion of sight-reading exams in all



levels of study and the need for guidance on relevant teaching methodologies, amongst others.

Participants expressed the desire for an explicit formal establishment of systematic sight-reading training, which would start from the early, foundational stages of instrumental learning and would continue uninterrupted up to the more advanced levels. This was also stated by piano teachers in my previous work, who also shared feelings of uncertainty, in terms of how and within which framework sight-reading should be taught. Although this uncertainty was less obvious for instrumental teachers, they still emphasised the need for relevant improvements, focusing on: a more systematic approach to sight-reading by including relevant training from early levels upwards; the establishment of relevant exams in all levels to enable monitoring the development of skills across the different levels; the provision of further guidance, sight-reading curricula and resources to support teachers, particularly those who had not received sight-reading training during their own learning experience.

Overall, teachers' suggestions for change seem to prioritise the strengthening of music teachers' awareness and the provision of institutional support and resources, alongside the development of a robust framework for sight-reading teaching across all levels of instrumental studies. Questions related to responsibility also arise, as provision of sight-reading training appears to be predominantly based on music teachers' intuition and their personal experience as learners, rather than embedded in curriculum from the initial stages.

## **5.6 Summary**

This study has explored instrumental teachers' perceptions and experiences of sight-reading in the context of Greek Conservatoire music education. Practical aspects, such as material resources, teaching strategies, and potential challenges have been explored, alongside participants' attitudes towards students' participation in collaborative activities. Findings have been discussed with reference to literature, building on findings from my previous study with pianists. Participants' varied levels of understanding generate questions in terms of the interpretation of formal regulations and the potential impact of this on their teaching practices, while their

recommendations for change underline the necessity for revision of the content of sight-reading regulations, particularly in terms of teaching methodology, resources, curricula, and educational purposes. These findings indicate that this research may make a contribution to the development of discussion, resources and provision for sight-reading within the Greek context, and underpin the justification of the creation of the resources presented in Chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 6 provides further insight into the pedagogical considerations through detailing (a) a review of existing sight-reading publications and (b) the findings from Study 2, which explored parameters of international authors'/creators' experiences in developing sight-reading materials and relevant publications.

## **CHAPTER 6: LEARNING FROM THE EXPERTS: REVIEWING SIGHT-READING PUBLICATIONS AND STUDY 2: CONSULTING CREATORS OF PIANO SIGHT-READING MATERIAL**

This chapter focuses on Study 2 of the present thesis. First, the sight-reading publications that were initially reviewed for the purposes of informing the creation of my sight-reading material are presented and discussed (section 6.2), leading to Study 2, which explores authors' experiences of creating piano sight-reading material (sections 6.3-6.5). Through interviews, four international authors<sup>15</sup> of sight-reading publications reflected on their experience of developing their published sight-reading material, including their creative principles, prioritised areas, challenges, and other considerations relating to their creative process. The observations from the review of publications and the findings from the interviews provided insights into processes involved during the development of relevant material and are discussed focusing on aspects informing my own creative process (section 6.6). Connections are also made to further chapters and creative aspects of the thesis.

### **6.1 Introduction**

In order to develop my sight-reading material, I sought to establish an informed framework in which to create and design my resources. To achieve this, I initially embarked upon a process of (a) research and (b) consultation. The research step of the process, beyond reviewing music psychology and pedagogical literature on sight-reading (Chapter 2), also involved a broader analytical review of published sight-reading resources, as well as of piano syllabi of international exam boards (Chapter 7). The review of published sight-reading material is presented in section 6.2. The review process led to Study 2 (consultation from experts), which was developed in order to strengthen this informed framework, deepening my understanding of the processes

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<sup>15</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, the term 'author(s)' has been utilised when referring to the creators of sight-reading publications within this thesis, instead of 'composers', as it encompasses the variety of material in their books, thus including non-musical material as well as the compositional content.

involved in creating sight-reading material through interviews with international authors of such resources (sections 6.3-6.6).

## 6.2 The reviewed sight-reading publications

Varied sight-reading publications of different ages and levels were reviewed in order to inform the process of developing my material. In this review the following piano sight-reading publications were examined:

Table 6.1 The reviewed sight-reading publications

Resource title	Author	Edition	First published	Level / Grade
<i>Improve your sight-reading</i>	P. Harris	Faber	2008	Pre-Grade to Grade 8
<i>How to BLITZ! Sight Reading</i>	S. Coates M. Madder	BlitzBooks / Chester Music	2000	Beginners/ Grades 1-2 / Grades 3-4
<i>Piano time: Sight-reading, the Oxford piano method</i>	P. Hall F. Macardle	Oxford University Press	1996	Books 1-3
<i>Piano Sight-Reading</i>	J. Kember	Schott	2004	Books 1-3
<i>More Piano Sight-Reading</i>	J. Kember	Schott	2010	Books 1-3
<i>Joining the Dots</i>	A. Bullard	ABRSM	2010	Grades 1-3
<i>Play at Sight</i>	C. Brown	Faber	1962/1987 2007	'elementary', up to approx. Grade 3
<i>Sight-reading for fun</i>	P. Lawson	Stainer & Bell	1992	Grades 1-2
<i>Sight reading success</i>	M. Riley P. Terry	Rhinegold Education	2012	Grades 1-2
<i>Simplified Sight-Reading</i>	P. Spencer Palmer	J. B. Cramer & Co. Ltd	1970	not specified, up to approx. Grade 2
<i>Read and play: Original series</i>	T. A. Johnson	Hinrichsen	1964	Grades 1-5
<i>Read and play: New series</i>	T. A. Johnson	Hinrichsen	1989	Grades 3-4

Resource title	Author	Edition	First published	Level / Grade
<i>Right @ Sight</i> , based on <i>Read and play</i> by T. A. Johnson	revised by C. Evans	Peters	2001	Grades 6-7
<i>Help yourself to Sight-reading</i> , Oxford Instrumental Tutors	D. Sandercock	Oxford University Press	1979	not specified; Preface addresses intermediate/advanced <sup>16</sup>
<i>Sight-Reading Made Easy</i>	D. Bradley J. R. Tobin	Joseph Williams Limited	1950	Book 8: Final
<i>Sight-reading for today</i>	J. Last	Bosworth	1988	Grade 8 to Diploma

As illustrated in Table 6.1, sixteen different sight-reading publications have been reviewed, several of which contain more than one book (for example, comprising a series with one book per Grade, or one book per two Grades); the column 'Level/Grade' indicates the level of the material which has been examined in this review. Most of the examined resources are addressed to the early Grades (up to Grade 3) which is in alignment with the focus levels of the resources developed in this thesis (Preparatory and Level 1) and the envisaged potential expansion of the devised material in the future (Levels 2 and 3), as explained in section 8.5. In addition, resources for further levels (intermediate and advanced) have been consulted, in order to gain insights concerning approaches to support more advanced levels of sight-reading, as well as further understanding about how such material may develop beyond the beginner and early stages.

The (first) publication dates of the examined resources extend from 1950 to 2012 (and beyond, through subsequent editions), covering a period of more than 60 years. Access to older publications was limited and some of these focus on more advanced levels. However, including these in the review was considered valuable, as they may reflect to some extent the educational and research advancements within these decades. Particularly in relation to music education and sight-reading pedagogy, these would concern a range of aspects, such as pedagogical approaches to sight-

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<sup>16</sup> However, some of the musical material looks quite advanced (and perhaps of a post-Grade 8 level).

reading, musical content, underlying principles, and the written language or visual elements.

In order to illustrate ways in which the development of my sight-reading resources has been informed by this review process, the following discussion focuses predominantly on earlier levels, and on parameters concerning (a) the progression of the material (section 6.2.1), (b) musical material (section 6.2.2), (c) pedagogical underpinnings and approach to learning (section 6.2.3), and (d) visual elements (section 6.2.4). For the purposes of this discussion, the first publication date has been taken into consideration for comparison purposes between publications; the terms 'older publications' or 'more recent/newer/later publications' are used to refer to publications before or after 1990, respectively.

### **6.2.1 Progression**

Examining the progression within existing sight-reading publications was necessary to inform my own approach to progression. Several books state that their contents align with exam boards' grades and specifications, particularly those of the ABRSM (*Read and play: Original and New series, Sight-reading made easy, Sight-reading for today, Sight-reading for fun, Joining the dots*), while others do not specify (*Simplified sight-reading, Help yourself to sight-reading, Piano time: Sight-reading*). Those which refer to exam boards' grades and criteria follow a progression along similar lines as the specifications described in Chapter 7, which is strongly evident in sight-reading book series with one book per Grade (*Improve your sight-reading, Joining the dots, Read and play: Original and New series*) or per two Grades (*How to BLITZ! sight reading, Piano time: Sight-reading*). Some of the other publications follow individual approaches to progression, such as *Play at sight, Simplified sight-reading* and *Help yourself to sight-reading*, sometimes with relatively loose/less distinct borders of specific levels. For example, *Help yourself to Sight-reading* (first published in 1979) refers to intermediate/advanced level; however, some of the musical material, particularly towards the end of the book appears quite advanced and perhaps even of a quasi-Grade 8 level, due to the greater length of the pieces (e.g. one full page), the use of quite complex rhythms (including demisemi-quavers, hemidemisemi-quavers and dotted rhythms), constant hand position changes and passages consisting

exclusively of chords (3-part, 4-part, octaves, in both hands), amongst other considerations.

There are also examples of publications which follow an individualised approach to progression, irrespective of whether they align to a specific exam board or not. For example, *More piano sight-reading (book 1)*, which comprises sight-reading pieces and duets, follows a progression by key: the musical material is developed and structured in seven sections, each in a different key (C, G, F and D majors, A, D and E minors), which also links to the complexity of these different keys, the number of sharps/flats, and fingering choices, amongst other aspects. Section 8 of this book contains pieces and duets with simple hands together, in any of the included keys.

*Simplified sight-reading* (first published 1970) appears to have a unique approach, structured according to three stages: (1) developing awareness of the keyboard layout linked to pitch, so that there is no need to look at the hands while playing; (2) the aspect of rhythm, through melodic exercises where one hand maintains a steady rhythm and pitch pattern, while the other moves independently; (3) technical and aural discrimination of (a) *staccato/legato*, (b) the relationship between two hands while collaborating to produce a single-line melody with various articulation markings, (c) phrasing, including use of pedal. *Sight-reading for today* (first published in 1988) is divided into two parts: Part 1, again with two sub-parts, focuses on preparing skills needed for sight-reading (first half: training the hands, second half: training the eyes), and Part 2 contains a set of sight-reading tests.

Focusing on the progression of the musical content within the first levels/grades, most resources follow a step-by-step approach starting from single-hand melodies and basic musical elements (such as simple note values and rhythms, limited range of notes, simple dynamics) gradually moving to more complex elements (e.g. rhythms with different values and rests, a wider range of notes, articulation, dynamic changes) and to playing hands together. Approaches to chords differ, with some sources introducing them in the very first level (*How to BLITZ! sight reading: Beginners*), and others including chords in sight-reading tasks in later levels (*Read and play: Original series: Grade II, Piano sight-reading 2, Joining the dots 2*), or not at all (*Piano time: Sight-reading*). Finally, in books that are not the first part of a publication series (e.g. Book 2, or Grade 2), some resources start with a revision of elements

encountered in previous levels (e.g. *Sight reading for fun* (first published in 1992)), before proceeding to the elements to be covered within the new level.

The above observations have informed my own approach to progression, alongside the findings of Study 2 (the reflections of authors of sight-reading publications) and the comparative analysis of sight-reading specifications within the piano syllabi of various exam boards (Chapter 7). For example, the establishment of a specific set of principles guiding the progression of the musical material and a detailed mapping of the introduction of various musical elements per level<sup>17</sup> was viewed as necessary, in order to create gradual and comprehensive content for each level. The same applies for the inclusion (a) of an opening Unit, revising the musical elements of the previous book/level, and (b) of a final Unit, recapitulating the main musical elements and skills developed within each book/level. The process of designing my material is presented in Chapter 8; progression of the material is detailed in section 8.5.

### **6.2.2 Musical content**

Reviewing the above sight-reading publications also informed the process of establishing the types of activities and the musical content of my resources, as analysed in Chapter 8 (sections 8.2, 8.3.4-8.3.6). Some of the reviewed publications contain musical material which occasionally resembles a sequence of sight-reading tests (*Sight reading for today*, *Simplified sight-reading*, *Sight-reading made easy*, *Sight-reading for fun*), while several resources include further types of activities to build learners' sight-reading skills. These often include rhythm-related tasks (*How to BLITZ! sight reading*, *Read and play: Original series Grade 1*, *Joining the dots*, *Piano time: Sight-reading*, *Improve your sight-reading*, *Right at sight*), tasks seeking to enhance familiarity with the piano keyboard and the learner's ability to move comfortably around it (*How to BLITZ! sight reading*, *Simplified sight-reading*, *Help yourself to sight-reading*) and performance-at-sight tasks (all publications), including some duet/accompaniment activities (*More piano sight-reading (book 1)*, *Joining the dots*, *How to BLITZ! sight reading: Book 2*). These have inspired and informed the

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<sup>17</sup> These include notes, note values, rests, dynamics, articulation, keys, accidentals and hand position changes, amongst others.



activity types in my resources, in which – in addition to the sight-reading playing tasks (sections 8.2.4 and 8.2.5) – I have also aimed to approach more systematically and develop more explicitly the various skills linked to effective sight-reading. Therefore, the resources created in this thesis include activities specifically targeting the development of good rhythmic skills (section 8.2.1), awareness of keyboard topography (section 8.2.2), observation skills through an activity to support this skill (section 8.2.3), and sight-reading duets with a partner (section 8.2.6).

Regarding the musical content, most of the examined sight-reading publications feature music composed for the purposes of the specific book. These are predominantly original compositions by the publication authors, incorporating the musical elements according to the progression of the material in each level (*Improve your sight-reading, How to BLITZ! sight reading, Read and play, Joining the dots*). Additionally, some publications also feature existing music from composers of the past, particularly in more advanced levels (*Sight-reading made easy, Help yourself to sight-reading*). The original compositions by authors sometimes appear as tests/musical examples with or without tempo indications (*Piano time sight-reading: Book 1, Help yourself to sight-reading, Sight reading success, Play at sight, Read and play, How to BLITZ! sight reading, Right at sight*), but often, especially in more recent publications, also exhibit traits which add to the musical identity of the pieces, such as a title, performance markings, tempo and/or character indications (*Sight-reading for fun, Improve your sight-reading, Joining the dots*). Such elements have been appraised as useful for a more informed sight-reading performance, particularly (but not exclusively) for young learners.

Linked to the performance pieces, approaches to the inclusion of fingering indications are rather uniform, with most of these resources providing useful finger numbers (e.g. for the starting note and/or for changes in hand position); only two of the examined sources do not include fingering suggestions (*Help yourself to Sight-reading* (first published in 1989), and *Simplified sight-reading* (first published in 1970)). Indeed, in the introduction of *Simplified sight-reading* it is stated that ‘fingering is purposely not marked’ (Spencer Palmer, 1970, p. 1). This could be linked to the pedagogical approach of an older resource (*Simplified sight-reading*, 1970), or the more advanced level of the material (*Help yourself to Sight-reading*, 1989);

however, for the early levels of the sight-reading material devised in this thesis, fingering indications have been viewed as helpful tools for beginner sight-readers and therefore have been utilised in the developed resources.

### **6.2.3 Pedagogical underpinnings and approach to learning**

The written elements of the books provide useful insights towards pedagogical underpinnings of the resources and the general approaches to learning employed by the authors. This part of the review focuses on parameters such as the language and tone through the written text within the resources, the sharing of strategies and the provision of opportunities for independent learning, as well as of indications of the overall approach to learning.

Differentiations can be observed in the written language and tone between older and more recent publications. Some of the older resources include either quite long sections of written text, often with a series of instructions for the learner to follow (*Simplified sight-reading, Read and play: New series*), or, by contrast, completely lack any written text, merely presenting sight-reading pieces (*Sight-reading for today*); it is not clear whether this could be attributed to the advancement of the grade level. There are also examples of resources in which the written language is quite directive and occasionally also quite strong and strict (*Simplified sight-reading, Read and play: Original and New series, Help yourself to sight-reading*<sup>18</sup>), thereby suggesting a teacher-centred approach to learning. This is less evident in later publications, which seem to reflect to some extent the developments in the field of pedagogy and music education, especially in relation to promoting student-centred learning. For example, the writing tone appears more friendly and less directive, even including the use of humour, and it seems that another goal of some authors is to make sight-reading training more enjoyable; this also links to the use of visual elements discussed in section 6.2.4.

Linked to the above, the sharing of sight-reading strategies and the provision of questions are also indicative of the pedagogical approach of the resources. Although several books articulate sight-reading strategies, these are provided in

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<sup>18</sup> P. 20: 'If you do not possess a metronome, buy one at once!'

various ways: for example, *Help yourself to sight-reading* shares tips and strategies as instructions, sometimes within longer chunks of written text, while others introduce these strategies more gradually, working on one or two at a time to make them more achievable, and through a more student-centred manner (*Joining the dots, Piano time: Sight-reading, Improve your sight-reading*). In addition, several publications include questions to the learner, utilising different approaches which may be indicative of a teacher-centred or a student-centred approach to learning. Some publications ask close-ended questions (*Read and play: New series*) which seem useful; however, there is occasionally scope for a more student-centred approach by inviting the learner to observe and think about specific elements, rather than the author stating them in their text. For example, instead of stating: 'There is a tied note in bar 11 (right hand). See that it is held for its correct value' (Johnson, 1989, p. 3), turning this into a question with a different phrasing could have been more student-centred, such as 'Can you find the tied notes? When you do, think about the number of beats you will need to hold them for'. Examples of more open questions are evident in other, more recent, publications, inviting the learner to think more critically about their learning, such as in *Improve your sight-reading Pre-Grade 1* ('How will you make this sound sleepy?', p. 19), and *Right at sight Grade 7* ('What do you notice when you compare bars 1 and 2 with bars 9 and 10?', p. 8).

Some of the more recent resources also include elements of self- and teacher evaluation. For example, *How to BLITZ! sight reading* (Beginner and Book 1) includes a rating system where both the teacher and the learner can assess performance by selecting one of the three provided emojis (smiling, indifferent, sad); in Book 2 this becomes a five-star rating scale, supposedly filled in by the learner or in collaboration with the teacher. Elements of (self-)evaluation also appear in *Improve your sight-reading* (Pre-Grade 1), through a 'teacher's or pupil's comments box' at the end of each activity section ('stage'). Finally, the preface of the resource *Help yourself to sight-reading* suggests the possibility of a flexible use of the material, as it states that the book may be used by learners working independently, or with a teacher.

My own approach to such pedagogical parameters and considerations is detailed in Chapters 8 and 9, particularly in section 8.3.3 (concerning the written language of the material and the author's voice), section 8.4 (evaluation and

reflection), section 9.2.3 (the sharing of strategies through the Bee character); sections 9.4 and 9.4.1 (the provision of opportunities for reflection).

#### **6.2.4 Visual elements and additional sections**

In addition to differences between publications in terms of their pedagogical approaches, further differentiations are evident in the visual appearance of the books, including the cover designs and inside pages, and in relation to the inclusion of additional sections/components within the published material. Again, some of these distinctions may be attributed to the later point/year of publication and may also link to the pedagogical underpinnings of each published source.

The appearance of the resources concerns both the layout of the musical content and the elements of (graphic) design of the cover pages and the inside of the books. It is not a surprise that the cover pages appear to become more elaborate through the years, with older publications featuring covers with a simpler, more minimal design, with use of a quasi-monochromatic approach (*Simplified sight-reading, Help yourself to sight-reading, Sight-reading made easy*); later publications demonstrate a more elaborate approach to design of their covers, with visual elements which may make them more attractive to the reader, such as brighter, more colourful schemes, visual illustrations and font effects (e.g. 3D word art effects) (*How to BLITZ! sight reading, Piano time: Sight-reading, Joining the dots, Sight-reading for fun*).

Differentiations are also observed in terms of the inner layout of the books. Several of the more recent publications, particularly those which are addressed to earlier levels or young learners, feature visual elements which may make the content more appealing, for example by including a book character companion. For example, *Sight-reading for fun* includes illustrations of a detective and his dog (also appearing on the book cover), who are the learners' companions throughout the activities. Along similar lines, in *Improve your sight-reading: Pre-Grade 1*, illustrations of funny cats and dogs give prompts, reminders and share pieces of advice, while a graduation hat congratulates the learner for completing each level within *How to BLITZ! sight reading* (Books 1 and 2).

In addition, illustrations or images are used as a system to enable communication between the author and the learner. For example, *Joining the dots* includes specific symbols/images for each activity type, which appear at the beginning of each task: a magnifying glass for the activity 'Key features', a weight-lifting man lifting a quaver above his head for the 'Workouts' activity, a wave-like piano keyboard for the 'Make music' activity and a music book/score with flying notes for the activity 'Read and play'. In *Piano time: Sight-reading* a set of illustrations is used as 'code signs' (Hall & Macardle, 1996, p. 4, Book 1) to share strategies or reminders for each musical example/task within every activity. This set of symbols includes: a key (reminder to look at the key, sharps and flats); a clock (a reminder to look at the time signature); a pair of eyes (meaning 'look out!', as a prompt to observe the music); a man's tie (a prompt to look for tied notes in the music); a jumping figure (a reminder to look for skips between notes); a drum (indicating the use of quavers); the palm of a hand (linking to fingering and prompting the learner to not move the fingers away from the keys); a pair of theatre masks (a reminder to look for expression markings); a man resting on an armchair (a reminder to look for rests).

Some publications have incorporated further visual elements or additional sections, which include a certificate of completion at the end of the books (*How to BLITZ! sight reading, Piano time: Sight-reading*), a reward system (with stickers) and the rating/evaluation system with emojis or stars (*How to BLITZ! sight reading*), as discussed in section 6.2.3. Additional sections include either a general introduction (foreword or preface) (*Read and play: Original and New series, Sight reading for today, Sight-reading for fun, Play at sight, Help yourself to sight-reading, Simplified sight-reading*) or an introductory section addressed to the teacher and/or the learner (*Sight reading success, Joining the dots, Piano time: Sight-reading, How to BLITZ! sight reading, Piano sight-reading, More piano sight-reading*), and a glossary of musical terminology (*Read and play: New series, Right at sight*). It should be acknowledged that a professional graphic designer has not been consulted nor contributed to the (visual) presentation of the resources created in the thesis, as this would be a step for further development of the material. My own approach linked to the aspects presented above is analysed in Chapter 9 (the introductions to the teacher and the learner, section 9.2; the inclusion of a book character companion, the Bee, section

9.2.3; the 'Congratulations' page at the end of each book Unit, section 9.4.2; the certificate of completion, section 9.6.1; the terminology glossary and the list of featured composers, sections 9.6.2 and 9.6.3, respectively).

### **6.3 Study 2: Consulting creators of piano sight-reading material**

After reviewing existing piano sight-reading publications, Study 2 was undertaken in order to strengthen the informed framework in which I would design my sight-reading material, deepening my understanding of practical parameters, principles and other considerations involved in the creative process of this type of resources. For this purpose, I consulted international authors of sight-reading publications; through interviews, the authors were invited to reflect on their experience and on parameters involved in creating their sight-reading material, including their approach to progression, various compositional and other considerations, such as pilot testing of their material and the level of publisher involvement in the final output.

The following sections detail the purpose of the study, and the research aims (section 6.3.1), the deployed methodology (section 6.4), and introduce (anonymously) the participant authors (section 6.4.1). The findings from their reflections are presented in section 6.5 (6.5.1-6.5.6) and discussed (section 6.6) in relation to how these informed further steps of this research (Chapter 7) and my own creative process and underpinning principles (Chapters 8 and 9).

#### **6.3.1 Purpose and research aims**

The purpose of this study was to explore international authors' experiences of creating sight-reading publications, in order to gain insights which would inform in further depth the creative process of my own material. The authors' expertise and reflections have been invaluable sources of inspiration, field knowledge and advice, which provided illuminating insights to facilitate my material creation.

The primary aim of the study was to gain insights on the authors' experiences and the processes involved in creating relevant material. Specific aims of the research included:

- (a) to explore authors' experiences in creating sight-reading publications,

- (b) to gain insights towards sight-reading considerations and processes involved in creating such educational material,
- (c) to explore their creative principles and approaches towards the musical material, focusing on progression and compositional processes,
- (d) to explore parameters relating to the teacher and the learner,
- (e) to become aware of potential challenges and limitations of the creative process, such as – but not limited to – the author-publisher relationship.

The methodological considerations to achieve these aims are detailed in the following section.

## **6.4 Methodology**

For the purposes of this study, individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken with four international authors of sight-reading publications, following the ethical approval procedure detailed in Chapter 4.9. Potential participant authors were identified based on their published sight-reading output and were approached via email, introducing the researcher and the research purpose, and inviting them to participate in the study. Follow-up emails were sent to authors who expressed interest in participating, sharing further information about the research through relevant information sheets/consent forms (Appendix 2).

Individual interviews were scheduled with the four authors who agreed to participate in the study. These took place online during the Covid-19 lockdown period, via the Zoom platform, except for one author who requested to provide written responses to the interview questions. The online interviews were audio-recorded, and the transcription files were sent to the authors for approval or potential amendments prior to the data analysis. Data was analysed through thematic, interpretative analysis, and findings are presented in section 6.5. The semi-structured interview schedules can be found in Appendix 4.

### **6.4.1 The participant authors**

The authors who participated in the study are based both in the UK and internationally. In order to maintain anonymity, the following profiles include

information which would not make the authors identifiable; therefore, no references are made to specific publication titles or to the country in which they are working. Some contextual information about further sight-reading work is provided, for example for instruments beyond the piano, or for exam boards, but it is not envisaged that this would lead to a revealing of their identity.

- Author 1 (hereafter addressed as 'A1'): has published sight-reading series for multiple instruments including the piano and singing and has written sight-reading tests for a particular exam board. A1 has also produced a publication containing sight-reading duets.

- Author 2 (hereafter addressed as 'A2'): has co-authored<sup>19</sup> a sight-reading series for the piano, including some additional material, which is freely available online; A2 has not written tests or other material for exam boards.

- Author 3 (hereafter addressed as 'A3'): has published a sight-reading series for the piano and various instruments for an exam board, including sight-singing; A3 has also composed music and produced sight-reading material for other relevant book series and exam boards.

- Author 4 (hereafter addressed as 'A4'): has published sight-reading series for several instruments, including the voice; for the piano, A4 has produced two sight-reading series, also featuring duets. A4 has not written for particular exam boards.

## **6.5 Findings**

Through the interviews, the authors shared invaluable reflections on their experiences of creating sight-reading publications, resulting in rich data with a great number of emerging themes. For the purposes of this research, the analysis focuses on specific aspects which relate to the output of this thesis and have informed the creation of my sight-reading books. The following sections focus on the authors' experience leading to their creation of sight-reading material (section 6.5.1); on considerations relating to exam boards (section 6.5.2.1); their approach to progression (section 6.5.2.2) and overarching creative principles (section 6.5.2.3); compositional considerations and

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<sup>19</sup> The possibility of interviewing both co-authors of this publication was explored, but A2 let me know that the other author was not available due to extended travel with no Internet access at the time.



approach to style (section 6.5.2.4); the pilot testing of their material (section 6.5.3); considerations relating to the teacher and the learner (sections 6.5.4.1 and 6.5.4.2); their approach to evaluation and assessment of performance at sight through the books (section 6.5.4.3); their relationship with publishers and their publisher involvement in the final output (section 6.5.5). An overall reflection on authors' creative experience and their final advice are also presented (section 6.5.6).

### **6.5.1 Experience leading to the creation of sight-reading material**

The authors were invited to share how their interest in sight-reading began and how they started creating relevant material. They referred to their experience with sight-reading as learners in various contexts and their teaching experience, while one author (A4) also referred to their experience as an examiner.

More specifically, Author 1 (A1) claimed that their experience with sight-reading as a learner was challenging: 'I wasn't very good at it'. Later on, sight-reading became a significant part in A1's professional career and 'quite a major part' of their life, as they started specifically teaching sight-reading and delivering sight-reading workshops to teachers and students. This experience as a learner and as a teacher developed their interest in wanting 'to find out how you do it and whether I could help other people do it as well', which led to the creation of their books. A1 also claimed that they were 'fascinated by the [sight-reading] process' and that they 'wanted to see whether it could be broken down' in a way that would allow 'people to be able to do it'. They also expressed the belief that sight-reading is a skill that everyone can develop, highlighting the importance of an appropriate teaching approach: 'I think everyone can learn to do [sight-reading] if they're taught it well'.

Author 2 (A2) also reflected on their experience as a learner, explaining that their sight-reading abilities developed during their studies in a specialist music high school. Being 'a pianist amongst a class of mostly instrumentalists', A2 was asked to accompany many of their classmates. They believe that their sight-reading abilities 'skyrocketed as a result of just doing it all the time [as an accompanist]' and that they did not think they were a particularly good sight-reader before then. While reflecting on their teaching experience, A2 mentioned the disparity of pupils' skills: 'I realised [...] that students had wonderful aural skills, but they didn't have great sight-reading

skills'. To address this issue, A2 devised a 'Sight-reading Society' together with a colleague, for which they created handbooks for learners to practise sight-reading from, organised termly tests and developed a reward system. A2's intended way of teaching sight-reading was 'to break down the elements' for the learners to use their analytical skills. As explained by A2, the structure and philosophy of the handbooks later became the basis that evolved into their published books; even the particular reward system of the Sight-reading Society was included in an adapted format in the books<sup>20</sup>.

For Author 3 (A3), their sight-reading material was informed by their learning experience and came after having produced some educational music. A3 explained that they 'loved sight-reading and exploring new music' from a very young age as a pianist. They explained that their initial educational output was then followed by piano sight-reading publications, which they later expanded into material for other instruments. . A3 stated that they could not recall who initiated the contact (if it was the author themselves or the publisher who approached the author first).

For Author 4 (A4) their teaching experience from private piano lessons and from teaching at a music school, combined with their experience as an examiner, initiated their interest in sight-reading and the development of resources. Their experience as an examiner was illuminating; A4 stated that 'part of every exam was sight-reading, and I realised how badly it was done'. This led them to engage into discussions with other teachers and to deliver relevant workshops, which revealed to them a lack of teachers' awareness of how to teach sight-reading. In addition, A4 did not think that the available sight-reading resources were appropriate in supporting teaching. They stated: 'I did look at the material that was available and I was appalled by it, because it seemed to be the same thing churned out regardless of the instrument. [...] it didn't seem to be specific enough'.

### **6.5.2. Creating the material**

The authors reflected on parameters which guided the progression of the material and their overarching creative principles. Each author shared information about their

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<sup>20</sup> The particular reward system is very distinct and therefore it is not stated in the findings, as it is envisaged that it would reveal the specific publication and therefore the author's identity.

creative process and starting points, and explained elements included in their publications which they considered significant for the development of sight-reading skills.

### **6.5.2.1 Considering exam boards**

In order to explore how the authors decide which elements to include in each level of their books in terms of material progression, I asked whether they write for specific exam boards as well as produce their own material. Two authors (A1 and A3) have previously produced sight-reading material for exam boards, alongside their own publications. These authors stated that they have considered the criteria and parameters specified by exam boards and have either followed them in their publications (A3) or aligned their material with them to some extent (A1). A1 also claimed that although their material 'is reasonably specifically angled towards music exams' and was conceived 'towards an exam structure', their books work 'quite independently of that'. Similarly, although A2 and their co-author have not produced material for a specific exam board, A2 stated that they allowed themselves 'to be a little bit guided by examination systems', due to the popularity of exams in their country. A2 further explained that they 'limited' themselves to the keys of particular grades, so that the books would prepare learners for the sight-reading test of that grade; A2 also believes that learners 'would also be prepared way beyond that, but they would definitely at least be able to do things from that grade exam'.

In contrast to these three authors, A4's process did not consider exam board parameters, acknowledging that 'not everybody does the grades'. They feel that they produced their material 'in a logical progression, like any tutor book' and they have avoided following specific syllabi and grade specifications, expressing strong feelings against such limitation: 'it just seems the wrong approach to just go from syllabus to syllabus, [...] from grade to grade' (A4). A1 also expressed the belief that 'sometimes these exam boards get it right and sometimes (I think) they get it wrong', but they felt that it was not for them 'to comment on them'.

### 6.5.2.2 Planning progression

The authors shared their process of planning the progression of the material within each book, as well as across the different levels. Each participant followed a different process; however, careful planning was undertaken by all of them.

A1 described their material as ‘very progressive’, with a ‘very clear progression’, and its layout resulted from much thinking and from ‘a lot of experience and experimentation’. A1’s starting point and overarching principle underpinning their material was a basic approach towards rhythm and melody, and they gradually built from these foundational elements. When making creative decisions, A1 also referred to the need to consider the learner’s approach and understanding.

A2 shared more details of their process. A2 and their co-author began by making lists of time signatures and keys, ensuring that they covered the exam board criteria, while also moving beyond them. Their progression was structured by key and by note range, and they planned all levels before deciding how these would be divided into books. This resulted in three books containing sight-reading material from beginner level up to Grade 5 (Book 1 for Grades 1 and 2, Book 2 for Grades 3 and 4, and Book 3 for Grade 5). They believed that ‘beyond that [level] people should just be sight-reading repertoire’ and that ‘there’s no actual book that can teach you how to sight-read beyond that [...], you’ve just got to go and do it’.

A3’s material progression also followed a key-based approach, by carefully developing ‘aspects of rhythm intervals and pitch through the course of each book’. Adaptations across the different books included increasing the length of the pieces, broadening and developing the written as well as the musical language, which ‘becomes more “adult” as we move through the grades’. Finally, A4 emphasised the amount of planning that went into mapping the progression of the material: ‘there’s a lot of planning, a great deal’; ‘it’s planned, completely’. This process involved thinking about the musical elements of each book section/chapter, the order and cohesion of information, and the amount of content needed for each book. A4 also explained the overall focus of their three books: Book 1 focuses on reading, patterns, and concludes with ‘some very simple hands together’; Book 2 contains keys up to two sharps or two flats with hands playing together throughout; Book 3 experiments with different keys and styles, also including ‘other tricks that pianists are expected to do,

like transposition and accompaniment'. For Book 3 in particular, the author acknowledged that it was different to their initial plans, but its content was largely influenced by the publisher<sup>21</sup>.

### **6.5.2.3 Creative principles and considerations**

The authors shared some of the principles underpinning their material and their creative process. As summarised in Table 6.2, the primary areas of the authors' creative principles focused on:

- (a) rhythm as a priority,
- (b) parameters relating to pitch,
- (c) considerations relating to hand position,
- (d) the use of various musical elements,
- (e) aspects linking to ensemble skills,
- (f) various considerations.

The authors associated each principle with specific areas, which are presented in Table 6.2 alongside quoted responses from the interviews to illustrate them to a greater detail:

- (a) Rhythm: prioritisation of rhythm and rhythm understanding,
- (b) Pitch: pitch representation, the connection between pitch and the topography<sup>22</sup> of the keyboard, identifying patterns and processing music in chunks, chords, the introduction of the bass clef and a key-based progression,
- (c) Hand position: fingering, hand position changes and playing hands together,
- (d) Musical elements: character and musicality, use of musical terminology, articulation and dynamics, use of titles in the pieces,
- (e) Ensemble skills: accompaniment pieces and/or duets,

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<sup>21</sup> Further findings relating to publishers and their involvement in the creative process are presented in section 6.5.5.

<sup>22</sup> The terms 'keyboard topography' or 'keyboard geography' are frequently used interchangeably to refer to the layout of the black and white keys of the piano. The term 'topography' is used in the thesis for consistency, and to avoid potential confusion of meaning within the explanations of the devised book activities, particularly in the Greek versions (in Greek the two terms are not as semantically related: 'geography' is associated with the science of Geography, while 'topography' can be used to refer to a greater range of surfaces and relevant patterns or characteristics).

- (f) Other considerations: the length of pieces, learner age groups, the eye function during sight-reading, learning independence and the use of humour within the material.

After Table 6.2, further considerations relating to the authors' creative processes are analysed in greater detail in the subsequent sections, including their approach to musical styles (section 6.5.2.4), their process of testing the material and collecting feedback (section 6.5.3), various considerations linked to the teacher and the learner (section 6.5.4), such as student enjoyment and their approach to evaluation, as well as considerations relating to publishers (section 6.5.5).

Table 6.2 Authors' creative principles and considerations

Creative principles		Stated by	Quoted responses
RHYTHM	Prioritising rhythm/ rhythm understanding	A1	'Rhythm has to come first', 'the most fundamental aspect of SR', 'the most key and first ingredient', 'you have to understand it intellectually, in the mind, and you have to understand it physically', 'you have to understand pulse, there's no question on that', 'the rhythm obviously is very essential, the value of that is overriding'
		A2	'We try [...] to prioritise rhythm over everything else', 'rhythm absolutely is priority number one', 'rhythm is the essence of music', 'we can recognise music with rhythm and without pitch, but we cannot recognise music with pitch and without rhythm', 'you have to sacrifice pitch for rhythm and it's very difficult for students to do that'
		A4	'Rhythm must come first', 'play an incorrect note and you may get away with it. Play an incorrect rhythm and everyone notices', 'if you get the rhythm wrong [...], you've had it'
PITCH	Pitch representation	A1	'Melodic ingredients', 'to make connections between what we see in the notation, the pitch representation, and how we then replicate that pitch representation' (on the instrument)
		A2	'Pitch is the next element' (after rhythm), 'you cannot have (melodic) patterns without pitch'
	Chunking & Patterns	A2	'Pitch and patterns are, really, intertwined'
		A4	'Book 1, I was concentrating on just the reading, patterns [...]'
	Pitch & keyboard topography	A2	'It's important to recognise random notes and to understand the topography of the keyboard and to instantly be able to go to the right register'
	Chords	A2	'Chords, very important', 'we branched out from the examination limitations, because we included chords', 'there's <i>no</i> chords that are in any of the SR tests, for any of the exam boards, until about grade four or five', 'which is crazy, because pianists have to sight-read chords in real life all the time', 'They're huge part of piano playing', 'the series is actually unique, in the way that it teaches chord reading and the way it prioritises chord reading'
Bass clef introduction	A2	Introducing the bass clef later on in the book: 'young voices don't sing in bass clef and that was best to start in treble clef because that's where we [young voices] sing'	

Creative principles		Stated by	Quoted responses
	Key-based progression	A2	'The first book, it was mostly key-based', 'the easiest key to SR in when you start off is C major', 'It's not the most ergonomic key, at all, but it is the easiest notation-wise', 'We decided to go with C, G, F major, then, we introduced the relative minors'
		A3	'The concept of 'key' and the feel of the notes under the fingers in sight-reading is reinforced by technical exercises, improvisations, etc.', 'they (the different sections/activities) put sight-reading into a more holistic context.'
HAND POSITION	Fingering	A4	'I needed to address fingering, because people don't; and it's illogical', 'where you can, use the fingering of that scale'
	Hand position changes	A4	'I didn't put both of them moving at the same time. I had one staying on a five-note position while the other one moved; and then vice versa'
	Hands together	A4	'Getting the hands together was important'
MUSICAL ELEMENTS	Character & Musicality	A1	'Character is that extra element that comes in', 'I want people to play with character as well', 'some people might say that – in a sense – it's the most overriding aspect'
		A2	'(We) try to make them (the SR pieces) as artistic as possible'
		A4	'Musicality', 'another principle that I've had all the way through all the books: <i>make it musical</i> ', 'Make it sound like a real piece, not something that's been put together to catch you out'
	Musical terms	A4	'Putting musical terms all the way through and building up'
	Articulation & Dynamics	A1	'For the initial books – there are no markings: no dynamics, no <i>staccato</i> , or articulation'
A2		'In the later books we're bringing in dynamics and articulation', 'oddly, when we are SR those things have a higher value, together with the rhythm', 'when I'm teaching [...] I'm actually saying to them (students) that the notes are bottom priority', 'definitely play some notes, but "you've got to do the dynamics", "you've got to do the articulation"', 'even more important than the notes', 'if you are accompanying somebody and you miss a dynamic, it can be embarrassing'	



Creative principles		Stated by	Quoted responses
ENSEMBLE	Titles	A1	A1 followed exam boards' approach to titles (introducing them in grade 6 rather than earlier), but for earlier levels they have provided titles in the tempo markings: 'I think it's very odd [...] because younger children or younger players like titles'
	Accompaniment pieces	A2	'Accompaniment style' pieces, 'it emphasises the importance of rhythmic fluency; you're now playing with somebody else and when you're in an ensemble, that is when you realise "I can't stop, I have to keep going"'
		A4	'They (learners) are more likely to be asked to accompany. But we do not teach them', 'I thought [...] "have a piano part that's easy; have a part that the piano teacher can play over the top. So, they get used to both seeing the third stave and following something else'
	Duets	A1	'I've only done two books of SR duets', 'playing music with someone else is lovely', 'in my SR duets the teacher's part, [...] usually the lower part, is a bit more interesting and so it makes simple melodies sound wonderful, really interesting and characterful', 'it helps you to move forward all the time, as long as it doesn't stress you'
		A3	'Very useful. Helps to keep the music moving'
		A4	'I love playing duets', 'you have to listen to each other', 'we pianists are bad, we slow down, we stop; we make a mistake and we think it's awful and then we have to go back and put it right....but if you're playing with just one other person, you've got to <i>keep going</i> ; you've got to <i>listen</i> ; you've got to be on the same wavelength as that person to be sympathetic to what they're doing'
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS	Length of pieces	A1	'One starts with quite short exercises and gradually gets longer'
	Age groups	A1	'Try and meet with people's intellectual ability to sustain concentration', 'young children have very short concentration spans', 'we designed that (preparatory book) for the younger age group', 'the higher levels [...] could be any age', the grade books: for 'a less specific age range, for anyone really'
	Eye-function	A1	'How you use your eyes, what you're looking at, how quickly you can process information'

Creative principles		Stated by	Quoted responses
	Independence	A1	'Trying to get learners to do what I think they should do when their teacher is not there', 'the most important aspect of practice [...] is that in your head you're having a discussion [...] with yourself'
	Humour	A1	'Humour is a very important aspect for me', 'life cannot exist without humour', 'I've tried to put at least one joke on every page', 'there has to be something that will make someone smile', 'something that will make you laugh; or a bit funny anyway', 'that's a criterion for me'

#### 6.5.2.4 Approaching musical styles

The authors referred to their approach to different musical styles when composing sight-reading pieces. Varied approaches to style, both similar and contrasting, were expressed by the authors. A1 described their sight-reading pieces as 'fairly bland', particularly in the beginning. They explained that this was due to 'writing just very simple constructions to get children to respond and understand'. To overcome this, they endeavoured to also make their sight-reading compositions 'a bit imaginative' by varying styles, for example by composing 'in the style of Mozart' or other composers, as well as in their own style. They concluded by expressing the thought that 'you have to be fairly bland on the whole, certainly to begin with. Bland but imaginative.'

A2 and their co-author approached styles largely based on exam boards' specimen books, by trying to 'emulate' the featured styles: 'we literally had to look at all the specimen books and include the pieces that were in that style so that they (students) could be prepared for exams'. However, their main purpose after planning the musical content of each sight-reading piece was to 'try to make them as artistic as possible'. A2 felt but they were rather 'limited' in style when they used time signatures such as 2/4, 3/4, or 4/4, but compound and more complex time signatures (like 7/8) gave them the opportunity to experiment and to also create more variety in terms of harmony, thus 'moving students towards a more contemporary style'.

For A3, the 'starting point' for every sight-reading piece in their graded books was the title, which 'determines the musical character and hopefully makes the piece of more interest to the pupil'. In contrast to A1, who felt that sight-reading pieces needed to be somewhat 'bland', A3 claimed that they 'like to write pieces which show musicality' while also using the appropriate technical elements for each level. For A3, sight-reading pieces provide an opportunity 'to explore a wide range of styles and musical periods', with relevance to the learners' musical experiences.

Similar views were expressed by A4, who claimed that they have tried to 'vary styles' of their sight-reading pieces 'quite a lot'. For A4, it was necessary to compose music that would feel 'like other piano music' and therefore it would be relatable to the learners and feel familiar. A4 also expressed strong feelings towards specimen sight-reading books and other resources which include music that feels meaningless, stating: 'I can't stand specimen sight-reading books and a lot of the stuff that's out

there I can't see the point of', while arguing that 'they should be proper little pieces, and not exercises'. For A4 composing sight-reading pieces in different styles was 'fun to do' and felt like 'borrowing styles' from composers and from music which learners are likely to be familiar with.

Finally, the authors reflected on the extent to which they have utilised material or other elements of cultural reference in their publications. All authors explained that their material is addressed to the Western/European/classical style and Western notation. A3 referred to the inclusion of jazz elements in their material, and A2 to an accompaniment-style piece with a 'reggae' and 'punk, heavy rock [...] allusion', as well as to some use of modes. A2 further acknowledged the value of musical material with cultural references, explaining that they use such music (of cultural relevance) 'all the time' while teaching by rote, 'because it's much easier'. A4 also recognised the value of culturally relevant material, although they have not used such material in their publications and explained their approach of wanting to 'make everything [...] like other piano music, so that everything about it is familiar'. Similarly, A3 supported that sight-reading material 'really needs to be in the same kind of styles that the pupil is otherwise playing' and shared the belief that 'folk material could do this', although they did not utilise such elements in their publications.

### **6.5.3 Testing and feedback**

The authors were asked if they followed any process of pilot testing of their sight-reading material prior to publication. All authors test the material by trying it with their pupils (A1, A2), by sharing it with colleagues to try it with their pupils (A1, A2, A3), or by collecting feedback from other musicians and teachers (A3, A4). Two participants also referred to people who act as 'advisers': A3 receives feedback from 'specialist advisers' on 'sample pages' when writing sight-reading material for exam boards; A4 also had a trustworthy advisor who reviews their material and provides feedback. For A4, testing is very important, as they believed that 'you need to bounce it (the material) off with other people as well'.

A1 and A2 shared further details on their process and what they explore through the testing. More specifically, A1 tests their material by trying it with their pupils as well as with colleagues' pupils. They also discuss their material with other

teachers and pianist friends, in order to realise if it works, or if it needs to be further improved. A1 then appraises the received feedback and makes decisions concerning what they would need to change or not. As A1 explained, this process would enable them 'to think it (what the feedback highlighted) through again and I might change it, or I might not change it'. Their attitude towards negative comments is reflective, but they also show confidence in the value of their work: 'just because someone doesn't like it [...], it doesn't mean that it's not good, or that it doesn't have the appropriate part to play in that progression'.

A2 described their process of pilot testing as 'gold, because you figure out what works and what doesn't'. This author and their co-author also use the material with pupils and seek feedback from colleagues. This may concern progression, to check that the musical elements and the criteria are aligned. As they stated, there were occasions where 'we realised that [...] we've got a piece in there in the major and we haven't introduced the major yet, or [...] the range is too high, we haven't got there yet'. Repeated material or potential gaps could be identified, for example by realising 'do you realise there's four pieces in 6/8 in this level?', or 'we haven't done A minor for ages!'. Finally, pilot testing could contribute to gaining insights towards the level of difficulty of the musical examples. As A2 stated: 'if more than three students had difficulty with an example, we simply just changed the example, simplified it... there is no point in doing things that were too hard'.

#### **6.5.4 Considerations for the teacher and the learner**

The authors also considered parameters relating to the teachers and the learners. Such parameters included the provision of guidance to the teachers through their material, the potential of promoting further musical skills beyond sight-reading, as well as elements which might make their books appealing to learners, and aspects promoting independent learning.

##### **6.5.4.1 Considerations for the teacher**

Authors A1 and A2 reflected upon the provision of guidance for teachers. As both authors stated, their sight-reading publications do not include specific guidance or instructions to the teachers but are more focused on the students using the material. For A2, 'the books themselves are aimed at the students' and this author usually

shares advice with teachers in sight-reading workshops, while A1 has produced an additional publication for teachers including more sight-reading exercises and detailed text where the author shares advice on how to teach sight-reading effectively.

Authors also referred to elements to make their material user-friendly. For A1, the very gradual progression of the material makes it friendly to use, both for the teacher and the learner, while A2 believes that teachers may find the prioritisation of rhythm particularly useful, as well as the 'unique' perspective of their sight-reading material in terms of promoting the teaching of chords. For A3, the key-based approach of their books, containing different activities in each key, is an element which other teachers would appreciate alongside the material progression. A4 did not refer to any particular considerations for the teachers; however, they acknowledged that the pianists' need to develop a wide range of musical skills (perhaps wider than other instrumentalists, such as accompanying or transposition), could be a challenge with implications for both teachers and learners. As A4 stated, 'we are asked to do far more, as pianists, than anybody else'. Finally, although A1 does not believe that their sight-reading book could be used as a method book exclusively, as it does not teach instrumental technique, they feel that it could be used as 'a progressive way forward', as it promotes several important musical skills, such as rhythm, note reading and playing with character.

#### **6.5.4.2 Student enjoyment, independent learning and writing style**

The authors reflected on considerations for learners using their material, relating to enjoyment, motivation and confidence, learning independence and writing style.

A1 and A4 emphasised the importance of linking sight-reading with learners' sense of achievement and enjoyment. Specifically, A1 expressed the belief that the gradual progression of their material makes sight-reading tasks achievable for the learner and thus can enhance their motivation while also enabling progress: 'I get it, so I move on'. A1 also claimed that the gradual progression can contribute to pupils' confidence and sense of self-worth which they perceive as 'hugely important'. As A1 stated, their material is 'very progressive, so it gives the sense of confidence, self-worth and then motivation to move on'. A1 does not support that sight-reading is 'inherently difficult'; in fact, they expressed strong feelings about the potential of

sight-reading and sight-reading teaching to become an enjoyable process: 'of course sight-reading can be enjoyable! And teaching sight-reading can be enjoyable'. Therefore, A1 views the teacher's approach as crucial in making sight-reading an enjoyable part of the lesson. This is aligned with their expressed creative criterion/principle about the importance of humour, and their effort to include 'something that will make you (the learner) laugh' consistently throughout their material (section 6.5.2.3).

Similarly, A4 emphasised the need for the teacher to make sight-reading 'fun', suggesting various ways in which this could be achieved in the lesson, such as by playing rhythm games, vocalising the music, or doing a 'dummy run' before playing the notes. A4 even suggested playing duets where the teacher pretends to have a bad sense of pulse, so that the learner could take the lead in guiding them to play in time. According to A4, such elements can make sightreading 'ten times more fun' and 'so much more enjoyable' and therefore enhance confidence and motivation. Elaborating on this further, A4 referred to feedback they received via by a book user who expressed their enjoyment of the material: 'I had a lovely e-mail from somebody once that said: "I don't need these for reading practice anymore. I just play them because I enjoy them!"'.

Some authors connected their material to learner independence. A2 believed that the structured approach of their books promotes independence, as it enables students to learn how to apply these strategies to further contexts, for example when practising repertoire. A similar view was expressed by A4, who supported that the sight-reading strategies shared through prompting written phrases and reminders in their material would promote independent learning and can lead to forming effective habits. A4 also referred to feedback from book users who used their material as a resource while working without a teacher: 'they've taught themselves by the first sight-reading book'; 'you can actually use it as a self-tutor'.

Further elements identified by authors as promoting learning independence included the different types of activities and the evaluation of progress. In particular,

A3 stated that the improvisation activities<sup>23</sup> included in their material promote independent learning, while acknowledging that 'sight-reading itself has elements of independent learning within it'. In addition, A2 felt that the process of evaluating progress within their books (smiley faces for teachers and/or learners to evaluate performance) promotes learner autonomy, as well as the specific reward system featured in their books; the rewards are also perceived as a motivation for learners to continue progressing and completing the different book sections.

Finally, A1 and A2 reflected on their writing style within the material. A1 described their writing tone as 'friendly', 'conversational' and 'approachable', rather than 'academic'. Their aim was for the book users to feel a connection with the author as a friendly helper: 'as if I was there with them and being a friendly kind of person'; 'that this book is a friend that is helping me go through this process'. This is also reinforced through the use of humour, which A1 believes 'makes people smile and enables movement forward'. A1 was opposed to 'instructional' resources 'that tell you all the stuff', describing these as 'austere', 'boring' and 'old-fashioned'. Similarly, A2 described their writing style as 'extremely casual', arguing that they 'don't like formal textbooks' and that 'students can be spoken to much more informally in a book and it can still be very successful, in fact more successful, if the language is casual'.

#### **6.5.4.3 Approach to evaluation/assessment**

The authors were asked how they invite the evaluation of sight-reading performance in their material, who is responsible for delivering the evaluation and to explain the reasons that led them to decide on these specific modes of assessment.

In A1's material, a 'teacher's or pupil's comments' box is included in their preparatory level book, which provides the opportunity for the teacher and/or the learner to evaluate the pupil's performance in playing at sight. However, due to practical limitations relating to publishing, this feature was eliminated from the subsequent levels of the material, as 'there wasn't room'.

A2 values pupils' self-assessment to a great extent, as they believe that it 'engages the student', provides 'a sense of agency over what they're doing' and

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<sup>23</sup> A3's material features some compositional exercises where the learner is requested to continue the music (usually for the right hand) over a given bass; A3 probably refers to these exercises as 'improvisational activities' in their written responses.



eventually leads to 'autonomy'. They have a specific way of evaluation using emojis, where the teacher and/or the learner can select the face expressions which they think best describes the pupil's performance, while there is a reward system for when different sections of the books are completed. A2 expressed the view that 'it shouldn't just be up to the teacher to tick or cross "you did well" or "you didn't do well"', but instead 'the student needs to decide "how do you think it went?"', thus emphasising the importance of the learner's reflection, instead of limiting evaluation to the teacher. Although it would have been interesting to gain further insights on the ways that the author intended this mode of evaluation to be applied in the lesson, it appears that they also perceive this as a potential starting point for further teacher-pupil discussion: 'if teacher and student agree that "yes, you are both happy", then, "yes, you can have your [reward]<sup>24</sup> for that section'.

For A3 and A4, no particular elements of evaluation in their material were stated; however, A4 mentioned some criteria which could be used to evaluate sight-reading performance: 'not to expect 100 percent; not to expect everything, but that they've got the majority of it right, [...] have the keys correctly; and the timing and the rhythm's correct'. Finally, A3 referred to pupils' reflection, expressing the hope that 'the music is written in such a way as a student could evaluate the accuracy of their performance', although they appeared rather sceptical, as they also stated that 'in some cases that may be a vain hope!'.

### **6.5.5 Publishers**

The authors reflected upon their experiences with publishers, including creative limitations and potential challenges they may have encountered. Some authors had a good and productive overall experience, while others had a more challenging collaboration with their publishers.

A1 did not have to work within a set of parameters by their publisher, but they had some practical limitations. These included the number of pages and the overall length of the books (the final number of pages needs to be divisible by four) and the layout. As A1 stated, these aspects influenced what was included within the material:

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<sup>24</sup> As stated previously, the particular reward is not stated explicitly, as it is a distinct characteristic of these books which could make them identifiable.

'you put into that page whatever you have room for'; the publisher and editor ultimately decided 'what can be put in a page depending on the space available'. For example, as stated previously, the 'teacher's and pupil's comments' box which was included in the preparatory level book for evaluating sight-reading performance was eliminated from subsequent levels due to lack of room. For A1, the cover was another aspect which was determined by the publisher; in their case, their material was published in different countries, and relevant adaptations were made to the cover and terminology (no mentions of 'exams'; books labelled as 'levels' instead of 'grades), although 'the material is the same'.

In addition, A1 felt that the creative control resided primarily with the author: 'it was very much my design, and the publishers just went with it really', and could not think of anything they (A1) would have changed in the material if publisher limitations were not a concern. Similar views were expressed by A3, who referred to the final outcome as a result of 'mutual agreement', describing their collaboration with publishers as a 'two-way process'. A3 felt that their publishers were 'very helpful' and understood their 'vision', considering any negotiations as 'helpful [...] feedback [...], opportunity for discussion and possible rethink'. Similarly to A1, the limitations A3 encountered related to space availability and design, which sometimes required adaptation of the material, for example 'to shorten or lengthen a piece' or to adjust the 'difficulty level'.

A2's experience is different to some extent, as they are the publisher of their material in their home country, so they 'have all the control'. Their experience of working with publishers in other countries has been positive; as A2 explained, they still maintained 'all the creative control'. They described their collaboration with their editor as 'lovely', as 'they weren't going to print anything that I wasn't happy with'. A2 referred to similar limitations when making publishing decisions, explaining that sometimes practical considerations need to be prioritised: 'not all of it is an artistic decision; some of it is literally "we need this number of pages", "where's the staple going to go?"'. As an author-publisher, A3 also needed to consider commercial limitations as well. As they stated, although they wanted to 'write a series of sight-reading duets', this type of resource would be 'even harder to sell'. Linked to this, one

change that they would make would be to explore other ways to incorporate their reward system, so that it would not be 'so expensive to print'.

A4's reflection on their experience with publishers revealed several challenges that this author encountered during their collaboration, relating to both the overall content and design. A4 had been requested by the publishers to produce three piano sight-reading books; however, the publishers had a different vision for the progression and elements to be included within the content of the third book than the author, and A4 felt that there is a 'gap' within progression across Books 2 and 3. Similar challenges occurred in relation to this author's duet sight-reading book for the piano, for which the author stated: 'they didn't understand, I don't think; and it's *not* what I really wanted to do with it, but I did it, that's what they wanted'. Although A4 did not have a limitation for the number of pages of their books, their biggest 'battle' was the book cover and its design. A4 recognised that this publisher had developed 'some superb designs' for them in the past; however, they expressed strong feelings of disappointment for the cover design of their sight-reading series: 'I don't know why they had to mess this one up'. A4's statements revealed that the publisher had complete control over the cover, despite the author's efforts to negotiate: 'it was the 'Publisher X' office that came up with having 'X image'<sup>25</sup> on the front, for sight-reading. And I couldn't shift them. I just could not'. The author felt that the dominant visual element of the covers was 'hideous' and 'scary' and explained that they 'used to tell pupils to put a brown paper cover on the books', which A4 had also done on their own copy.

### **6.5.6 Overall reflection on creative experience and final advice**

The authors shared some final reflections on their creative experience by referring to aspects that they particularly enjoyed or found challenging, as well as giving some final advice. All authors shared a common challenge, which was the process of completing the material. A1, A2 and A3 referred to the amount of time and energy needed to create the material, to compose the sight-reading pieces and to lay out the material. A2 argued that 'the difficulties would be literally in getting the files together, or the

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<sup>25</sup> Not stated as a very distinct visual element of the publication covers would reveal the author.

time that it takes to lay it out'. A1's response was particularly illuminating, as they stated that 'as the material gets more complex, it's quite hard work to write. [...] it takes a huge amount of creative energy' (A1). They argued against a potential assumption that it is easy to write sight-reading pieces, by stating that 'writing short character pieces that fit into certain criteria is not easy to do [...] it's hard work, it takes a lot of creative energy'. A3 described the process of 'the continual checking and cross-checking' of the material as a sometimes 'tedious' task, while A4 also encountered challenges related to publishers as stated in section 6.5.5.

Authors were also invited to identify their favourite or most enjoyable moment while creating the material. A1 and A2 enjoy the entire process of creating the material: A1 stated that they enjoyed writing the music, as well as the editorial process and the final output, while A2 highlighted the process of pilot testing the material, because it provides valuable insights of 'what works and what doesn't'. A3 also enjoys 'seeing the final proofs and the actual book', while for A4 the most enjoyable part was creating the final book of their series which is focused on different styles.

Finally, the authors shared pieces of advice which they thought would be useful for me when creating my own material. This related to various aspects of the creative process, from establishing criteria, deciding on progression and compositional considerations, to writing style, written instructions and reviewing the material. More specifically, A1 recommended keeping in mind certain criteria in which to base the progression of the material, either linking to particular exam criteria, or by establishing my own. A2 advised against following the approach of exam boards which they believe is 'just to publish books of examples that appear to be random', but instead to 'break down' sight-reading into different elements. Along similar lines, A3 recommended having a 'very focused approach to sight-reading, introducing the musical elements one by one', in order to also enhance learners' confidence 'as they explore the necessity to work on their own that sight-reading gives'. Further advice included providing clear written instructions (A3), 'keeping a light touch' and adding some humour (A1), making the sight-reading pieces 'musical', instead of 'like a test or an exercise [...] to catch you out' (A4). Finally, A4 also counselled to establish a 'routine' of reviewing the material and 'playing around with it' before making final decisions.

## **6.6 Reflective discussion of aspects informing the creation of my material**

The review of sight-reading publications and the findings from the interviews with the authors of such resources revealed a plethora of considerations, parameters and principles underpinning the published material and the authors' creative experiences. The review observations and authors' input have provided useful insights to inform my own creative process and together they have strengthened the robustness of the creation of my material, highlighting various parameters that would be useful to consider prior to, during and after the process of developing my resources. This section synthesises the review and the interview findings by considering aspects which informed the process of creating my material, through a reflective discussion. This focuses on three overarching themes emerging from the findings, drawing connections that the sight-reading material reviews and the authors' experiences made for me in relation to: (a) the development of progression and establishing my creative principles; (b) pedagogical parameters, and (c) the evaluation and testing of the created material.

### **6.6.1 Developing progression and establishing creative principles**

The review of sight-reading publications indicated varied approaches to progression (analysed in section 6.2.1), and the interviewed authors explained their individual approaches and the creative principles underpinning the musical material of their publications in detail. Each author shared their own processes and the rationale guiding their creative decisions, which resulted in their published output. Through the review and the interviews, I collected useful insights which were very informative in relation to developing my musical material, particularly in terms of planning progression, establishing my own creative principles and deciding upon the different types of activities to include in my books (Chapter 8).

More specifically, the structured approach of the reviewed sight-reading resources and the authors' input revealed the necessity for a well-thought out and clearly structured progression. The interviews further highlighted the importance of planning in advance the progression of the musical elements in detail and the

necessity for the material to be clear, logical, and achievable. Some authors explained in greater detail how they developed progression within each book or across their book series, emphasising the necessity for gradual advancement of the musical material. Their reflections affirmed the understanding gained from the review process, namely that I would need to think very carefully about the progression of my sight-reading material, by making clear decisions, detailed plans and outlines about progression in advance, which would need to be comprehensive, appropriate for the corresponding level of pupils, and cohesive within the books as well as from one book to the next. This would not only be helpful for me in creating a clear framework of structuring and developing my material, but also for the teachers and the learners using the books, by providing a clear, progressive, and achievable structure of the musical elements. The results of this process through which I determined the creative principles and developed the progression in my material are detailed in Chapter 8.

Linked to this, the authors also shared their thoughts about the sight-reading criteria of exam boards, and reflected on the extent to which their publications are aligned to the relevant expectations and requirements. Similarly to what was observed in the broader process of review of sight-reading publications, different approaches were encountered, with some authors taking into consideration the exam board sight-reading requirements, either to a greater or to a lesser extent, also depending on context (for example, if their material was produced for a specific exam board, or if it was developed as an educational resource for developing sight-reading skills independently of exam boards). According to the authors' interview responses, even those who did not align their material to any examination boards claimed to be aware of the relevant requirements from their previous experience as teachers or as examiners; this might also find relevance to the reviewed publications which did not appear to align with specific exam boards. Connecting this to the Greek context where the systems of music performance examination boards are not as widespread, as for example in the UK, such knowledge is not as common for instrumental teachers. In addition, and even more importantly, the absence of relevant specifications and requirements for sight-reading within the Greek Conservatoire regulations provided a *tabula rasa* framework, where I would need to develop and determine these

parameters by myself, by developing a robust framework of criteria alongside progression.

Despite the sense of creative freedom this could facilitate, I strongly felt the need to gain further awareness of relevant requirements in order to further expand the insights gained from the material review and the authors. Therefore, I decided to examine the sight-reading specifications of international examination boards by undertaking a comparative analysis of their piano syllabi and appraising their sight-reading marking criteria. Focusing on the first grades of piano studies, this exploration would support the process of establishing my creative framework by strengthening my knowledge and raising my awareness of the approaches employed by music education bodies. The comparative analysis of sight-reading within the piano syllabi of various international examination boards is detailed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

### **6.6.2 Pedagogical considerations**

The observed prioritisation of particular musical elements in the reviewed sight-reading material and within the authors' reflections, also informed my process of developing the different types of activities within my sight-reading books; this also applies to some further principles concerning the musical material. As illustrated previously in section 6.2.2 and in Table 6.2, some of the reviewed publications and the participant authors placed emphasis upon the development of rhythmic skills, which the authors perceived as a very important factor (A1, A2, A4). In the interviews, pitch perception and the connection of pitch to the piano keys was also addressed (A1, A2), alongside the development of the learner's ability to identify patterns and to process information in meaningful units (chunks) (A1, A4). Some authors (A2, A3) also suggested a key-based progression of the material, and referred to practical parameters, such as hand position, fingering, or the length of pieces. Further considerations included providing opportunities for collaborative playing, for example with duets (A1, A3, A4) or accompaniment pieces (A2, A4).

Similar observations concerning strategies and skills contributing to effective sight-reading (i.e. observation, looking ahead, or collaborative playing, amongst others) were also observed in some of the reviewed resources (section 6.2.2). I perceived such insights as particularly useful in informing the process of developing

my book activities, especially in terms of breaking down the different elements involved in sight-reading and determining the purpose and focus of each activity (building rhythmic skills, exploring the piano keyboard, and duets, amongst others). Further aspects which were brought to my attention both from the review of published material and from the interviews with authors concern the use of titles and performance or character indications for the sight-reading pieces and the use of musical terminology, amongst others; my deployed approach towards these aspects is explained in Chapter 8.

As detailed in the Literature review (Chapter 2), such considerations are in agreement with findings from research and with recommendations from pedagogical literature on sight-reading, which address the value of building skills such as rhythm realisation, pitch perception, pattern recognition, and meaningful observation, as well as the contribution of participation in accompanying and ensemble activities to sight-reading effectiveness (McLachlan, 2015; Gordon, 2014; Zhukov, 2014a; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Cooke, 2011; Fisher, 2010; Mcmillan, 2010; Keyworth, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Kostka, 2000; Sloboda et al., 1998; Waters et al., 1998; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, 1996; McPherson, 1994).

The awareness I gained from combining knowledge from literature sources with the observations from the reviewed material and the insights from authors' reflections contributed to my process of determining and developing the purposes and rationale for the activities in my devised resources, as explained in Chapter 8 (section 8.2) and enhanced my confidence in my activity ideas. This also applies in relation to my decision to incorporate musical material from a range of sources in my books. As detailed in Chapter 8, in addition to the music I composed for the specific activities, the devised resources comprise musical material of cultural relevance (section 8.3.6), adaptations of music from existing composers including female and under-represented composers (section 8.3.5). Such elements were not observed in the reviewed publications (except for some resources which also featured music by composers of the past in addition to specific sight-reading material by the book authors), nor highlighted in the authors' interviews. In addition to opening the discussion of important pedagogical topics, such as EDI, to sight-reading and to the field of developing educational resources, their inclusion contributes to a wider variety



of the musical material and potentially also to learners' greater interest in the sight-reading tasks.

In addition to parameters linked to the musical material, the authors also shared insights about general pedagogical considerations of their approach, for example relating to learners' motivation, enjoyment, and learning independence. These considerations, viewed alongside the varied pedagogical underpinnings observed from the review of sight-reading publications (section 6.2.3), affirmed my personal pedagogical beliefs which focus on a student-centred, reflective approach to teaching and learning. The insights gained from the review and the interviews enabled me to think in more depth about my original ideas and to seek further ways to promote these philosophies through my material. For example, I pondered upon ways to increase learners' motivation, confidence, and enjoyment through my material, and thought about the inclusion of culturally relevant musical material, and of elements which could contribute to independent learning, such as by reinforcing sight-reading strategies, asking open-ended questions, or by facilitating learners' evaluation through self-reflection. Considering the rather limited extent to which reflective opportunities appear in the reviewed sight-reading publications, promoting self-reflection was a significant principle and original contribution of the devised resources (section 9.4.1). In addition, designing a gradual progression of my material was another decision supporting this direction, by creating achievable goals to create a sense of accomplishment and progress while boosting confidence and encouraging learners to keep moving forward. The rationale of my approach is explained in greater detail in Chapters 8 and 9, and the practical application of these considerations can be seen through my devised material (available in Appendix 6).

During the process of connecting literature findings on these areas and the insights gained from the review and the interviews to my own material, I also thought about the written language of my books, such as the tone and writing style in the activities and the written instructions, as well as the author's voice and how it would come across to the book user(s). I realised that a simple, approachable, friendly tone could facilitate a collaborative and supportive relationship between the author and the learner. Similarly, I became aware that my instructions would need to be clear and

detailed, without being overwhelming, and also consider learners who might be working independently (without a teacher).

Finally, some authors shared that their publications were predominantly aimed towards learners (A1, A2), while A1 has produced a separate publication addressed specifically to teachers, providing guidance on how to teach sight-reading. Considering the Greek Conservatoire context, in which no resources, nor relevant training is provided to teachers, this led me to decide to include elements in the books which would be helpful in supporting the teacher as well, such as the introduction sections of the books and the explanation of the activities and their purpose, as well as the clear instructions, the reflective questions and the overall gradual progression of the material. Further decisions, inspired both by the review process and the authors' reflections, included the decision to develop a book character companion, and to incorporate a terminology section and a certificate of award at the end of the book (detailed in Chapter 9).

### **6.6.3 Evaluation and testing of the material**

The interviewed authors also explained their processes of testing their material prior to publication. As explained in the findings (section 6.5.3), all authors undertook pilot testing, by trying their material either with their own or colleagues' pupils, or by collecting feedback from other teachers, 'specialist advisers', or personal advisors-collaborators. Through this process, the authors were able to become aware of others' impressions and feedback on their material, highlighting strengths, areas in need of further improvement or adaptations, and aspects which may/may not work practically, amongst others.

The authors' input and approaches were particularly illuminating in relation to the value of testing the material with potential users (teachers and/or learners). Recognising the importance of collecting feedback on my own material as a process informing the further development of the devised material, as well as the subsequent steps envisaged beyond this thesis (the creation of relevant sight-reading resources for further piano levels), I realised the necessity to explore ways to have my own material evaluated and tested: trying my material practically with my own, or other piano teachers' pupils would reveal potential practical challenges or the potential

need for adaptations, for example in relation to the level of difficulty or the length of pieces. In addition, seeking piano teacher's feedback on my material would provide useful insights, exploring their impressions of the deployed approach to the development of sight-reading skills, the material progression and musical content, its creative underpinnings, the written language, visual elements (layout, presentation), and the pedagogical approach towards learning, amongst others. The process of evaluating the devised material of this thesis through survey reviews by piano teachers<sup>26</sup> is detailed in Chapter 10.

Finally, further considerations arose from the authors' input relating to the commercial and publishing context, particularly in relation to potential challenges and limitations which may occur in the creative process from publishers' involvement or control over the final output. For some of the authors, the precise context leading to publication was not explicitly stated; for example, what was the starting point of some authors leading to publication? How much material had the authors devised before establishing contracts with a publisher, or how much material was envisaged at the beginning (only one book, or a series of books)? How was the contact initiated, by the author or by the publisher? Although further consideration of such aspects lies beyond the purposes of the present thesis, relevant points provide useful insights concerning potential future steps in the development of the devised material.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter focused (a) on the review of existing sight-reading publications and (b) on the second study of the present thesis, in which four international authors of sight-reading publications shared their creative experiences through interviews and reflected on their processes of developing sight-reading material. The review and the research findings provided valuable insights towards parameters underpinning the creation of such resources and informed aspects for the development of my own sight-reading material for the Greek context. In order to strengthen the insights gained from the review of the sight-reading publications and from authors' interviews, and to

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<sup>26</sup> As explained in Chapter 10, pilot testing of the material with piano learners was not possible due to Covid-19 limitations and restrictions.

inform further the process of establishing my creative principles, a comparative analysis was undertaken of the sight-reading specifications and marking criteria for sight-reading as they appear within the piano syllabi of international examination boards, presented in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 7: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SIGHT-READING IN EXAMINATION BOARDS' PIANO SYLLABI: SPECIFICATIONS AND MARKING CRITERIA**

In this chapter, a comparative examination of sight-reading parameters within piano syllabus documents of international music examination boards is presented. First, a comparative analysis is deployed, examining sight-reading as it appears within the piano syllabi of music examination boards (section 7.1). Following this, their sight-reading specifications within the first levels – up to Grade 3 – are explored section 7.2 (7.2.1-7.2.4), followed by relevant comparative observations (section 7.3); the examination boards' marking criteria for sight-reading are also appraised (section 7.4). This analysis informs aspects of the development of the present sight-reading material, focusing on the included elements per grade and marking criteria. This provides a robust justification of the principles employed for the design and creating of the two devised piano sight-reading books, which are analysed in Chapter 8.

### **7.1 Sight-reading within examination boards' piano syllabi: A comparative analysis**

In order to establish an informed set of principles as a structural basis for designing my sight-reading material, piano syllabi of well-known music examination boards on an international level have been consulted. Due to the significant impact of these examination boards on the music education community worldwide, it has been viewed as particularly useful to examine and critically appraise their parameters and requirements for sight-reading, as described within each piano syllabus, for the purposes of my material creation. The analysis is limited to the syllabi, as books of specimen tests should be expected to comply with the syllabi parameters of each board; however, relevant musical examples from the ABRSM specimen test books are presented to illustrate the specifications per Grade in sections 7.2.1-7.2.4.

The aim has been to identify key elements which could inform and support the framework for designing my sight-reading material, in conjunction with (a)

understanding gained from reviewing existing piano sight-reading publications (section 6.2) and (b) knowledge and advice gained from the contributions of renowned authors of such material (Study 2, Chapter 6). The progression of content (musical elements included per level/Grade) and criteria of achievement have been of particular focus during this process.

Classical piano syllabus documents of the following examination boards have been examined:

1. Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) – Piano syllabus 2019-2020
2. Trinity College London (TCL) – Piano syllabus 2018-2020
3. London College of Music (LCM) – Piano general syllabus 2018-2020
4. The Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM), Canada/USA – Piano syllabus 2015-2020
5. Conservatory Canada (CC) – Classical piano syllabus 2018-2020
6. Australia and New Zealand Cultural Arts (ANZCA) – Examination syllabus pianoforte 2018-2020

While examining these piano syllabi, parameters related to the first three Grades, including any preparatory levels, were approached critically to inform my own material creation, which focuses on the beginner levels. The focus on these levels is closely linked to the main aims and output of this thesis and research, namely the creation of two completed sight-reading books equivalent to the Preparatory and Grade 1 levels, and the initial design and progressive structure of two further books, equivalent to Grades 2 and 3, the development of which is aimed for as an extension of the material, upon completion of the thesis. Therefore, particular emphasis has been placed upon the specifications included in Grades from 0 (Preparatory) to Grade 3, with analytical observations from the syllabus documents per grade, specific to sight-reading. Further justification as to why these Grade levels have been set as the focus of the created sight-reading educational material is explained in Chapter 8.

The subsequent table (Table 7.1) summarises areas and specifications related to sight-reading, as addressed in the piano syllabus documents of each exam board. Following this, the comparative overview of the mentioned parameters is presented,

with further analytical observations on the areas of sight-reading specifications and marking criteria.

Table 7.1 Sight-reading parameters within the piano syllabi of examination boards

Exam Boards	Sight-reading examined			Examination details			SR specifications per Grade		Marking Criteria	
	Preparatory	Grades	Diplomas	Observation time	Practice possibility	Tasks	General/Detailed		General (marks)	Specified
<b>ABRSM</b>	No	All (1-8)	Yes (3/3) 'quick study'	'half a minute'	Yes all or any part	1	Detailed	Per level: length, musical elements	Yes	Yes – in detail (Grades 1-8/ DipABRSM & LRSM/FRSM)
<b>TCL</b>	Optional	Gr.1-5: optional Gr.6-8: compulsory	N/S	'30 seconds'	Yes all or any part	1	Detailed	Approx.2 levels lower than examined grade; musical elements mentioned per grade	Yes	Yes – in detail (same throughout levels)
<b>LCM</b>	No	All (1-8)	Yes (3/4)	'up to 1 min.'	Yes parts/ <u>not</u> all	1	General	(Syllabus redirects to handbook)	Yes	Yes – in detail (grades 1-5, grades 6-8)
<b>RCM</b>	Yes	All (1-10)	Yes (1/2)	N/S	N/S	2 'sight-rhythm' 'sight-playing'	Detailed	Per level: length, musical elements, score examples	Yes	–
<b>CC</b>	–	All (1-10)	Yes	'a brief period'	N/S	2 Rhythm, Piano passage	Detailed	Per level: length, musical elements, score examples	Yes	–
<b>ANZCA</b>	Yes (2/3)	All (1-8)	No	'a short period'	Yes 'may "ghost" (but not play)'	1	Detailed	Approx.2 grades lower than pieces; musical elements per grade	Yes	–



Several comparative observations can be made in relation to the parameters of Table 7.1 above, which indicate similarities and/or differences in the approach towards sight-reading between the examination boards. An initial observation concerns the levels in which sight-reading is offered as an examined requirement. For the preparatory levels, there seems to be a significant differentiation in the inclusion of sight-reading, with two boards examining sight-reading in their pre-grades (RCM, ANZCA), one having sight-reading testing as optional (TCL) and two boards not examining this skill in the pre-grade context (ABRSM, LCM), while CC does not include a preparatory level as a whole. Considering that preparatory grades are addressed to students at very early stages of music learning, this differentiation might be an indication of difference in philosophical perspective between the examination boards in terms of (a) the perceived starting point of the acquisition of sight-reading skills, and (b) the extent to which these skills might be viewed as testable in this early stage of musical learning.

Further differentiation in philosophical perspective seems to be reflected in the grade levels (Grades 1-8 or Grades 1-10, as applicable), where a noticeable distinction is observed in relation to TCL: in contrast to the other exam boards which include sight-reading examination in all grades, TCL provides sight-reading as an optional test from the beginning to the intermediate levels (Grades 1-5), which then becomes compulsory from Grade 6 onwards. This approach is explained by TCL, who state that: 'This flexibility is designed to allow candidates to demonstrate their musical skills in different ways, while recognising that sight reading is an important skill at higher grades' (TCL, 2017, p. 18). In diploma levels, four examination boards examine sight-reading skills (ABRSM, LCM, RCM, CC), while for the other boards it is either not stated (TCL), or not offered (ANZCA).

Piano syllabi also mention specific practical aspects of the examination process, such as the duration of observation time and the possibility of practice; most of the examined boards seem to share similar approaches. A short amount of time, usually between 30-60 seconds, is offered to candidates to observe and potentially practice parts of the entire sight-reading piece. Divergences between the described times and practice parameters are worth considering, in order to gain a more critical understanding of the different approaches. For example, how long exactly is a 'short'

(ANZCA) or 'brief' (CC) period of observation time? Why is practising of the entire piece not allowed in the LCM exam, contrary to other boards (ABRSM, TCL) and how is permission to 'ghost' instead of playing justified (ANZCA)? Since observation (RCM) or practice related information (RCM, CC) are not stated in the syllabi of some boards, how are relevant parameters established and communicated to teachers and learners?

Finally, in contrast to most examination boards which provide a single sight-reading task, the RCM and CC exams include two tasks: the first focusing on rhythm at sight through clapping or tapping (without pitch), and the second examining instrumental playing at sight. Therefore, it would be interesting to reflect interpretatively upon potential reasons which might have led to the inclusion of rhythm-specific tasks in the sight-reading examination of these boards, as well as on the potential value of such elements to the development of general sight-reading skills. For these two exam boards, the two components of the sight-reading exam (rhythm and playing) do not receive the same proportion of marks. Out of the ten marks awarded for sight-reading in total, 3 marks are for the rhythmic task, and 7 marks for the playing task for Grades 1-10 of the RCM, and for Grades 1-9 of CC. CC Grade 10 gives 2 marks for the rhythmic task and 6 marks for the playing task (8 marks in total). For the two tasks of the RCM in the two Preparatory levels (Preparatory A and B), a 50% proportion is stated, with 5 marks available for each component out of the 10 marks in total.

## **7.2 Sight-reading specifications per grade: Preparatory to Grade 3**

The piano syllabi of the examined boards each indicate sight-reading specifications to a different level of detail, with some mentioning general information and others providing more comprehensive descriptions about the sight-reading parameters for each grade. General information, provided in the documents of LCM, includes specifications primarily about the approximate level of sight-reading pieces. More informative descriptions, to various levels of detail, are evident in the piano syllabi of ABRSM, TCL, RCM, CC and ANZCA, focusing on parameters such as the length of sight-

reading pieces, potential keys and time signatures, hand position, pedalling and other musical elements per level.

The following section provides a series of tables presenting the elements mentioned for sight-reading per level, focusing from the preparatory grades, up to Grade 3, which have been extracted and combined from ABRSM, TCL, RCM, CC and ANZCA piano syllabi<sup>27</sup>. Comparative observations concerning the table contents are also presented for each Grade, to acquire a deeper understanding of potential philosophies and underpinning principles and thus, to subsequently inform aspects of the design process of my own sight-reading material.

Alongside these, musical examples<sup>28</sup> are provided below for each grade to illustrate how the specifications are reflected through the music. Due to ABRSM's position as a longstanding music examination board<sup>29</sup>, with a long history in examining sight-reading as a key musical component, the musical examples in the following sections have been drawn from books of specimen sight-reading tests published by ABRSM. In addition to the popularity of this examination board, both internationally and in Greece, at the time when this thesis is being written ABRSM appears to be the most commonly used exam board of classical music teachers in Crete, where Study 1 of the present thesis was conducted (Chapter 5). For the Preparatory grade, as sight-reading is not examined in the pre-grade levels of ABRSM, the musical examples provided at this level have been drawn from Paul Harris' *Improve your sight-reading! Getting started: Pre-Grade 1 Piano* (Harris, 2009). This publication has been selected as the source of musical examples at this level, based on Harris' longstanding connection as a collaborator with ABRSM, and his own complete series for sight-reading, which reflect the ABRSM musical elements and criteria (*Improve your sight-reading!* and *Improve your sight-reading! A piece a week*).

### **7.2.1 Sight-reading specifications: Preparatory Grades**

As mentioned in the previous section, examination of sight-reading within preparatory grades is evident in the exams of RCM and ANZCA, while it is optional for TCL. ABRSM,

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<sup>27</sup> LCM specifically is not included, as only general information is provided, as noted above.

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<sup>29</sup> According to the official ABRSM website, the first ABRSM board and syllabus were established in the 1890s (About Us> Our History, <https://fk.abrsm.org/en/about-us/our-history/>).

LCM and CC do not include sight-reading test in this context. The following table (Table 7.2) demonstrates relevant elements specified in this level.

Table 7.2 Sight-reading specifications, Preparatory Grade

Exam Board	TCL	RCM		ANZCA	
		Prep A	Prep B	Preparatory	Preliminary
Length (bars)	N/S	Rhythm: 2 bars Playing: 4 notes	Rhythm: 2 bars Playing: 'short melody'	6 notes	4 bars
Keys	Major: C	Major: C	Major: C	Major: C	Major: C
Time Signature	2/4	4/4	4/4	N/S	3/4, 4/4
Hand position	N/S	RH alone <i>and</i> LH alone 5-finger position	Hands separate 5-finger position	5-finger position Hands separate	Hands separate
Musical elements	Crotchet, Minim Semibreve rest Dynamics <i>p, f</i> <i>moderato</i> Simple phrasing	- <u>Rhythm</u> : semibreve to quaver - <u>Playing</u> : semibreve to crotchet Moving by step in one direction Repeated note Fingering for first note only	- <u>Rhythm</u> : semibreve to quaver - <u>Playing</u> : semibreve to crotchet Melody divided between hands Fingering for first note only	Crotchet	Crotchet, Minim, Semibreve

RCM and ANZCA offer two levels of preparatory grade exams, the first examining primary musical knowledge and the second adding further basic elements. For both exam boards, the first preparatory level includes a very short sight-reading task (four and six notes respectively), which is briefly expanded in the second preparatory level to form a 'short melody' (RCM) or four bars of playing (ANZCA). Although for TCL the length of the task is not stated, the music is presented in C Major, which is also the key for RCM and ANZCA preparatory sight-reading test. A common approach seems evident towards hand position (not mentioned for TCL), as learners are expected to play in a five-note position with hands sharing the melody, except for

RCM Preparatory A, in which two melodic tasks, one for each hand, are provided in addition to the sight-rhythm test.

Differences can be observed regarding time signature (2/4 for TCL, 4/4 for RCM and ANZCA), with the most noticeable differences being in relation to the musical elements involved. Simple values are examined by all three boards, with TCL including only minims and crotchets due to the exclusive use of the 2/4 time signature. Semibreves are included in both preparatory levels of RCM and the second of ANZCA (Preliminary), while quavers are also presented within the rhythmic tasks of RCM. Comparison between the first preparatory level of RCM and ANZCA suggests a significant difference of approach between the two boards. For ANZCA, the sight-reading task seems to be very basic, including one value per pulse (crotchets only), while for the same level of RCM three preliminary values are included (semibreves to crotchets), as well as quavers within the rhythm task. A very basic approach towards sight-reading in such early stages should not necessarily be viewed as a negative trait; considering the likely (young) age of learners, this might be perceived as a more achievable introduction to sight-reading tests, enhancing candidates' sense of accomplishment. However, such differences seem to suggest an explicit differentiation between exam boards in terms of the level of knowledge and practical application which are expected to be acquired within this preparatory level.

Finally, TCL mentions further musical elements within the sight-reading test of the preparatory level, including semibreve rests (TCL) to indicate a whole-bar rest, as well as markings related to tempo (*moderato*), dynamics (*p*, *f*) and simple melodic shaping and phrasing. As similar elements are not mentioned for the two other boards, it is assumed that these are not included within the specimen examination in this level.

The following musical examples illustrate the sight-reading elements which are employed at the pre-grade level. As explained in section 7.2, for this Preparatory grade, the examples have been drawn from Paul Harris' *Improve your sight-reading! Getting started: Pre-Grade 1 Piano* (Harris, 2009), as ABRSM do not examine sight-reading at this level, and therefore they do not have a corresponding book of specimen tests.

Harris' book features different types of exercises in each of the twelve 'stages' as he calls each chapter/unit, comprising: 'Rhythmic exercises', with three rhythmical examples in each 'Stage'; 'Melodic exercises', with three single-line melodies for each hand separately in the first 'Stages', and three shared single-line melodies in the final 'Stages' of the book (see example below); and 'Prepared pieces', either two single hand melodies (a separate melody for each hand), or one single-line melody divided between the two hands, with prompts and questions for the learner to prepare each piece before playing. These range from observation questions, such as 'How many beats are there in each bar?' (Harris, 2009, p. 19), questions relating to previous musical knowledge and understanding, such as 'How many beats is a [crotchet rest symbol] worth?' (Harris, 2009, p. 7), to prompts relating to specific sight-reading skills, such as 'Hear the piece in your head before you begin' (Harris, 2009, p. 19). The final exercise of each 'Stage' is the 'Going solo' activity, which initially features two single-hand melodies, and later one single line melody divided between the two hands. Unlike the 'Prepared pieces' exercise, the 'Going solo' exercise does not include prompts or questions.

Musical Example 7.1 below is from a 'Going solo' activity (Stage 7) (Harris, 2009, p. 13), while Example 7.2 is from a 'Prepared piece' exercise (Stage 10) (Harris, 2009, p. 19), each one reflecting some of the musical elements stated in Table 7.2, presented earlier for this Preparatory level. Both examples feature single-line, four-bar melodies in 4/4, using simple values from semi-breve to crotchet. In the left-hand melody of Example 7.1, crotchet rests also appear. The music is set in C major, and there are fingering indications for the starting note of each hand. A single dynamic marking (*mp*, *mf*, *p*) is used per melody, without dynamic changes within the music; the descriptive words at the top of each melody ('Flowing', 'Marching', 'Sleepily') provide performance indications, also hinting at style.



Example 7.1 (Preparatory level): Two single-line, four-bar melodies. 'Going solo' (Harris, 2009, p. 13).

'Flowing', 'Marching', Music by Paul Harris, © 2009 Faber Music Ltd. Reproduced from *Improve your sight-reading! Getting started: Pre-Grade 1 Piano* by permission of the publishers. All Rights Reserved.



Example 7.2 (Preparatory level): Single-line melody shared between hands. 'Prepared piece' (Harris, 2009, p. 19).

'Sleepily', Music by Paul Harris, © 2009 Faber Music Ltd. Reproduced from *Improve your sight-reading! Getting started: Pre-Grade 1 Piano* by permission of the publishers. All Rights Reserved.

### 7.2.2 Sight-reading specifications: Grade 1

The characteristics of sight-reading mentioned in the first Grade of piano study syllabi are summarised in Table 7.3 below, accompanied with relevant comparative observations. Asterisks (\*) indicate new components for this level across the different boards.

Table 7.3 Sight-reading specifications, Grade 1

Exam Board	ABRSM	TCL	RCM	CC	ANZCA
Length (bars)	4 or 6	N/S	Rhythm: 2 bars Playing: 4 bars	Rhythm: 4 Playing: 4	8
Keys	Major: C, G, F Minor: A, D	Major: C, G* Minor: A natural*	Major: C, G*, F* Minor: A*	Major: C, G Minor: -	Major: C, G*, F* Minor: A*

Exam Board	ABRSM	TCL	RCM	CC	ANZCA
Time Signature	4/4, 3/4*, 2/4	2/4, 4/4*	4/4	Rhythm/Playing: 2/4, 3/4	*2/4, 3/4, 4/4
Hand position	Hands separate 5-finger position	N/S	Hands separate 5-finger position	Hands separate 5-finger position	Hands separate
Musical elements	Simple dynamics Simple values Simple articulations Accidentals in minor keys	Semibreve* Minim rest* <i>mf</i> *	- <u>Rhythm</u> : semibreve to quaver* - <u>Playing</u> : semibreve to crotchet Melody divided between hands Fingering for first note of each hand only	Minim, crotchet, quaver, dotted minim Semibreve rests Simple melody divided between hands Fingering indications	Simple values: Crotchet, Minim, Semibreve Melody divided between hands *Hands come together for final simple chord

In the first Grade, exam boards seem to share common characteristics related to the included elements for sight-reading. Learners are usually expected to sight-read four-bar tasks (six bars are provided for 2/4 time signature by ABRSM), with the exception of ANZCA examinations, which include eight bars in this level. For the two boards which test rhythm separately (RCM and CC), the relevant tasks include two and four bars, respectively. Five-note hand position and playing at sight with hands separately is a shared trait of the exam boards, with the melody being divided between the hands. Throughout all Grades, no indications about hand position are evident in the content of TCL syllabus, which might lead to the assumption that hand position in sight-reading is analogous to the general playing position/s required for each level. An exception is ANZCA, which suggests that hands may come together for ‘the final chord’ (ANZCA, 2018, p. 22). This seems to be a helpful step for enhancing the primary sense of tonality during sight-reading and for preparing harmonic understanding through an initial introduction to simple chords during performance at sight, before proceeding to triads and four-note chords in subsequent levels.

Boards seem to be largely in agreement in terms of the keys in which sight-reading tasks are presented in this level. Simple keys are utilised, such as C, G and F major for the majority of boards, excluding TCL and CC which only employ C and G



major. A minor is also a key possibility for sight-reading in all exam boards, again with the exception of CC which does not include any minor keys. In addition to A minor, ABRSM sight-reading tasks might also be set in D minor. The deployment of simple keys seems to be a rational parameter of this initial level, corresponding to the scales included in the technical curricula. The exclusion of F major from TCL and CC sight-reading tasks is an interesting aspect, since the equivalent sharp key (G major) seems to be prioritised. Potential reasons for this discrimination are worth pondering upon: could this be attributed to the keys employed in the set repertoire of the main curriculum? Do the main pieces utilise only C and G major? And if so, how can the exclusion of F major from this level be justified? Such questions might also be linked to philosophical considerations and/or aesthetic parameters underpinning the different approaches of exam boards.

Similar questions could be extended to time signatures. Reasonably, simple time signatures are utilised, with 2/4 and 4/4 being the most common ones, used by all exam boards in this level, with the exception of 2/4 in RCM and 4/4 in CC. Differences of approach are observed particularly in relation to 3/4, which is not used in two of the five exam boards. How can this be explained and what is the link of this to the general musical knowledge obtained in this level?

Regarding the musical elements mentioned in this Grade, these predominantly focus on note values and rests, as well as on specifications about the melody division between the hands (RCM, CC, ANZCA). Although rests are specifically stated only for TCL and CC, Example 7.3 below evidences that rests are also utilised in ABRSM specimen tests. Elements such as articulation and dynamics are not indicated for the majority of exam boards in this level: articulations are only addressed by ABRSM and dynamics by ABRSM and TCL (*mf* in addition to *piano* and *forte* stated for the Preparatory level).

The following musical examples from the ABRSM specimen sight-reading tests (2018e) is indicative of the level and musical elements examined in Grade 1. Three examples have been selected from the 55 examples in the book as representative of the various musical elements examined at this grade, ranging from bar length, time signature, note values and rests, to articulation, dynamics and key. The examples are

presented in the order they appear within the specimen test book, as indicated by the example numbers on the left-hand side.

In line with the ABRSM Grade 1 specifications, Example 7.3 consists of four bars with a single-line melody shared between the two hands. There are fingering indications for the starting note of each hand, and it can be observed that both hands have the same note range, from D ascending to A (hand position: left hand fifth finger on D3, right hand thumb on D4). The music is set in 3/4 time signature, in the key of G major, with one F sharp note in each hand (using the third finger in both hands). Note values from minim to quaver pairs are used, including a dotted minim in the final bar, while semibreve rests are used for the 'silent' hand, while the other one is playing; therefore, the rests are used as an indication of which hand is playing, rather than with a rhythmic significance in the course of the melody. The articulation of this example includes three *legato* slurs and two *staccato* crotchets, forming a pattern of both rhythm and articulation between bars 1 and 3. The example also features dynamic markings, with the music starting *piano* and concluding *mf*, after getting gradually louder in the penultimate bar (bar 3), where a *crescendo* marking (hairpin) appears. At the top of the example, instead of a title, a descriptive common word ('Delicately') is used as a performance indication, which is a frequent approach in this Grade, with occasional exceptions (see Example 7.4).

12

Delicately

*p*

*mf*

Example 7.3 (Grade 1): 4-bar, single-line melody in G major, shared between the hands, with legato, staccato, and dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018e, p. 4).

'Delicately' (No. 12), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 1*, by permission of the publisher.

Example 7.4 below consists of six, rather than four bars, presumably due to the 2/4 time signature. As in the Example 7.3, the melody is shared between the two hands, with a three-bar *legato* phrase dedicated to each hand, and semibreve rests indicating the 'silent' hand. The finger number for the starting note of each hand is provided, and the two hands have the same note range (from D ascending to A), as

previously. The music is set in D minor this time, presumably in its natural form, as no B flats or C sharps are encountered within the used note range. The utilised values include minims, crotchets and pairs of quavers, and there are more dynamic markings and dynamic changes this time, as the music starts from *piano* dynamic, raises to *mf* in the third bar and then returns to *piano* in the final bar, through the *crescendo* and *diminuendo* hairpin symbols. Finally, this example features a tempo marking ('Andante') at the top of the music, this time using musical terminology instead of a common word to describe performance. It could be assumed that this is because this musical example appears later in the specimen test book, and therefore could suggest a gradual shift towards using terminology as the examples progress; yet, this assumption cannot be verified, as performance is later again described with a common word rather than with a musical term (see Example 7.5).

The image shows a musical score for a 6-bar piece in D minor, 2/4 time, marked 'Andante'. The score is written for a single melodic line shared between the left and right hands. The first two bars are marked *p* (piano), the third bar is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte), and the final bar is marked *p* (piano). The score includes fingerings (5) and dynamic hairpins.

Example 7.4 (Grade 1): 6-bar, single-line melody in D minor, shared between the hands, with *legato* slurs and more dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018e, p. 10).

'Andante' (No. 41), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 1*, by permission of the publisher.

The third and final example for this level (Example 7.5) reflects similar characteristics to the two previous ones, in alignment with the Grade 1 specifications of ABRSM. The length of the music is four bars, and the melody line is shared between the hands, which again play one at a time. The music is in 4/4, using C major, and finger numbers are provided for the starting note of each hand. As before, the two hands play the same note range, from C to G (hand position: left hand fifth finger on C3, right hand thumb on C4). The values used in this example are predominantly crotchets and pairs of quavers, with one minim as the final note, in the left hand. The articulation includes *legato* slurs and one accented note for the left hand in the final bar, while there are two dynamic markings, starting with *piano* for the right hand (bars 1-2) and then changing to *forte* for the left hand (bars 3-4), this time without gradual dynamic changes. The word 'Happily', provides an indication for performance this time, unlike

Example 7.4 (number 41 in the specimen test book), where the term ‘Andante’ was used.



Example 7.5 (Grade 1): 4-bar, single-line melody in C major, shared between the hands, with *legato* slurs, accent and two dynamic markings (ABRSM, 2018e, p. 10).

‘Happily’ (No. 42), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 1*, by permission of the publisher.

### 7.2.3 Sight-reading specifications: Grade 2

Specifications provided for the second Grade of piano study sight-reading tests are presented in Table 7.4 below. As previously, elements which are first introduced in this level and have not been mentioned in the Preparatory level or in Grade 1, are marked with an asterisk.

Table 7.4 Sight-reading specifications, Grade 2

Exam Board	ABRSM	TCL	RCM	CC	ANZCA
Length (bars)	4 or 6	N/S	Rhythm: 2-4 Playing: 4	Rhythm: 4 Playing: 4	8
Keys	Major: C, G, F, D* Minor: A, D, E*, G*	Major: C, G Minor: A harmonic*	Major: C, G, F Minor: A, D*	Major: C, G, F* Minor: -	Major: C, G, F Minor: A
Time Signature	4/4, 3/4, 2/4	2/4, 4/4, 3/4*	Rhythm: 3/4*, 4/4 Playing: 4/4	Rhythm: 2/4, 3/4 Playing: 3/4, 4/4	2/4, 3/4, 4/4 ♩ *
Hand position	Hands together in 5-finger position	N/S	Hands separate May move outside 5-finger position	Hands separate 5-finger position	Hands separate Hands may come together

Exam Board	ABRSM	TCL	RCM	CC	ANZCA
<b>Additional musical elements</b>	Dotted notes Tied notes	Dotted minim Tied notes	- <u>Rhythm:</u> semibreve to quaver, dotted minim quaver rest - <u>Playing:</u> semibreve to quavers Melody divided between hands	- <u>Rhythm:</u> minim, crotchet, quaver, dotted minim, dotted crotchet Rests: semibreve, minim, crotchet - <u>Playing:</u> minim, crotchet, quaver, dotted minim Rests: semibreve, minim Melody divided between hands Fingering indications	Values from semibreve to quavers

As indicated in Table 7.4 above, the length of melodic sight-reading tasks ranges from four (ABRSM, RCM, CC) to eight bars (ANZCA), with rhythmic tasks being between two to four bars in Grade 2. Simple time signatures are utilised by exam boards (2/4, 3/4, 4/4) – except RCM which excludes 2/4 – with noticeable differentiations in the syllabus of the two boards with a separate rhythmic task. For RCM and CC, discrepancies are evident between the time signatures of the two sight-reading tasks: RCM sight-rhythm examines 3/4 and 4/4, while sight-playing focuses only on 4/4 as in Grade 1; CC excludes 4/4 from the rhythmic tasks, as well as 2/4 from the melodic sight-reading task. Such discrepancies warrant further interpretation. Why are there different time signatures for the two tasks? Since it might seem reasonable to expect that the same time signatures would be used for sight-rhythm and playing at sight at the same level, does this reflect a difference in perspective towards sight-reading skills related to rhythm? And if so, would the seemingly more advanced rhythmic task of RCM and CC – in comparison to their sight-reading playing – potentially suggest a ‘rhythm comes first’ viewpoint, or could this be interpreted to imply that pitch is, to some extent, viewed as a challenging aspect of sight-reading achievement? What could be potential benefits from each approach – simultaneous development of rhythm and pitch perception, and foregrounding rhythm at sight first

– to the development not only of sight-reading, but also of general musical skills? Further consideration of this could be made in relation to the marking systems, which (as stated in section 7.1) give a proportion of 30% of the ten awarded marks to rhythm, and 70% to the playing component for Grades 1-10 (with the exception of CC Grade 10, where the sight-reading total marks are 8 – 2 for the rhythmic, and 6 for the playing task), while a 50% proportion is stated for the two components in Preparatory levels A and B of RCM (5 marks for rhythm, 5 marks for the playing task).

Similarities can be observed in terms of the approach to key in this level, with most boards' sight-reading tests set in basic major and minor keys (C, G, F major, A minor). TCL has the fewest keys in sight-reading tasks, which remain the same as Grade 1, namely C and G majors and A harmonic minor, with questions arising as to why F major has been excluded as previously, at the current level. At the other end, ABRSM seems more diverse in terms of key possibilities, with a wider range of major (C, G, F, D) and minor (A, D, E, G) tonalities, in connection to the required scales for this Grade (Grade 2 scales additionally include A major).

Hand position seems to be the area with the most noticeable differentiation among exam boards in this Grade. Playing with separate hands varies between five-finger position (CC) and beyond the five-finger position (RCM); hands may come together for ANZCA without specifications about the range of playing, while playing with both hands in five-finger position is stated for the ABRSM. In this parameter, elements of progression from the previous Grade are evident for each exam board, except for CC which maintains the same approach; ABRSM separate hands playing develops into hands together in five-finger position; RCM moves outside a five-finger position, maintaining hands separate playing, while ANZCA suggests hands playing together more frequently than just for the final chord.

Progression is evident through the inclusion of further note duration values and rests; however, musical elements such as articulation, dynamics or tempo markings are not indicated. Although ABRSM does not specifically clarify what the term 'simple values' from Grade 1 includes, boards utilise note values from semibreve to quavers, excepting TCL which incorporates quavers in Grade 3. Use of rests is also stated for the rhythmic task of RCM and both tasks of CC, while it is not clear the extent to which these are utilised in ABRSM and ANZCA sight-reading (TCL makes

mention of semibreve and minim rests in Preparatory and Grade 1, respectively). ABRSM, TCL, CC, and RCM (only for sight-rhythm) also incorporate dotted notes, while tied notes are mentioned for the first two exam boards.

Notably, element descriptions of the present Grade provide no further specifications in terms of further musical elements and relevant markings, such as dynamics, articulation, tempo, or expression indications, especially for exam boards which did not include such elements in the previous Grade. This generates questions regarding the introductory points of such elements to sight-reading, suggesting different perspectives towards the employment of such aspects during sight-reading. Taking into consideration the fact that ‘simple dynamics’ and ‘simple articulations’ were mentioned in ABRSM and TCL (*mf* indication) since Grade 1, the exam boards’ approach towards the introduction and gradual progression of such primary elements in sight-reading is an interesting aspect to observe throughout subsequent levels. Further relevant observations are presented within the following sections.

The musical examples below are indicative of the level and musical elements of this Grade and have been selected from the 55 examples of the ABRSM Grade 2 specimen sight-reading test book (ABRSM, 2018d). As before, the examples are presented in the order they appear in the book, rather than in ascending difficulty, while for all examples, the music is written for both hands to play together.

The following example (Example 7.6) in D major is written in 2/4, is six bars long, and includes minims, crotchets, and pairs of quavers, as well as crotchet rests. As in previous grades, fingering is provided for the first note of each hand, as well as a tempo marking at the top, this time using the musical term ‘Allegretto’. Articulation includes *legato* slurs and *staccato* notes, and there are some dynamic changes, with the music beginning with *forte* dynamic and finishing with *piano* sounds, after a *diminuendo* (hairpin symbol) in the fifth bar. The music here appears considerably more complex than before, particularly due to the dialogic effect the lines of the two hands have in this example, as well as due to the different articulation markings and the use of sharps in each hand.

Example 7.6 (Grade 2): 6-bar melody in D major, hands together, minims to quaver pairs, crotchet rests, *legato*, *staccato*, dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018d, p. 7).

'Allegretto' (No. 28), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 2*, by permission of the publisher.

Example 7.7 is written in D harmonic minor and includes the C sharp in the penultimate bar, which is the only black note in this example. This time, there is a clear indication linking to style at the top, 'Sad Waltz', which naturally connects later to the characteristics of the music, which is set in 3/4, and the left hand accompanies the main melody of the right hand, in a waltz-like style. Fingering is provided for the first note in each hand, yet the right-hand position may possibly feel challenging to the player, due to the repetitive alteration between the fifth and fourth fingers in the first two bars. The values used in the four bars of the music are predominantly crotchets and quavers, in pairs and single ones, and dotted notes (minims and crotchets) appear in the right-hand, as well as a crotchet rest in the left hand. Dynamic markings are soft throughout, starting with *piano* and going down to *pianissimo* at the end, after a *diminuendo* (hairpin symbol) between the two final bars.

Example 7.7 (Grade 2): 4-bar waltz in D minor, hands together, dotted minims to quavers, dotted crotchets, crotchet rest, *legato*, dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018d, p. 12).

'Sad waltz' (No. 51), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 2*, by permission of the publisher.

The final musical example for Grade 2, Example 7.8 below, is described as 'Tempo di minuetto', again linked to the relevant style, as the previous example. A shift towards the use of musical terminology is observed at this level, as musical terms appear more frequently as performance indications; however, this approach is not



exclusive, as some common words are also encountered in the examples of the specimen test book (ABRSM, 2018d), such as ‘Dancing’ (p. 3, example 7), ‘Sadly’ (p. 5, example 19) or ‘Lively’ (p. 12, example 53). Set in 3/4, this minuet-style four-bar passage is written in E harmonic minor, with black notes in both hands: D sharp for the right hand and F sharp for the left hand. The values used are minims, crotchets, and groups of quavers (in pairs or in groups of four), and a dotted minim for both hands in the final bar, while no rests appear. The dynamics in this example are loud, as they start and finish in *forte*, with a *diminuendo* and *crescendo* (hairpins) in the two middle bars, although without indicating the sound level these dynamic changes need to reach (bar 2). Notably, there are no articulation markings or indications in the music, leading to the question whether such omissions have been accidental, or intentional to allow for the player’s choice and stylistic knowledge.



Example 7.8 (Grade 2): 4-bar minuetto in E minor, hands together, dotted minims to quaver groups, dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018d, p. 12).

‘Tempo di minuetto’ (No. 55), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools.  
Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 2*, by permission of the publisher.

### 7.2.4 Sight-reading specifications: Grade 3

Exam boards’ specifications of sight-reading encountered in the third Grade of piano study are illustrated in Table 7.5 below. As before, the asterisks indicate the new elements for sight-reading in this level.

Table 7.5 Sight-reading specifications, Grade 3

Exam Board	ABRSM	TCL	RCM	CC	ANZCA
Length (bars)	Up to 8	N/S	Rhythm: 4 Playing: 4	Rhythm: 4 Playing: 4	8
Keys (all new)	Major: A, B $\flat$ , E $\flat$ Minor: B	Major: as Grades 1, 2 (C, G) Minor: D	Major: D Minor: as Grade 2 (A, D)	Major: D Minor: A, D	Major: D, B $\flat$ Minor: E, D
Time Signature	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/8*	2/4, 4/4, 3/4	Rhythm: 3/4, 4/4 Playing: 4/4	Rhythm: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4* Playing: 3/4, 4/4	2/4, 3/4, 4/4 ♩
Hand position	Hands together outside 5-finger position	N/S	Hands together	Hands separate, except in cadences	N/S
Additional musical elements	2-note chords	Quavers, crotchet rest slurs <i>mp</i> <i>Andante</i>	- <u>Rhythm</u> : semibreve to quaver, dotted minim, dotted crotchet quaver rest - <u>Playing</u> : semibreve to quavers	- <u>Rhythm</u> : minim, crotchet, quaver, dotted minim, dotted crotchet Rests: semibreve to quaver - <u>Playing</u> : minim, crotchet, quaver, dotted minim Rests: semibreve to crotchet Fingering indications	Tied notes

The average length of sight-reading pieces in this level is between four (RCM, CC) to eight bars (ABRSM, ANZCA), incorporating note values up to quavers, varied rests (semibreve, minim, crotchet) and dotted notes (TCL does not mention dotted crotchets, while ANZCA does not provide relevant clarifications). Tied notes are introduced into ANZCA sight-reading at this stage, along with two-note chords for ABRSM. Musical elements mentioned by TCL refer to aspects further to values, such as dynamics (*mp*), tempo markings (*Andante*) and phrasing (*slurs*). Similarities can be observed in terms of approach to key in this level, with most boards including major keys up to two accidentals and minor keys up to one. Exceptions are ABRSM, with majors up to three sharps or flats and minors up to two, and TCL which introduces D minor in this level, without having incorporated F major in this or any prior level.

ABRSM demonstrates a quicker pace of progression in comparison to other exam boards, particularly noticeable in the range of keys utilised for the sight-reading pieces, as well as through the introduction of 3/8 time signature. This does not seem to apply to RCM and CC, where a more moderate progression is noticeable in this level: RCM sight-playing task is limited to 4/4 time signature, while CC sight-reading pieces still employ hands playing separately 'except at cadence points' (CC, 2018d, p. 4). This relatively slower pace of progression, also evident in subsequent levels, could potentially be attributed to structural differences of the grading system of these boards, in comparison to the other exam boards, since they offer ten, rather than eight, Grade levels. The incorporation of two additional grades could potentially allow for a more gradual progression of elements between the different levels.

The following musical examples, selected from the 45 examples provided in the ABRSM sight-reading specimen test book for Grade 3, illustrate the level and musical elements included at this level (ABRSM, 2018c). The examples are presented in order of appearance in the book.

Example 7.9 below illustrates one of the most prominent additions of musical elements at this level: two-note chord and changes in hand position. Although the length of this example remains at four bars and is written in 4/4, the music here is notably more complex than before, not only due to the constant playing of the hands together, but also due to the wider variety in the musical elements involved. The music is written in E flat major, resulting in a considerable number of notes on the black keys for both hands. The right-hand part of the example includes two-note chords, values from semibreve to quavers, in pairs and single ones, as well as dotted note values (minim and crotchet). Although the left hand plays predominantly crotchets, there is a pair of tied notes at the end, as well as frequent changes in hand position. Strikingly, there are five changes of the left-hand position within these four bars, including the extension of the fifth finger to reach the final note.

As in previous grades, the fingering is provided for the starting note of each hand, and there are also helpful indications when the hand positions change. An additional indication to use the second finger for the final two right hand E flat notes might have been useful to the player, yet perhaps it is expected for the learner to make such adaptations more automatically at this stage, or to think about and make

a note of the appropriate fingering during the preparation time. Although articulation predominantly consists of *legato* slurs and just one *staccato* crotchet at the end of the left-hand part, it is also more complex, as the slurs are of different lengths, change frequently, and occur alongside the hand position changes. Dynamics start from *mf* and remain relatively moderate, with a *crescendo* and a *diminuendo* hairpin symbol. Finally, at this level, the performance indications at the top of each example use musical terminology for character and tempo indications almost exclusively, such as ‘Moderato’ in the following example, while it is observed that some less basic terms are also encountered (such as ‘grazioso’, ‘semplice’, ‘giocososo’), with few exceptions where common words are used to describe the music, such as ‘Rather sadly’ (p. 3, number 7), ‘Tenderly’ (p. 6, number 17) or ‘Flowing’ (p. 9, number 28).

**Moderato**

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Example 7.9 (Grade 3): 4-bar melody in E flat major, hands together, dotted minims to single quavers, tied notes, 2-note chords, *legato*, *staccato*, dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018c, p. 4).

‘Moderato’ (No. 8), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 3*, by permission of the publisher.

The second example for Grade 3 (Example 7.10 below) features music in 3/8, a time signature which is first encountered at this level. As expected, in addition to crotchets, triads of quavers and single quavers, the music here also includes pairs of semiquavers – another musical element first encountered in this Grade – as well as quaver rests. This 6-bar example is written in B minor and involves several changes in the position of each hand, along with a considerable number of notes using black keys according to the key signature and the leading-tone (A sharp in the right hand). As previously, fingering for each hand is provided at the start, as well as when a change in hand position occurs. Again, perhaps an additional indication of a suitable finger number would have been useful for the first note of the third bar in the right hand, and in the penultimate bar of the left hand; yet, as previously, perhaps these are elements that the exams seek to test in terms of the player’s adaptability while playing, and/or their preparation during the time allowed for observation before

playing. Articulation involves occasional *legato* slurs, while the dynamics are predominantly quiet, as the four first bars are marked as *piano*, with a *crescendo* marking (hairpin symbol) in the penultimate bar, reaching *mf* in the final bar. The performance indication of this example is ‘Scherzando’, a less basic musical term this, linked to the character of the music.

**Scherzando**

Example 7.10 (Grade 3): 6-bar melody in B minor, hands together, 3/8, crotchets to semiquaver pairs, quaver rests, *legato*, dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018c, p. 11). ‘Scherzando’ (No. 34), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 3*, by permission of the publisher.

The final example for this Grade (Example 7.11), is the longest piece yet, as this level first introduces 8-bar tests and the requirement to read a second system as well as the first. This musical example is marked as ‘Allegretto’ and is set in 2/4 time signature. Written in A major, it includes several notes on the black keys, particularly for the right hand. Descending two-note chords in thirds are used in the first four bars of the right hand, using crotchets and minims, while the rest of the right-hand and the left-hand part, consist of shorter note values: quavers and quaver rests; in the right hand there is also a pair of semiquavers in the second half of the music. Articulation is rich, with repetitive patterns of *staccato* quavers in the left hand, and a combination of *legato* and *staccato* pitches for the right hand; there are also some accented notes in the penultimate bar. Dynamics include *mf* for the first line and a *crescendo* marking (hairpin) reaching *forte* halfway through the second line. Fingering is used in a similar manner to the previous Grade 3 examples, with finger numbers for the starting note of each hand and for hand position changes. Suggesting using the thumb for the third quaver in bar 6 of the right hand may have been helpful for the player to prepare for the musical gestures in the subsequent bars.

**Allegretto**

Example 7.11 (Grade 3): 8-bar melody in A major, hands together, line change, 2-note chords, minims to semiquaver pairs, quaver rests, *legato*, *staccato*, accents, dynamic changes (ABRSM, 2018c, p. 14). 'Allegretto' (No. 44), © 2018 The Associated Board of the Royal Schools. Reproduced from *Piano specimen sight-reading tests: ABRSM Grade 3*, by permission of the publisher.

### 7.3 General observations

Careful examination of sight-reading specifications reveals different perspectives and approaches of the exam boards. There does not seem to be a common level of detail conveyed in the descriptions of each exam board, with each board providing relevant information to a different extent. Observed similarities and differentiations have been illustrated in the previous sections, with more detailed analysis of the levels from Preparatory to Grade 3, in line with the aims and the corresponding piano sight-reading material created within the present thesis. In this section some additional, more general, observations are outlined, from a broader perspective towards the relevant specifications.

Regarding aspects related to rhythm, gradual enrichment of utilised values has been observed for all exam boards, which progress from simple values in the initial levels (semibreves, minims, crotchets) to more complex rhythms (quavers, dotted values, and rests) in subsequent Grades. The gradual progression of rhythmical material is evident through the relevant specifications of all exam boards.

A distinction is observed between the rhythmic elements utilised in the two sight-reading tasks of CC, namely the rhythmic task, and the playing task. Throughout all levels of this exam board, there is a difference in note values and rests stated for

the rhythmic and the playing sight-reading tasks, with slightly more advanced elements included in the sight-rhythm in comparison to the sight-playing task. It may be speculated that this differentiation is related to approaches which are strongly related to the building of rhythm, such as those of Kodály or Dalcroze, which prioritise rhythmical achievement. The philosophy of building solid rhythmic skills as foundations for performance at sight by emphasising rhythmic elements is also in agreement with literature referring to the significance of a steady pulse and rhythmical flow during performance at sight (Zhukov, 2014a; Mishra, 2014a; Macmillan, 2010; Wristen, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; McPherson, 1994). It could be argued that this approach could contribute positively to the establishment of good rhythmical understanding prior to the inclusion of any further musical elements into sight-reading, including the addition of pitch. Performance at sight seems to be approached in a more gradual, step-by-step manner here, by focusing initially on more basic musical elements (rhythm) and then moving on to further aspects. Prioritising rhythmic understanding and rhythmical achievement during sight-reading practice, namely when practising sight-reading strategies within or beyond the music lesson (e.g. during at-home practice, or in ensemble activities), could aid performance at sight, including during a relevant examination. Inclusion of equivalent elements for both tasks in the examination might provide better insights towards the acquired sight-reading skills and a stronger basis for comparison of achievement between exclusively-rhythmic sight-reading and playing at sight including pitch, which could potentially highlight areas in which the combination of both elements – rhythm and pitch – might appear problematic or particularly challenging for learners.

For elements such as articulation and dynamics, different approaches have been noted. For most of the examined boards, such elements are not specifically mentioned for sight-reading tasks, with the exception of ABRSM and TCL, and the examples provided for the more advanced levels of CC (Grade 7: articulation; Grade 8: dynamics). Particularly for earlier levels, Preparatory to Grade 3, articulation and dynamics are only addressed by ABRSM and TCL: ABRSM Grade 1 mentions simple dynamics and articulations; similarly, TCL introduces dynamics and elements of phrasing in the initial Grades (Preparatory: *p*, *f*, simple phrasing; Grade 1: *mf*), which become more elaborate in subsequent levels (Grade 3: *mp*, slurs), while it is worth

mentioning that for TCL *staccato* is stated from Grade 4 onwards. No similar mentions are encountered in the descriptions of other exam boards up to Grade 3, and in fact up to Grade 5<sup>30</sup>.

The significance of such foundational musical elements in terms of character, style and musicality, and the frequency that these are encountered in main repertoire of any subsequent levels, might raise questions about why these have largely been omitted from the task descriptions of syllabi. This also connects to learner's possible interest in the actual music; for example, music with expressive musical features and/or performance directions presumably is inherently more interesting than that without much or any. A potential explanation of this could be that exam boards might expect teachers and candidates to utilise books of specimen tests to practically understand these parameters in practice, more than perceiving them as a list of requirements in the syllabus.

Approach to key seems to be an area with many similarities between exam boards. The progression of keys utilised in sight-reading tasks seems to be based upon increasing the number of sharps/flats, with simple major and minor keys with both sharps and flats utilised in initial Grades (C, G, F majors, and A, E, D minors), and keys with more accidentals in subsequent levels. TCL evidences a different approach to key, focusing only on natural and sharp keys from Preparatory to Grade 2, while flat keys are first introduced through the incorporation of D minor in Grade 3 – remarkably, its relative (F) major has not been utilised until this point. Although in subsequent Grades a wider variety of key possibilities are provided by TCL along similar lines to the other exam boards (for example, Grade 4: D major, E minor; Grade 5: F, B flat and E flat majors, G minor), TCL sight-reading tasks appear rather limited in key possibilities in the first Grades, as explained above. Yet, this could be viewed as rather unsurprising, even expected to some extent, given the low/early levels of these initial grades. In conclusion, despite individualised differences, exam boards appear to have a common rationale, starting logically from simpler and progressing to more complex keys, as

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<sup>30</sup> This also applies to the more advanced levels (Grades 6-8) of ANZCA and RCM; for RCM such elements might be implied through the 'comparable to level X repertoire' statements in Grades 6-8.



would be expected. This rationale has influenced my own creative process to key, as explained in Chapter 8 and illustrated through the created sight-reading material.

Finally, fingering seems a rather neglected aspect within the sight-reading specifications of exam boards. Relevant specifications are evident only in RCM and CC sight-reading syllabi, with fingering indications for the first note of the sight-reading task provided in Preparatory and Grade 1 of RCM, and appropriate fingering suggestions for CC up to Grade 3. Research by Sloboda, Clarke, Parncutt, and Raekallio (1998) has shown correlation between sight-reading accuracy and fingering strategies, with relevant decisions having implications on the effectiveness of performance at sight. Therefore, simple fingering indications might prove helpful, particularly for learners in early levels of study who might not have yet developed fingering 'expertise' to the extent that appropriate fingering selection manifests itself in a more spontaneous manner (Sloboda et al., 1998, p. 189). Potential omission of fingering indications might be justifiable in subsequent, more advanced levels in which appropriate fingering selection might be perceived as a desirable acquired skill and expected to be demonstrated in sight-reading tasks.

#### **7.4 Appraising exam boards sight-reading marking criteria**

The piano syllabi of the aforementioned exam boards suggest two different approaches towards marking criteria. Some include (a) general mark indicators and others state (b) specified marking criteria. As presented in Table 7.1 (section 7.1), all boards mention the overall (maximum) marks awarded for sight-reading tests, while specific marking criteria with detailed descriptors are provided for three out of the seven exam boards, namely ABRSM, TCL and LCM.

This differentiation of approach towards the provision of detailed marking criteria is worth reflecting upon. Along with the specifications of the musical elements of each Grade, marking criteria for sight-reading might be perceived as a useful and informative parameter for all parties involved in the learning process, not just within the examination. A set of specified criteria serving as indicative components for assessing performance at sight might be a helpful indicator of the perceived level of development of the relevant skills per instrumental level. Using these to estimate and

evaluate performance at sight beyond an examination mark or mark range, could enable both students and teachers to identify strengths and areas for future development, particularly if the specified criteria are linked to feedback and become translated into aspects of achievement and subsequent goals. Thus, sense of achievement would not be limited to being viewed only in relation to marks but would rather be perceived in terms of acquired skills, while both teachers and learners could obtain a clearer idea of what is expected to be achieved within the examination in each grade and how this links to progress.

The following table (Table 7.6) provides a summary of marking criteria as identified within the syllabi of the three examination boards which provide specific descriptions: ABRSM, LCM and TCL. Six levels of marks are identified: (a) Distinction, (b) Merit, (c) Pass, (d) Below Pass 1, (e) Below Pass 2 and (f) Below Pass 3, while the specific marking criteria included are focusing on the areas of fluency, rhythm, pitch, musicality/markings, and delivery. As indicated in the table, for ABRSM the maximum number of marks is 21, while 10 is the maximum for the TCL; for LCM the mark ranges are graded as percentages.

Table 7.6 Specified marking criteria and sight-reading descriptors in ABRSM, LCM and TCL piano syllabi

	<b>ABRSM</b> Grades 1-8	<b>LCM</b> Grades 1-5	<b>TCL</b> Grades N/S (1-8?)
<b>Distinction</b>	<b>19-21 marks</b>	<b>85-100%</b>	<b>9-10 marks</b>
Fluency	fluent playing	-appropriate tempo -consistent tempo (fluency)	-excellent/very good sense of fluency -secure control of pulse
Rhythm	rhythm accuracy	rhythm accuracy	secure control
Pitch	accurate notes/ pitch/key	pitch accuracy	-very high degree of accuracy in notes -secure control of tonality
Musicality/ Markings	musical details	-musical shaping and expression -thorough understanding of musical notation -musical substance conveyed	musical detail realised
Delivery	confident playing	confident playing	–

	<b>ABRSM</b> Grades 1-8	<b>LCM</b> Grades 1-5	<b>TCL</b> Grades N/S (1-8?)
<b>Merit</b>	<b>17-18 marks</b>	<b>75-84%</b>	<b>8 marks</b>
Fluency	-pulse usually steady -adequate tempo	-mostly fluent -workable tempo -largely consistent tempo	- good sense of fluency -occasional inconsistencies in control of pulse
Rhythm	rhythm mainly correct	mostly accurate	occasional inconsistencies in control of rhythm
Pitch	largely correct notes/ pitch/key	mostly accurate	-good degree of accuracy of notes -some slips -occasional inconsistencies in control of tonality
Musicality/Markings	–	-some signs of musicality -principal markings observed -some aspects of the musical substance conveyed	some musical detail
Delivery	largely secure playing	–	–
<b>Pass</b>	<b>14-16 marks</b>	<b>65-74%</b>	<b>6-7 marks</b>
Fluency	general continuity	-some fluency -inaccurate and/or inconsistent tempo	-generally reliable sense of fluency -some inconsistencies in the control of pulse
Rhythm	note values mostly realised	modest level of accuracy	- some inconsistencies in the control of rhythm
Pitch	pitch outlines in place, despite errors	modest level of accuracy	-reasonable degree of accuracy in notes -a number of errors some inconsistencies in the control of tonality
Musicality/Markings	–	-little reference to markings -basic sense of the musical substance conveyed	little attention to musical detail
Delivery	Cautious playing	–	–
<b>Below Pass 1</b>	<b>11-13 marks</b>	<b>55-64% (Upper)</b>	<b>4-5 marks</b>
Fluency	lack of overall continuity	-lack of fluency -inappropriate/ inconsistent tempo	-limited sense of fluency -lack of basic control of pulse
Rhythm	incorrect values	-some accuracy -substantial number of errors	lack of basic control
Pitch	approximate notes/ pitch/key	-some accuracy -substantial number of errors	-sporadic accuracy in notes -lack of basic control of tonality

	<b>ABRSM</b> Grades 1-8	<b>LCM</b> Grades 1-5	<b>TCL</b> Grades N/S (1-8?)
Musicality/ Markings	–	-limited response to markings -insufficient sense of the musical substance conveyed	no attention to musical detail
Delivery	insecure playing	–	–
<b>Below Pass 2</b>	<b>7-10 marks</b>	<b>0-54% (Lower)</b>	<b>1-3 marks</b>
Fluency	no continuity/ incomplete	-fluency not clearly present -no sense of tempo	-little/no sense of fluency -no sense of pulse
Rhythm	unrealised note values	accuracy not clearly present	rhythm not established
Pitch	absent pitch outlines	accuracy not clearly present	-very limited accuracy in notes -tonality not established
Musicality/ Markings	–	-no response to markings -musical substance not conveyed	no attention to musical detail
Delivery	very uncertain playing	–	–
<b>Below Pass 3</b>	<b>0 marks</b>		
Overall	no work offered	N/A	N/A

As illustrated in Table 7.6, a comparative appraisal of the marking criteria of the three specific exam boards indicates four shared main areas of focus: (a) fluency, (b) rhythm, (c) pitch and (d) musicality and markings. For the first area of focus, fluency, the development and demonstration of a sense of steady pulse and pulse control is evaluated within the different grade levels, linked to the level of rhythmic accuracy. Pitch is also appraised, in relevance to note accuracy, key awareness and control of tonality; however, it is not clear what ‘modest level of accuracy’ may mean, stated for the evaluation of pitch in the Pass range of LCM. Elements of musicality and musical detail are also expected and assessed during performance at sight, such as expression and musical shaping, understanding of musical notation, observation and realisation of markings.

Notably, ABRSM marking criteria mention an additional – psychological – area of evaluation, related to ‘confidence’ during delivery. High levels of confidence are sought and are, therefore, awarded higher marks, with confident playing worthy of ‘distinction’, ‘largely secure’ playing valued as ‘merit’, and ‘cautious’ delivery classified

as a 'pass'; 'insecure' or 'very uncertain' playing are graded below pass. This seems to be a less common area of evaluation, as it is not evident in the marking criteria of other exam boards. Aspects of confidence in relation to sight-reading have been examined through literature, predominantly in the context of ensemble and group playing, focusing on relevant benefits from participation in such activities (McLachlan, 2015; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Macmillan, 2010). Appreciation of confidence during playing at sight is an interesting parameter, raising music teachers' awareness and urging them to acknowledge the significance of such psychological attributes and the potential impact of these on musical performance – including performance at sight – thus emphasising the necessity to facilitate the development of confidence-related skills along with any sight-reading-specific skills. However, the inclusion of confidence into the evaluated aspects of sight-reading raises questions suggesting that evaluation of confidence might be a less robust aspect of assessment. For instance, how is confidence determined by the examiner? Is it through the candidate being ready to start before the expiration of the allotted preparation time and then playing accurately? How does confidence differ from accuracy in realising notes, rhythms, and musical elements? Is it perceived in relation to not stopping? Or is it linked with expressive gestures and with how the performer uses their body? Such unidentified aspects of confidence might make this component a potentially problematic aspect of sight-reading assessment.

## **7.5 Summary**

This chapter has examined sight-reading parameters of international examination boards. The comparative analysis has focused on two main areas: specifications of musical elements per grade, from the Preparatory Grade up to Grade 3, and marking criteria. Common approaches of exam boards and areas of differentiation have been identified and approached from an interpretative perspective. The examination has focused on the piano sight-reading syllabi, and the musical examples provided for each Grade have been extracted from ABRSM books of sight-reading specimen tests (Grades 1-3), as these should be expected to comply with the equivalent exam board criteria for each Grade. For the Preparatory Grade, musical examples from Paul Harris'

book: *Improve your sight-reading! Getting started: Pre-Grade 1 Piano* (Harris, 2009) were utilised, due to lack of a corresponding ABRSM specimen test book, as ABRSM do not examine sight-reading at this level. The appraisal of the musical elements specifications and marking criteria of exam boards within piano syllabi has sought to increase knowledge obtained from the review of sight-reading resources and from reflections of authors of such publications on their related experience, rationale, principles, and creative processes (Chapter 6). The comparative analysis has strengthened the informed framework of developing my own sight-reading material and has provided a robust justification of the creative choices and parameters underpinning the devised sight-reading books of this thesis, presented in Chapter 8.

## **CHAPTER 8: DESIGNING EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL FOR GREEK CONSERVATOIRE PIANO SIGHT-READING**

This chapter focuses on the creative process underpinning the piano sight-reading material developed for the purposes of the present thesis, namely two sight-reading books addressed to Greek Conservatoire piano learners. The design and creative principles are outlined, explaining my pedagogical approach towards key aspects of the sight-reading process which led to the specific book activities (sections 8.1 and 8.2), informed by literature in the field (Chapter 2), from the examination of international sight-reading publications (Chapter 6.2) and of exam boards' piano sight-reading specifications (Chapter 7), as well as from findings from the two studies presented in Chapters 5 and 6. This provides a robust justification of the design principles and the specifications per level. Various creative decisions are discussed (section 8.3), including my approach to incorporate content of Greek cultural relevance and the rationale promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) which influenced the music featured in the books. My approach towards evaluation of learners' achievement and reflection is also explained (section 8.4). The progression of each book is outlined through tables illustrating the specifications of each level and the musical elements included within each Unit of each book (section 8.5), while the two created resources (the books for the Preparatory Level and Level 1), are presented in Appendix 6. Musical examples indicate progression within Level 2 and Level 3, the envisaged next steps of this educational series (sections 8.5.3 and 8.5.4).

### **8.1 Establishing the creative principles**

For the purposes of this thesis, two sight-reading books have been created, addressed to Greek piano beginner learners. The books are equivalent to the ABRSM Preparatory and Grade 1 levels and are referred to as 'Preparatory Level' and 'Level 1' respectively in this thesis. The created books are provided in Appendix 6, and a detailed analysis of the devised sight-reading series is presented in Chapter 9, with complementary musical examples and extracts from the two books, indicating specific components as well as musical material in greater detail.

In order to establish an informed framework in which to create and design sight-reading material addressed primarily to piano learners within, yet not limited to, the context of Conservatoire<sup>31</sup> music education in Greece, a wide range of relevant sources have been consulted, including research in the field of sight-reading, literature dedicated to piano teaching methodology (Chapter 2), piano syllabi of international examination boards (Chapter 7), and international publications, namely sight-reading music books, promoting the development of sight-reading skills (Chapter 6.2). In addition, Greek Conservatoire piano and instrumental teachers' experiences with sight-reading and relevant perceptions have been explored (Chapter 5). Expert creators-authors of sight-reading publications have also been invited to share their knowledge and reflections on their creative experiences of their material design process (Chapter 6).

Upon careful examination of the employed sources and through in-depth reflection on my personal perspectives towards teaching and experience to date, the creative principles detailed in the subsequent sections of this Chapter (sections 8.2-8.5) were established, guiding the creative process, and resulting in the structural components presented later, in Chapter 9.

In particular, section 8.2 explains the process of determining the different types of activities included in the devised books, linking their purpose and aims to key parameters of sight-reading. The rationale behind various creative decisions is explained in section 8.3 and its subsections, such as the early level of the material, the usability of the books, the author's voice, my approach to musical styles, the EDI-promoting perspective towards the featured composers, and the inclusion of culturally relevant material. My approach to evaluating progress and estimating the level of achievement is also explained, with particular emphasis on the value of reflective practices (section 8.4). Finally, the specifications and musical elements incorporated within each level are presented and analysed through tables and musical

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<sup>31</sup> As described in Chapter 1, Greek Conservatoire education includes learners of all ages, with initial instrumental studies addressed predominantly (but not exclusively) to young learners. Students may be accepted to enrol in the first level of music studies usually at the age of 7, or even earlier. Completion of instrumental studies (in terms of years of study, progression and graduation exams) leads to the acquisition of a 'Performance Degree' and/or 'Performance Diploma', including optional advanced theory degrees (in Harmony, Renaissance Counterpoint, Baroque Fugue), all of which are recognised as professional qualifications.



examples illustrating the progression within each book and across the book levels (section 8.5).

## **8.2 Determining the book activities**

This section explains my approach towards determining the different types of activities in the devised books. These have been informed by music psychology and sight-reading pedagogy literature (Chapter 2), from the process of reviewing a wide range of older and more recent piano sight-reading publications (Chapter 6.2), and from the interviews with authors of such material (Chapter 6). For each of the developed activity types, a description is presented along with the purpose and aims of each activity, linking to sight-reading literature and relevant research findings.

Research on sight-reading processes and relevant music education literature as detailed in Chapter 2 (Literature Review) have informed the creative decisions while determining the book activities. During this process, key parameters of the sight-reading process have been considered, such as the importance of rhythmic skills, observational skills, and the positive influence of ensemble activities on the development of good sight-reading skills. These key aspects have influenced the creative process and have been utilised as structural guides for the generation of the activity types included in the devised books. During the creation of the sight-reading material, emphasis was placed upon developing the following:

- (a) rhythmic skills,
- (b) awareness of keyboard topography,
- (c) observational skills,
- (d) pitch-and-rhythm perception and practice on the piano keyboard,
- (e) ability to play written music at sight,
- (f) ensemble skills.

For each of the above types of skills, a corresponding activity was devised, resulting in the following activity types:

- (a) *Building on Rhythm,*
- (b) *Exploring the Keyboard,*
- (c) *Let's observe,*

- (d) *Melodies on the spot,*
- (e) *Performing at sight,*
- (f) *Fun for two.*

### **8.2.1 Building on rhythm**

*Building on Rhythm* is the rhythmic activity of each Unit. It develops the learner's rhythmic skills through musical examples which focus on rhythm only (excluding elements such as pitch, fingering, or dynamics).

This approach of prioritising rhythmic elements to build solid rhythmic skills as foundations for sight-reading is in alignment with literature referring to the significance of a steady pulse and rhythmical flow during performance at sight (Zhukov, 2014a; Mishra, 2014a; Macmillan, 2010; Wristen, 2005; Harris & Crozier, 2000; McPherson, 1994). Authors of international sight-reading publications also recognise the importance of rhythmic skills for effective sight-reading, according to their reflections on their creative experience, presented in Chapter 6. For the purposes of the devised sight-reading material of this thesis, the inclusion of an activity explicitly dedicated to promoting good rhythmic understanding was considered essential, in order to facilitate rhythm perception and to establish a strong sense of pulse from the outset, leading to rhythmic flow while playing at sight; this is also inextricably linked to development of rhythm perception as an overall musical skill.

### **8.2.2 Exploring the keyboard**

*Exploring the Keyboard* aims to familiarise the learner with the topography of the piano keyboard. By identifying single note keys or groups of notes on the keyboard, the learner's awareness of keyboard patterns is enhanced, as well as their ability to move around the piano keyboard with ease and accuracy. This could facilitate their ability to play with fluency and precision while sight-reading, without being disrupted by the need to look at their hands on their keyboard while playing.

The inclusion of this activity in the devised books was guided by research on the effect of visual feedback on sight-reading performance. Banton (1995) demonstrated that less skilled sight-readers depended on looking at their hands on the keyboard while playing at sight to a greater extent than more skilled sight-readers,

in order to achieve movement accuracy. When removing visual feedback from performance at sight, namely when sight-readers were unable to look at the piano keyboard while playing, more consecutive note errors were made from players who claimed to rarely practise sight-reading, than by those who practised more frequently. It could be argued that under normal sight-reading conditions checking movement precision visually cannot be eliminated; therefore, Banton supports that it is necessary to develop 'a certain amount of trust and confidence in one's own ability to move around the keyboard unguided', thus resulting in fewer disruptions of the 'intended fluency' while playing at sight (Banton, 1995, p. 14).

### **8.2.3 Let's observe!**

This is an observation activity, aiming to strengthen the learner's observational skills, which are particularly valuable during the preparation time of a sight-reading piece. The learner is asked to look closely at three seemingly identical pairs of melodies, in order to 'spot the difference' between each pair, also thinking about the resulting difference in the sound. Through practising focused and deliberate observation, this activity aims to develop and reinforce positive habits linked to the use and management of the preparation time before sight-reading.

This activity has been designed to contribute to the gradual building of observational skills, in order to aid the learners' effective observation during the preparation time before playing. Literature refers to skilled sight-readers' ability to follow a self-regulated process during their preparation for performance at sight, proposing that the initial observation of musical elements, such as temporal features in the music and the identification of meaningful patterns, and their subsequent interpretation can lead to better understanding of the music to be played, as well as to a more accurate prediction of the continuation of the observed patterns, stylistic characteristics and potential obstacles (Mishra, 2010; Waters et al., 1998; McPherson, 1994). The process of reviewing published piano sight-reading resources (Chapter 6.2) highlighted the need for a more systematic approach towards developing learners' observation skills than in many of the examined publications. Therefore, this observation activity aims to facilitate the development of the foundations of habits related to preparation time, promoting the learner's ability to identify elements useful

for sight-reading from an early stage. With the additional prompts provided in the books, such as the activity instructions, the book hero (the Bee) (detailed in Chapter 9.2.3) and the reflective questions after the activity (detailed in Chapter 9.4.1), as well as with the help of a teacher for those working with one, learners' observations and the identified differences can be discussed, interpreted, or reflected upon further, also linking to a broader musical contextualisation. The observed melodies (one from each pair) are included in the next playing-at-sight activity, *Melodies on the spot*, where the learner can apply their initial observations to their sight-reading.

#### **8.2.4 Melodies on the spot**

*Melodies on the spot* is the first activity to involve playing at sight in the devised books. The learner is provided with short melodies devised by the author, which incorporate the musical elements of each book Unit (detailed in section 9.2.5). The melodies of the observation activity also appear, enabling the learner to apply practically their previous observations.

This activity combines elements and skills practised in the previous activities, namely rhythm, keyboard topography awareness and observation, with the additional elements of pitch, gradually also including articulation and dynamics. The learner needs to apply the strategies and skills developed earlier in order to play at sight with as much accuracy and fluency as possible. Russell's (2019) research revealed that isolation of rhythm and pitch in priming conditions does not necessarily lead to better accuracy when these elements are combined, as 'rhythm processing may change based on the presence of pitch' (Russell, 2019, p. 264). Based on Russell's conclusion that 'fluency, when considered independently, mirrored pitch accuracy, not rhythm accuracy' (Russell, 2019, p. 264), Russell emphasises the importance of pitch perception, proposing that music teachers utilise activities combining both pitch and rhythm, thus enabling the simultaneous processing of these elements, to aid fluency while playing at sight.

For the creation of the music content, four-bar melodies have been constructed, forming one or two phrases per example, so that the phrase units/boundaries facilitate the function of the eye-hand span, based on research findings illustrating that the forward gaze of good sight-readers tended to extend to

the boundaries of musical phrases (Lehmann & Kopiez, 2016; Sloboda, 1977). Finger numbers are provided for the starting note of each hand to help the learner to identify the hand position of each melody. Providing fingering is also intended to lead to an ergonomically comfortable playing position; as relevant expertise is gained through learners' piano studies, it is envisaged that they would become more confident in choosing appropriate fingering in more advanced levels (Sloboda et al., 1998).

### **8.2.5 Performing at sight**

This performing activity features adaptations or simplified versions of existing music by international composers of various musical eras, as well as pieces of Greek cultural relevance which encapsulate the musical elements of each Unit; occasionally music composed by the author is also included.

A title and a performance description as well as the composer's name are provided in the pieces comprising this activity. Alongside the title, descriptive words are presented, such as 'with pride' or 'like a march', to be utilised as performance indications by the learner, as analysed later in section 9.3.5. Indications relating to style may also appear. Such references are envisaged to inform learners' playing while providing a preliminary historical context from the early levels onwards. Their consideration could also initiate further teacher-learner dialogue about composers' backgrounds, styles and musical eras, or prompt independent learners to research relevant information to enrich their knowledge.

The approach followed in this activity, namely providing indications related to composers, musical eras, styles, and performance indications has been informed from sight-reading literature highlighting the necessity for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application while sight-reading. Transfer of performers'/learners' theoretical, historical and stylistic knowledge to the sight-reading process can positively influence its effectiveness in numerous ways, such as by facilitating the recognition of patterns linked to particular styles, by leading to better fingering choices, by enhancing the ability to predict or anticipate what may come next in the music, and ultimately by informing decisions related to sight-reading performance (Mishra, 2014a; Zhukov, 2014b; Wristen, 2005; Thompson & Lehmann, 2004; Sloboda et al., 1998; Waters et al., 1997; Sloboda, 1985, 1983, 1978, 1976).

Further considerations related to style, the featured composers and the inclusion of culturally relevant material are presented in sections 8.3.4, 8.3.5 and 8.3.6.

### **8.2.6 Fun for two**

*Fun for two* is the final playing activity of each book Unit, containing piano duets in order to facilitate the deployment of learners' sight-reading skills within an ensemble context. The learner may sight-read the duets with a teacher or musical friend (who would need to be a slightly more advanced partner). The music of the duets has been adapted from international composers' works or from Greek traditional music; duets have also been composed by the author specifically for the purposes of this activity.

Literature identifies a correlation between sight-reading expertise and time spent in accompanying experiences (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, 1996). These researchers' studies focused on 'the real-life situation of piano accompanying' to measure and compare sight-reading performances of expert performers and accompanists (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, p. 182; 1996), identifying relevance between individual differences and specialisation, with piano accompanists achieving better sight-reading performances than expert solo performers (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993). In addition, 'individual differences in pianists' ability to sight-read and accompany were significantly correlated with the amount of accompanying experience and available repertoire for accompanying purposes', while 'the specialized experience and activities of accompanying were better predictors of sight-reading than accumulated piano practice' (Lehmann & Ericsson 1996, p. 22). Lehmann and Kopiez (2016) also emphasise that 'by engaging in many hours of relevant experience, for example as an accompanist [...] sight-readers develop necessary cognitive adaptations, such as efficient encoding, building of plausible expectations or clever inferring, and memory skills' (p. 546). Transferring these findings into a pedagogical context, Wristen (2005) and Zhukov (2014a, 2014b) emphasise the importance of promoting collaboration and accompanying activities in music lessons, in order to enhance sight-reading experience in this context.

The above research findings and pedagogical considerations underpin the inclusion of the duet activity here; this has also been observed in some publications which include duets or accompaniment style pieces (*More piano sight-reading (book*

1), *How to BLITZ! sight reading: Book 2*) and was viewed as useful by some authors (Chapter 6). The aim has been to offer consistent opportunities for collaborative sight-reading experiences to users of the books, ideally within an enjoyable and motivating context. Considering limitations of time within the piano lesson and/or potential challenges in setting up collaborative and accompanying activities between learners of different instruments, depending on the educational and/or the institutional setting, it is envisaged that this activity will enable learners also to experience sight-reading within a real-life context of collaborative music making. In the duets of the two designed books, there are occasions where the learner is playing the melody, as well as occasions where they are assigned the accompaniment, aiming to set the foundations of the pianist's role as an accompanist from an early level.

### **8.2.7 Further elements**

Alongside these specific skills related to the sight-reading process, further elements have been designed and incorporated in the devised material in order to promote the development of reflective practice skills and to facilitate independent learning, as explained subsequently in section 8.4. They provide opportunities for the learner to reflect and think critically about their playing and progress, through the *Let's reflect!* boxes of reflective questions after each activity, and the *Congratulations!* page at the end of each Unit (analysed in more depth in section 9.4).

There are specific instructions for the book user(s) for each activity type provided in the Introduction of the two books, in the *Getting to know the book activities* section, as explained in more detail in section 9.2.3. An ample number of musical examples is included in the activities for the learner/teacher to utilise as flexibly as needed. It was considered preferable by the book author to provide a generous quantity of examples to cover a wide range of combinations of musical elements, enabling the book user(s) to utilise them according to individual needs. The rationale for this approach as well as a more in-depth explanation of each activity type is detailed in Chapter 9 (section 9.3).

## **8.3 Creating the material**

This section presents principles and decisions made in advance as well as during the creative process of the devised pedagogical material. The following subsections explain the rationale for building the material starting from the beginner levels (section 8.3.1) and justify various creative intentions which were applied to aspects of the books, such as the usability of the designed material (section 8.3.2), the author's voice (section 8.3.3), and the employed approach towards musical styles (section 8.3.4). The selection of the featured composers is also discussed from a perspective promoting EDI (section 8.3.5), as well as the inclusion of culturally relevant material (section 8.3.6).

### **8.3.1 Starting from early levels**

The devised sight-reading material focuses on the beginner levels of piano studies, equivalent to completely beginner to ABRSM Initial Grade<sup>32</sup> (pre-grade 1 assessment) and Grade 1; it is envisaged that this educational series will expand to further levels, as a potential future development of the present thesis.

For the purposes of this material, it was decided to build the presented books starting from the early levels, considering the findings of existing research on sight-reading and relevant pedagogy alongside the research projects conducted within this thesis: research on instrumental teachers' perspectives towards sight-reading teaching and their relevant experience as teachers and learners (Chapter 5), and the insights gained from the review of resources and from the interviews with authors of international sight-reading publications on their creative processes (Chapter 6). Critical appraisal of the Greek Conservatoire operational regulations prior to 1957 until today (Chapter 1) was also undertaken, as well as critical and comparative examination of sight-reading specifications within international exam boards piano syllabi (Chapter 7) to inform my creative process.

As explained in Chapter 1, the examination of the Greek Conservatoire operating regulations has highlighted an apparent lack of a systematic teaching approach to the development of sight-reading skills. The differences of approach and

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<sup>32</sup> <https://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/piano-exams/new-initial-grade/>



the various discriminations identified between instruments, particularly in relation to the level of study in which sight-reading is mentioned for individual instruments, also support this deficiency. Being acutely aware of this lack of a robust, systematic approach, I have endeavoured that the focus of the proposed material on the earlier grades (from pre-grade levels up to level 3), will demonstrate ways in which sight-reading skills can be developed along with the other related music skills which are built from the early stages of music learning, the importance of which is shown by literature (Chapter 2). This can also contribute to establishing positive habits and attitudes related to sight-reading from early on by both learners and teachers, and to teachers becoming empowered to apply similar steps or approaches to subsequent, higher grades.

The proposed approach has also been informed by the syllabi of international music exam boards and the comparative observations concerning their sight-reading specifications, as analysed in detail in Chapter 7. Despite differences in their approach and individual philosophies, the inclusion of sight-reading exams from Grade 1 and the Pre-Grade levels demonstrates exam boards' recognition of the importance of an early development of sight-reading skills. This is also encountered in the work and experiences of the authors of sight-reading publications interviewed for this thesis (Chapter 6), as their resources start from the very first piano levels; this further supports the creation of the present material and my aspiration for this to be a thorough and methodical resource for the Greek context.

The participant instrumental teachers in Study 1 shared the conviction that starting to facilitate the development of sight-reading skills within the first years of instrumental learning could lead to a natural integration of these skills within the learners' overall musical development and progress (Chapter 5.5.4). Literature indeed also supports that an early start can facilitate the optimal development of sight-reading skills (Kopiez & Lee, 2008), as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

### **8.3.2 The usability of the material**

In relation to the usability of the devised material, I designed the books to be appropriate for both learners working with a teacher, and learners who are working independently, such as adult learners. Although the layout of the books was created

without the help of a professional graphic designer, I sought for the visual appearance of the material to be appealing to and inclusive of different age groups. It could be argued that there are certain visual elements, such as the appearance of the bee character (explained later in this section), which may make the material appealing to young learners; nevertheless, such traits are not exclusive of users of a broader age range. In addition, the step-by-step progression and structure of the material starting from a single note and moving gradually to more complex musical elements (presented in section 8.5), does not exclude the possibility that the devised material could be used as a method book as well, depending on the educational context. The primary intention was to provide a resource specifically for the development of sight-reading skills. Nevertheless, for beginner piano learners the material enables newly acquired musical knowledge to be immediately put into practice within the sight-reading framework; additionally, sight-reading skills are developed alongside the other fundamental musical skills promoted through the activities.

### **8.3.3 The author's voice and the Bee character**

The author's voice was an important parameter to consider during the process of creating the material. An overarching goal was to create a friendly and supportive voice of the author coming through the pages of the book, to create a sense of an author-learner collaboration with the book users. Starting from the introductory book sections with the welcoming notes to the learner and to the teacher, but also through the activity instructions – and despite translation challenges relating to the use of non-native language (English) – the utilised language and writing tone is friendly and approachable, while any complex terms (such as 'keyboard topography')<sup>33</sup> are explained in a simple manner to facilitate the learner's understanding. In addition, the creation of a character book companion was decided, to draw further connections between the learner and the author's voice. The character of a singing Bee was created to act as a musical helper and companion, providing prompts, tips, strategies and asking questions to promote the learner's critical thinking. Through the Bee,

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<sup>33</sup> In the introduction section 'Getting to know the book activities' of the two created books, the term 'keyboard topography' is explained in a simplified manner as 'this simply means getting to know the piano keyboard as well as possible'.

further positive and encouraging language is used, in a manner which seeks to promote the learners' sense of achievement as well as learning independence from the early levels. Chapter 9 provides greater detail in relation to the author's voice (section 9.2.1), as well as the roles of the Bee character (section 9.2.3) illustrated through specific examples and extracts from the books.

### **8.3.4 Musical Styles**

For the purposes of the devised material, it was important for the author to include pieces and musical styles which would find relevance within the addressed educational and cultural context, namely primarily – yet not limited to – Greek music education settings. Having consulted the piano syllabi of various graded music performance exam boards, particularly of the ABRSM, I endeavoured to include various styles and genres within the devised beginner books, including different composers and musical eras.

Considering the requirements and basic knowledge/skills which are generally expected to be developed within the beginner levels, common musical styles have been incorporated into the sight-reading material, such as marches, minuets, waltzes, études, lullabies, and preludes, amongst others. Terminology<sup>34</sup> related to style is used sparingly in the Preparatory level book, to avoid increasing the complexity of the musical content; however, style references are slightly more frequent in the second book (Level 1). When the style is stated, it appears in the title of the piece.

For all music pieces in the *Performing at sight* and the *Fun for two* activities, a title is included, along with a subtitle, to inform the learner's playing at sight. Titles state the name of a piece and may link to form, for example in Pleyel's B. 817 'Menuet' (book Level 1, Unit 4), or may be more descriptive, such as 'Song of the lemons' (Greek folk song of East Thrace, Preparatory level book, Unit 5), inviting the learner to create an impression of the music through their playing. This has also been applied to the pieces and duets which have been composed by the author specifically for the purposes of the devised material, where imaginative titles have been provided, such as 'An impatient giant' (Preparatory book, Unit 3), or 'Melancholy waltz' (Level 1 book,

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<sup>34</sup> At the end of each book, there is also a section dedicated to 'terminology', containing short, yet concise, descriptions of the musical terms encountered in the book Units (analysed in section 9.6.2).

Unit 7). Following the piece title, a subtitle is included, containing descriptive phrases which provide indications about the character of the music. Informed by the ABRSM approach in their piano sight-reading books, the descriptive performance indications are simply phrased, such as ‘cheerfully’, ‘like an echo’, or ‘with mischief’, to prompt the player’s imagination about how the music should sound, so that they can subsequently show its character through their playing.

### **8.3.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

During the process of compiling the musical material to be included within the book activities (*Performing at sight* and *Fun for two*), an essential creative principle was to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in relation to the featured composers. Therefore, alongside composers whose appearance has been established in standard (beginner) piano repertoire, such as J. S. Bach, Czerny, Schubert, or Kabalevsky, music from composers of colour, women composers, and composers whose works may not be widely known in the Greek context has been utilised. The primary intention of this EDI-promoting approach was to enrich the pool of repertoire with which the beginner learners using the books will engage, potentially also acting as a starting point for further exploration (by the teacher and by the learner) of music from composers whose works may not be encountered in piano method books as frequently as others.

In recent years, research has discussed the topic of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in music education, with implications for numerous aspects of the teaching process relating to the inclusion and representation of the diverse student backgrounds and identities, the role of gender in inclusivity (of students, teachers, and composers), as well as policies shaping music education internationally, including representation of diverse repertoire beyond the traditional standards in the music classroom (Bernard & Talbot, 2023; Abbazio et al., 2022; Griffiths, 2020; Lam, 2018). In addition, in the book ‘Music education for social change’, Hess discusses representation in music participation in and beyond the classroom as a political aspect of music education, with considerations relating to the music curriculum and relevant stereotypes (Hess, 2019).

Focusing on repertoire, Lam’s research article ‘Female representation of women in the traditional music classroom’ (2018) highlights the impact of this lack of

representation on pupils' learning experiences. Recognising a 'a recent shift toward a more inclusive view of music history' (p. 18), Lam draws attention to the classical music curriculum as largely dominated by specific figures of prominent composers, highlighting the necessity for a more holistic representation of works by less often encountered composers; in particular, female composers, to which the teacher's role is key to facilitating the inclusion of relevant repertoire (Lam, 2018).

Lam's findings and suggestions regarding gender relate to Griffith's (2020) research on gender and race in classical music education. In Griffiths' article 'Playing the white man's tune: inclusion in elite classical music education' (2020) the author provides survey findings investigating gender and race representation of musicians within three difference contexts: in ten English orchestras; in a one-week playlist of two classical music radio stations; and in the performed repertoire of the four most current at the time London Promenade Concert seasons. The findings identified good representation of female and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) musicians in orchestras but were illuminating in relation to representation of gender and race in relation to repertoire, stating that '99% of performed pieces were by white composers and 98% by male composers' (Griffiths, 2020, p. 55). Griffiths suggests that change in the white male supremacy canon is also needed, not only in relation to music by living composers (Griffiths, 2020, p. 68).

Increasing dialogue in relation to EDI has also influenced repertoire selections in music examination boards such as ABRSM. In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, ABRSM published a 'Diversity and Inclusion Statement' (June 2020), articulating that they 'have a responsibility to challenge any practices that allow prejudice to persist, and to embed sustainable change' (ABRSM, 2020)<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, ABRSM have since then published further updates on the progress made on the 'Diversity and Inclusion Plan', explaining developments in relation to the syllabi of various instruments, such as musical theatre, piano, woodwinds, and brass, with the most current update released in September 2022. Each update reported statistical information about inclusive steps undertaken, for example comparing the number of

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<sup>35</sup> 'Diversity and Inclusion Statement' (June 2020), accessed online via the ABRSM website: <https://gb.abrsm.org/en/policies/diversity-statement/>

pieces by female and BBIPOC<sup>36</sup> composers between the updated and previous syllabi. Collaborations with living composers through commissions are also reported, as well as the incorporation of traditional tunes from various countries (China, Ghana, Jamaica, etc.)<sup>37</sup>, along with the intention to continue transforming and enriching the range of their repertoire<sup>38</sup>. Inclusion of traditional musical elements is also of relevance to the present thesis, as explained in section 8.3.6.

The above parameters of EDI were key in my approach when making decisions about the music to be included within the devised sight-reading material. During the exploration process of potential repertoire for the purposes of the devised books, online music database searches were undertaken, such as ‘Donne: Women in music’<sup>39</sup>, ‘Hildegard’<sup>40</sup>, ‘Institute for composer diversity’<sup>41</sup>, ‘EDIMS: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Study’<sup>42</sup>, and ‘Music by black composers’<sup>43</sup>. Indeed, as Bernard and Talbot (2023) suggest, these websites were particularly helpful as starting points to identify ‘repertoire by underrepresented composers’, particularly by women composers and composers of colour (Bernard & Talbot, 2023, p. 27). The next steps of this search were exploring individual composers’ repertoire and examining the inclusion potential of particular works, either in their original version, or as arrangements. This approach towards repertoire is also envisaged to act as starting point for discussion between the learner and the teacher, as well as to prompt colleagues to think further about repertoire choices and aspects of inclusion, encouraging a broadening of the music within the classroom, potentially beyond the existing piano syllabus in the Greek Conservatoire context, which has not been revised/updated since 1957.

### **8.3.6 Cultural relevance**

As explained in the previous sections, the devised sight-reading material includes music from various composers, eras, and musical styles. Alongside compositions of

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<sup>36</sup> Black, Brown and Indigenous People of Colour (BBIPOC)

<sup>37</sup> ABRSM Diversity and Inclusion Plan: [Progress Update 4 – February 2022](#)

<sup>38</sup> ABRSM Diversity and Inclusion Plan: [Progress Update 5 – September 2022](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Donne: Women in music](#)

<sup>40</sup> [Hildegard](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Institute for composer diversity](#)

<sup>42</sup> [EDIMS: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Study](#)

<sup>43</sup> [Music by black composers](#)

the Western-classical genre and pieces written by the author specifically for the purposes of these books, music relevant to the specific educational and cultural context (namely piano teaching in Greece) has been incorporated, to enrich the variety of musical styles and to promote cultural relevance. This includes elements encountered in the musical experiences of Greek learners since childhood, which are in close relation to their cultural tradition, such as the use of folk modes and rhythmic patterns, as well as children's songs and traditional tunes.

Research exploring cultural relevance in music education (Doyle, 2014; Abril, 2009; Campbell, 2002) has highlighted the need for culturally responsive teaching drawing meaningful connections between music education content and the continuously developing multi-cultural and diverse identity of modern society. According to Abril (2009), 'culturally responsive teaching is a concept that has brought awareness of the need for teachers to be sensitive and responsive to the cultures of their students' (p. 77). Culturally responsive teaching should therefore result in a 'culturally responsive curriculum' (Abril, 2009, p. 87). This would require teachers to be prepared to incorporate more diverse repertoire into their lessons, inclusive of genres beyond the Western-classical (Doyle, 2014). Most recently, relevant adaptations of examination board syllabi, such as ABRSM, suggest that the necessity for more diverse repertoire is being recognised with developments also being made in relation to the inclusion of traditional tunes from various regions within the updated syllabi (section 8.3.5).

This is also applicable to the context of the present thesis; considering that the Western-classical genre prevails in the Greek piano curriculum, it could be argued that there is often little room to explore culturally relevant material in the piano lesson. Therefore, there is scope for engagement beyond Western classical music to be made, representing further facets of the Greek – as well as any<sup>44</sup>– cultural setting. Similarly, sight-reading publication authors' reflections suggested that this also applies to sight-reading material internationally, which appears to be focusing primarily on Western

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<sup>44</sup> The cultural elements featured in the devised sight-reading material focus on the Greek musical heritage; addressing elements of other cultural backgrounds present within the Greek society, even though inarguably interesting, opens a new, wide field for research and discussion which lies beyond the purposes of the present thesis.

classical musical content (Chapter 6, section 6.5.2.4); some questions were also raised in relation to the extent that international sight-reading publications may find relevance (as sole resources) to music learners in Greece, especially beginners (section 5.5.2). Recognising the value of elements linked to cultural musical heritage and the possibility that there might be rather limited opportunity, if at all, to facilitate these through the teaching of standard piano repertoire, the inclusion of culture-specific elements in sight-reading, as proposed in the devised material, provides a potentially useful opportunity for such engagement. Such elements may also be of interest to potential users from other cultural backgrounds, to enrich their knowledge and familiarity with cultural elements of other countries, traditions, or regions.

#### **8.4 Evaluating achievement, and reflection**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the operational regulations of Greek Conservatoires do not refer to sight-reading examinations at the beginner or intermediate stages of music learning of any instrument. Although sight-reading assessment is stated in the final advanced levels of piano studies, there is a notable absence of a set of evaluation criteria, or of any further exam-related specifications. Therefore, for the purposes of the present thesis and the proposed sight-reading material, it was sought to provide a context linked to evaluation of progress, which would facilitate focus on achievement, particularly through learners' own self-evaluation and critical reflection on their playing and on the development of their sight-reading skills.

Drawing from literature emphasising the importance of reflection within the learning process in promoting independent learning and in actively raising learners' awareness of strengths and weaknesses and thus enabling them to identify ways for improvement (Benjamins et al., 2022; Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020; Carey et al., 2017; Ryan & Ryan, 2013; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983), conscious effort has been made to promote self-reflection throughout the devised books at various points:

- (a) Through the 'Table of reflective questions on achievement' in the introduction (presented in Chapter 9): these questions act as the achievement criteria within the books and are advised to be used by the learner as guidelines to evaluate aspects of their performance and progress.



As these criteria are not linked to a specific marking system, the term 'achievement' has been selected in order to facilitate a positive sense of achievement, linking learners' performance to accomplishment, rather than to a mark.

- (b) Through the 'Let's reflect!' question boxes at the end of each activity: a series of reflective questions invites the learner to reflect on their playing, thinking about strengths, challenges they met, progress which has been made, or potential future aims/goals for further improvement.
- (c) Through the 'Congratulations!' page at the end of each book Unit and at the end of each book: the learner is invited to reflect on their experience and progress collectively this time, either throughout the course of a Unit, or throughout the whole book. These opportunities are particularly useful for acknowledging broader aspects on which progress has been made, for highlighting elements that the learner found enjoyable, and for setting future goals.

Considerations have been made not only in relation to the content, but also to the language of the questions. The first person ('I' or 'we') is used to create an impression of self-evaluation, with the learner asking the question to themselves. The inclusion of both open and close-ended questions enables the learner to think critically about aspects of their playing, and the questions may function as starting points for further discussion. An additional purpose alongside the reflective intentions of the above elements was to link self-evaluation to the sense of accomplishment and to make the reflective process a positive experience leading to progress. Therefore, in addition to helping learners articulate challenges, the questions are also designed to promote their understanding of psychological aspects that may link to positive emotions and motivation in instrumental learning, such as enjoyment and feelings of reward. Finally, a broader aim of this approach has been to foster the development of reflective practices into habits which would be transferrable and applicable to other parts of the music lesson, as well as integrated into the learner's independent approach while practising at home.

Chapter 9 provides further detail in relation to the achievement criteria and the reflective opportunities within the devised material (sections 9.2.4 and 9.4).

## **8.5 Material progression: Level specifications and elements per Unit**

This section outlines the specific parameters and musical elements guiding the design process of the piano sight-reading material of the present thesis, namely the two sight-reading books equivalent to Preparatory level and Grade 1 found in Appendix 6. The comparative analysis of sight-reading parameters within piano syllabi of exam boards (Chapter 7), has informed the process of structuring sight-reading elements in each level of this material, leading to the choices specified in the subsequent sections.

For each level, the sight-reading material is designed progressively, with a gradual introduction of new elements into the activities according to the principles and specifications of each level presented in the relevant tables. Each level has been divided into eight 'Units', throughout which the demands of the music are increased progressively. As explained in the book introductions, the proposed Units may be explored in various ways, either one Unit per lesson if time permits, or in a more flexible manner by distributing the musical material across two or more lessons/sight-reading sessions, depending on the learner's needs or the overall pace of the lesson. In the latter case, it is advisable to combine elements from the different activities (a to f) within each session to form a more well-rounded engagement with sight-reading.

In the series of tables in the following subsections, the specifications for each level are presented, alongside the descriptions of the musical elements included within each Unit of each level. For the Preparatory level and Level 1, in addition to the two completed books, musical examples are presented in Chapter 9 where the two devised books are discussed in more depth. Considering future developments for the outcome of this thesis and its implications as a resource, guide, and practical tool for piano teachers in my home country, it is my primary aspiration to expand this educational material into a wider sight-reading book series, gradually covering further levels of piano studies. Therefore, specifications for two further levels have also been drawn (Levels 2 and 3), equivalent to ABRSM Grades 2 and 3, as a first step towards this future endeavour. Musical examples providing indications for the progression of

the envisaged material are presented alongside the specification tables for these additional levels (sections 8.5.3 and 8.5.4).

### 8.5.1 Preparatory level

The following table (Table 8.1) illustrates the musical specifications employed within the material and the activities of the devised book for the Preparatory level.

Table 8.1 Preparatory level specifications

PREPARATORY LEVEL SPECIFICATIONS		
<b>Length of pieces</b>	Melodies & Pieces: 4 bars / Duets: 4-8 bars	
<b>Time Signatures</b>	2/4, 4/4, 3/4	
<b>Key Possibilities</b>	White keys only	
<b>Hand Position</b>	5-finger position, each hand separate, hands sharing the melody, single note at a time in each hand	
<b>Musical Elements</b>	<i>Values</i>	Semibreve, minim, crotchet
	<i>Rests</i>	Semibreve, minim, crotchet
	<i>Articulation</i>	None
	<i>Dynamics</i>	<i>f, p, mf</i>
	<i>Style</i>	Descriptive words, Titles
	<i>Fingering</i>	Indicated for 1 <sup>st</sup> note of each hand
	<i>Other elements</i>	Repeated notes, steps, simple leaps

The above musical specifications are gradually introduced along the course of the eight Units of the book, as illustrated in Table 8.2. This table also appears in the Introduction of the Preparatory book, to provide an outline of the progression of the musical elements per Unit (presented in Chapter 9.2.5, Figure 9.12). The asterisk (\*) indicates the new elements which are introduced in each Unit.

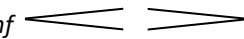
Table 8.2 Musical elements per Unit: Preparatory level

PREPARATORY LEVEL – Musical elements per Unit	
UNIT 1	2/4, Single note (C) for each hand, minim, crotchet
UNIT 2	4/4*, 2/4, two notes per hand (C+ D/B)*, <i>mf</i> *, semibreve*, minim, crotchet (in pairs of repeated notes), bars with same-value notes
UNIT 3	4/4, semibreve, minim, crotchet (different* and repeated notes), various* values per bar, <i>f</i> *
UNIT 4	3/4*, three notes per hand (E/A)*, <i>p</i> *
UNIT 5	2/4, 3/4, 4/4, four notes per hand (F/G)*, crotchet rest*, <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i>
UNIT 6	2/4, 3/4, 4/4, five notes per hand (G/F)*, semibreve rest*, crotchet rest, <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i>
UNIT 7	2/4, 3/4, 4/4, five notes per hand, minim rest*, crotchet rest, semibreve rest, <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i>
UNIT 8	Recapitulation, elements from all units

## 8.5.2 Level 1

The musical specifications of the Level 1 book are presented in Table 8.3, followed by the musical elements contained in each Unit at this level (Table 8.4).

Table 8.3 Level 1 specifications

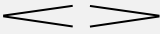
LEVEL 1 SPECIFICATIONS		
<b>Length of pieces</b>	Melodies & Pieces: 4 bars Duets: 4-8 bars (two exceptions: one 10-bar and one 16-bar duet)	
<b>Time Signatures</b>	2/4, 3/4, 4/4 or <b>C</b>	
<b>Key Possibilities</b>	Major: C, F, G Minor: A, D, E (natural) <sup>45</sup>	
<b>Hand Position</b>	Various 5-finger positions, hands sharing the melody, single note at a time in each hand	
<b>Musical Elements</b>	<i>Values</i>	Semibreve, minim, crotchet, quaver pairs, dotted minim
	<i>Rests</i>	Semibreve, minim, crotchet, dotted minim rest
	<i>Articulation</i>	<i>Staccato</i> , <i>legato</i> , accents
	<i>Dynamics</i>	<i>f</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mf</i> 

<sup>45</sup> Harmonic minor accidentals may be used by the teacher in the duets (*secondo* part), for an enriched harmonic environment.

LEVEL 1 SPECIFICATIONS	
<i>Style</i>	Descriptive words, Titles, Waltz, Minuet, March, Lullaby, folk elements
<i>Fingering</i>	Indicated for 1 <sup>st</sup> note of each hand
<i>Other elements</i>	Tied notes Repeated notes, steps, leaps

As previously, the table of musical elements per Unit appears in the Introduction of the Level 1 book. These are indicated in Table 8.4, which follows:

Table 8.4 Musical elements per Unit: Level 1


LEVEL 1 – Musical elements per Unit	
<b>UNIT 1</b>	New elements: <i>C</i> , <i>legato</i> 4/4, thumbs sharing middle <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i> , semibreve rest, crotchet rest
<b>UNIT 2</b>	New hand position: RH thumb on <i>C</i> <sub>5</sub> , LH 5 <sup>th</sup> finger on <i>C</i> <sub>3</sub> , 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i> , rests: semibreve to crotchet, 
<b>UNIT 3</b>	New elements: <i>staccato</i> , dotted minim and rest Same hand position as in Unit 2 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i> , rests: semibreve to crotchet
<b>UNIT 4</b>	New elements: quavers (pairs), accents Various hand positions in <i>C</i> major Rests: semibreve to crotchet, and dotted minim. 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i>
<b>UNIT 5</b>	New element: <i>G</i> major New hand position: various <i>G</i> major hand positions Combination of previous elements
<b>UNIT 6</b>	New element: <i>F</i> major New hand position: various <i>F</i> major hand positions Combination of previous elements
<b>UNIT 7</b>	Natural minors ( <i>A</i> , <i>D</i> , <i>E</i> ), tied notes Various hand positions Combination of previous elements
<b>UNIT 8</b>	Recapitulation, elements from all units

### 8.5.3 Level 2

The following tables include the musical specifications for the envisaged Level 2 sight-reading book, and the corresponding musical elements per Unit within it.


Table 8.5 Level 2 specifications

LEVEL 2 SPECIFICATIONS	
<b>Length of pieces</b>	Melodies & Pieces: 4-8 bars / Duets: 4-12 bars

LEVEL 2 SPECIFICATIONS		
<b>Time Signatures</b>		2/4, 3/4, 4/4 or C, 5/4
<b>Key Possibilities</b>		Major: C, F, G, D Minor: A, D, E Modes
<b>Hand Position</b>		Hands playing together (simply), 5-finger position (possibility of 2 <sup>nd</sup> finger over thumb), single note at a time in each hand (no chords in either hand)
<b>Musical Elements</b>	<i>Values</i>	Semibreve, minim, crotchet, quavers, dotted minim, dotted crotchet
	<i>Rests</i>	Semibreve, minim, crotchet, quaver, dotted minim rest
	<i>Articulation</i>	<i>Staccato, legato, accents, tenuto</i>
	<i>Dynamics</i>	<i>pp, ff, f, p, mf,</i> 
	<i>Style</i>	Various, descriptive words, folk elements
	<i>Fingering</i>	Indicated for 1 <sup>st</sup> note, 2 <sup>nd</sup> finger over thumb
	<i>Tempo markings</i>	<i>Moderato, Andante, Allegro, rit.</i>
	<i>Other elements</i>	Tied notes, simple syncopation, repeat signs, arpeggio passages, notes up to 1 ledger line

Musical examples are presented after Table 8.6, to provide some indication for the progression of the music in this level.

Table 8.6 Musical elements per Unit: Level 2

LEVEL 2 – Musical elements per Unit	
<b>UNIT 1</b>	New element: hands playing together (simply) Hand positions of C, F, G majors Values and rests as in Level 1; <i>mf, f, p,</i> 
<b>UNIT 2</b>	New element: more movement, articulation, accents Hand positions of C, G, F majors; A, D, E minors; related modes Values and rests as in Level 1, including tied notes
<b>UNIT 3</b>	New element: dotted crotchet; <i>tenuto, ff, pp</i> Various positions in C, G, F majors; A, D, E minors; related modes
<b>UNIT 4</b>	New element: D major; 2 <sup>nd</sup> finger over thumb New hand position: RH thumb on D <sub>4</sub> or D <sub>5</sub> , LH 5 <sup>th</sup> finger on D <sub>3</sub> and A <sub>3</sub> Combination of articulation and dynamics
<b>UNIT 5</b>	New element: 5/4 Any position of the key possibilities of this level, including modes. Variety of musical elements
<b>UNIT 6</b>	New element: Syncopation (simple) in 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, 5/4 Any position of the key possibilities of this level, including modes Variety of musical elements
<b>UNIT 7</b>	New element: repeat signs Any position of the key possibilities of this level, including modes More detailed combinations of musical elements
<b>UNIT 8</b>	Recapitulation, elements from all units

Considering the future expansion of the present books into a wider sight-reading series, the following musical examples have been designed to indicate the envisaged progression at this Level, according to the Level 2 specifications. The following musical examples would be part of the *Performing at sight* activity, featuring music composed by the author<sup>46</sup>, or culturally relevant material, such as Greek folk songs, which have been arranged for the purposes of the corresponding book Units.

- Example 1 (Level 2): UNIT 4

*A walk in the park*  
Allegro EP

Figure 8.1. Level 2, Performing at sight: UNIT 4

Figure 8.1 provides an example of a piece for the *Performing at sight* activity, employing the musical elements of Unit 4 at this level. The music in this example is eight bars long, written in 4/4 and featuring the new key presented for the first time in Unit 4, D major, and relevant hand positions. Note values range from semibreves (in the left hand) to quavers (single, pairs and one group of four), including dotted crotchets in the right-hand. Articulation contains *staccato* notes, *legato* slurs, and one accented note for the right hand in the final bar, with some dynamic changes (hairpin symbols) from *piano* to *forte*. Finger numbers are provided for the starting note of each hand, as well as for the second finger in the right hand when it crosses over the thumb to play the C#. The title, along with a tempo marking (*Allegro*), are stated at the top.

<sup>46</sup> The 'EP' indication on the right-hand side of the title line represents the author's name initials.

- Example 2 (Level 2): UNIT 6

The following example (Figure 8.2) is a shorter piece of four bars in Unit 6, where syncopations are the featured musical elements. The title is provided at the start, along with the tempo marking *Moderato*. The music is written in E minor, using the key signature note (F#) in both hands, and the leading tone (D#) once in the right-hand using the second finger over the thumb, as indicated through the finger numbers; the finger number for the starting note of each hand is provided as well. Note values range from semibreve (final note of the right hand) to pairs of quavers (one in each hand). The left hand has a rhythmic pattern of crotchet notes on the strong beats interchanging with crotchet rests on the weak beats, except for the final bar. Articulation is simple, containing *legato* slurs; simple dynamic markings appear (*mf* and *piano*), with a single *diminuendo* (hairpin symbol) in the third bar.

*An old thought*  
**Moderato** EP

Figure 8.2. Level 2, *Performing at sight*: UNIT 6

- Example 3 (Level 2): UNIT 7

Figure 8.3 demonstrates a musical example from Unit 7 of this level. The new element here is the repeat sign, which appears at the end of this six-bar arrangement of a traditional Cretan song<sup>47</sup>, as suggested in the title and accompanying information at the top of the piece. The performance indication ‘With pride’ specifies the character of the music. The music is written in A natural minor (Aeolian mode), with both hands starting from A; finger numbers are stated for the starting note in each hand, as well as for the crossing of the second finger over the thumb in the first bar (right hand). Values from semibreve to quavers appear (single quavers and one quaver pair for the

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that due to non-Western principles, some traditional tunes do not structure musical phrases according to consistent 4-bar phrases; such ‘irregularities’ occur for example from structural characteristics of the lyrics of some tunes.



left hand in the final bar), including dotted crotchets and one dotted minim (right-hand, bar 2). There is also a syncopated rhythm in bar 4. Articulation includes *legato* slurs, accented notes and *tenuto* symbols in both hands, as well as dynamic changes (*crescendo* and *diminuendo* hairpin symbols) ranging between *mf* and *fortissimo*.

**Let's drink and feast, my Lords!**  
**With pride** **Traditional song of Crete**

Figure 8.3. Level 2, *Performing at sight*: UNIT 7

### 8.5.4 Level 3

Similarly to Level 2, the following tables (Tables 8.7 and 8.8) indicate the specifications and the musical elements required for the envisaged Level 3 of the sight-reading material.

Table 8.7 Level 3 specifications

LEVEL 3 SPECIFICATIONS		
<b>Length of pieces</b>	Melodies & Pieces: 8 bars / Duets: 8-12 bars	
<b>Time Signatures</b>	2/4, 3/4, 4/4 or C, 5/4, 3/8, 6/8	
<b>Key Possibilities</b>	Major: C, G, D, F, B flat* Minor: A, E, B, D, G Modes	
<b>Hand Position</b>	Moving beyond 5-finger position; changing position; hands together	
<b>Musical Elements</b>	<i>Additional Values</i>	Semiquavers (groups of 4 and 2)
	<i>Rests</i>	(as previously) Semibreve to quaver, dotted minim rest
	<i>Articulation</i>	<i>Staccato</i> , <i>legato</i> , accents, tenuto, more combinations
	<i>Dynamics</i>	<i>mp</i> , <i>cresc.</i> , <i>dim.</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>ff</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mf</i> ,

LEVEL 3 SPECIFICATIONS	
<i>Style</i>	Various, descriptive words, folk elements
<i>Fingering</i>	Indicated for 1 <sup>st</sup> note and fingering changes
<i>Tempo markings</i>	<i>Moderato, Andante, Allegro, rit., Vivace, Larghetto</i>
<i>Other elements</i>	2-part chords (in either hand), fermatas, octave sign, anacrusis, repeat signs, arpeggio passages, chromatic notes

Table 8.8 Musical elements per Unit: Level 3

LEVEL 3 – Musical elements per Unit	
<b>UNIT 1</b>	New element: changing hand position (scale patterns/fingering) in C, F, G, D majors and A, D, E minors/modes Combination of note values, rests, and dynamics; simple articulation
<b>UNIT 2</b>	New element: two-part chords, changing hand position (moving hand according to indicated fingering); octave sign Articulation variation, dynamic changes
<b>UNIT 3</b>	New element: semiquavers (groups of 4); B minor; <i>mp</i> Any hand position of utilised keys. Varied articulation and dynamics
<b>UNIT 4</b>	New elements: B flat major, anacrusis, 3/8, <i>cresc.</i> , <i>dim.</i> Semiquavers in groups of 2
<b>UNIT 5</b>	New element: semiquavers in groups of 4, <i>rit.</i> Any time signature up to 3/8, varied articulation and dynamics
<b>UNIT 6</b>	New element: 6/8 Any of the utilised keys and modes; varied articulation and dynamics
<b>UNIT 7</b>	New element: G minor Any time signature, more detailed musical elements
<b>UNIT 8</b>	Recapitulation, elements from all units

As previously, musical examples are presented to indicate the progression and the application of the specifications of Level 3 through the musical material. The subsequent examples would be part of the *Performing at sight* activity, featuring music composed by the author, or culturally relevant material, such as Greek folk songs, which have been arranged for the purposes of the corresponding book Units.

- Example 1 (Level 3): UNIT 2

The following extract (Figure 8.4) represents some of the musical elements outlined for Unit 2 of this level. The music features key elements introduced in this Unit, such as two-note chords, changes in hand position, and the octave sign. The piece is written

in A harmonic minor, with the leading tone (G#) appearing in the left-hand part of the fourth bar.

*A sad dialogue*  
Andante EP

Figure 8.4. Level 3, *Performing at sight*: UNIT 2

This eight-bar piece is divided in two four-bar phrases. As suggested from the title, the music features a dialogue between the two hands, which have alternating roles between melody and accompaniment in each line/phrase. The subtitle indicates the tempo marking *Andante* to also enable the learner to perform the required elements, particularly the hand position changes, without haste. Finger numbers are provided for the starting notes, as well as for every change in hand position, in addition to the octave change in the right hand. Note values from semibreve to quavers are included, with single quavers and quavers in pairs and in groups of four, as well as crotchet rests. Articulation includes *legato* slurs, two *staccato* notes on the left hand (bar 7) and one accented note in the right hand (bar 4); there are similarities in the dynamic changes of the two phrases, with the music starting from *piano* and gradually getting louder towards the end of each line, except for the final dynamic: the music in the first line rises up to a *forte* dynamic, while in the second line it reaches *mf*.

- Example 2 (Level 3): UNIT 4

This example (Figure 8.5) was written according to the specifications of Unit 4 of this level, in particular featuring the 3/8 time signature, anacrusis, (pairs of) semi-quavers

and the dynamic markings *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. The descriptive title and subtitle inform the learner about the character of the music.

*A song in the forest*  
Carefreely EP

Figure 8.5. Level 3, *Performing at sight*: UNIT 4

This piece is written in B flat major using 3/8 time signature. The music begins with anacrusis, following rhythmic patterns in each hand. Note values from dotted crotchet to semiquavers (one pair) are used, as well as a single whole-bar rest. Articulation is more detailed at this stage, containing *legato* slurs, *staccato* notes, and combination of the two, as well as *tenutos* (bars 3-4) and an accented note (bar 7). Dynamic changes are indicated with the terms *crescendo* and *diminuendo* instead of the hairpin symbols, ranging from *piano* to *mf*. As previously, finger numbers are stated for the opening notes in each hand, as well as for any change in hand position.

- Example 3 (Level 3): UNIT 6

The following example (Figure 8.6) is an arrangement of the Greek folk dance *Zonaradikos* (meaning ‘the dance of the belts’), which is a lively dance originating from the region of Thrace. The original rhythms of this song are in 6/8, which is the new time signature introduced in this Unit. The subtitle *Vivace* indicates the character of the music to be performed.

**Zonaradikos (the dance of the belts)**  
Vivace

**Folk dance of Thrace**

The musical score is written in 6/8 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has four measures. The right hand (treble clef) plays chords, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The left hand (bass clef) plays a melodic line. A crescendo (*cresc.*) marking is placed between the second and third measures. Fingerings are indicated with a '5' above the first measure of the right hand and a '5' below the first measure of the left hand. The second system also has four measures. The right hand plays a melodic line, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The left hand plays chords. A crescendo (*cresc.*) marking is placed between the second and third measures. A fingering of '1' is shown above the first measure of the right hand.

Figure 8.6. Level 3, *Performing at sight*: UNIT 6

Different groupings of note values encountered typically in 6/8 music are utilised in this arrangement, ranging from dotted crotchets to quavers (single and in groups of three); no rests are included. The music contains two distinct phrases, with the roles of the melody and the accompaniment changing hands between the two lines. The main melody is marked as *legato* and has more movement than the accompaniment, which comprises two-note chords, featuring *tenuto* articulation and two accented notes at the end of the phrase, to match the final accented notes of the melody line. There is a clear imitation between the hands in the two phrases, where the dynamics are also similar, starting with *piano* and rising to *forte* through the *crescendo* markings. Finger numbers are provided for the starting note of each hand as well as for the hand position change in the right hand in bar 5.

## 8.6 Summary

This Chapter explains and justifies the creative principles underpinning the devised piano sight-reading material, the two sight-reading books (Preparatory level and Level 1) available in Appendix 6. The employed pedagogical approach was based on key parameters of the sight-reading process which informed the design of the different

types of activities. Aspects such as the approach of starting from an early level, the usability potential of the devised material and the reflection of the author's voice through the books, are also discussed. Considerations relating to the rationale of promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) by including in the material music from under-represented composers, is also explained and discussed in relation to literature, as well as the inclusion of culturally relevant musical content. The specifications of each book level and the musical elements of each Unit illustrate the progression of the material. Musical examples provide indications for the requirements envisaged for the future developments of this sight-reading series (Levels 2 and 3). A detailed analysis of the devised sight-reading resources is presented in Chapter 9, followed by piano teachers' appraisals of the first two books in the series (Chapter 10).

## CHAPTER 9: THE DEVISED SIGHT-READING BOOK SERIES

In this chapter, the two devised sight-reading books for beginner-level piano learners are introduced. The different structural parts of the two completed books are presented and analysed, demonstrating how the creative principles described in Chapter 8, have been realised in the devised material. Each of the introductory parts is explained, along with the purpose and function of the book character (the Bee), and the achievement criteria. The different types of book activities are explained in detail, and result from the creative principles established in Chapter 8. Further structural parts of the books are explained, such as the reflective sections across the books, and the progression towards and within the final Unit (Unit 8) of each book is analysed. The rationale for the inclusion of the conclusive parts of the books is also explained, namely the *Certificate of Award*, the *Terminology* glossary, and the *List of featured composers*. Musical examples and book extracts are provided to illustrate more clearly the explanations and justification of the various structural parts of the devised sight-reading books.

### 9.1 An outline of the different book sections

For the purposes of this research and thesis, two books have been created aiming for the development of sight-reading skills of beginner-level piano learners. These books, entitled *My first steps in the world of sight-reading: Preparatory Level, for piano beginners* and *My first steps in the world of sight-reading: Level 1, for beginner pianists* respectively, are the first two parts of what is envisaged to develop into a wider book series for piano sight-reading, currently visualised as equivalent from the Preparatory level to Grade 3. As explained in Chapter 1, the creation of these books may be pivotal and beneficial, justified by the lack of relevant teaching material in the Greek market for music education and of a systematic approach to sight-reading within the operational regulations of Greek Conservatoires (Chapter 1), leading to limitations, deficiencies, and inconsistencies within and between music institutions, as well as across piano teachers of the same Conservatoire.

The first section of this Chapter provides an outline of the different parts of the books, which have been informed by and embody the creative principles described

in Chapter 8. Each part is then presented and analysed in greater detail within each of the subsequent sections. The different book parts can be grouped as follows:

A) The Introductory parts, in order of appearance within the books:

1. *A welcome note*, for the learner who is using the book,
2. *Getting to know the book activities*, with information about the different types of activities and the introduction of the book character (the 'Bee'),
3. *The achievement criteria*, containing a table of reflective questions to evaluate achievement,
4. *A note to the teacher*, a welcome to the colleague using this book, along with a brief introduction and with an acknowledgement for a flexible use of the material as needs arise,
5. *The musical elements per Unit*, a comprehensive table showing the progression of the musical elements across the different Units of the book.

B) The Units with the book activities:

1. Units 1-7, comprising indications for hand position and the new elements of each Unit, the different types of activities (see section 9.3) and reflective opportunities after each activity and at the end of each Unit,
2. Unit 8, a revision Unit at the end of the book, reviewing the development of sight-reading skills and progress overall.

C) The Conclusive parts as they appear at the end of the books:

1. The *Certificate of Award*, for the completion of the book,
2. The *Terminology* section, a glossary-type alphabetical list featuring the musical terms encountered in the book, with a brief explanation for each,
3. A *List of featured composers*, with the names, life/death year dates and country of origin of the composers whose music has appeared in the books, and the Units where each composer's music is encountered.

## 9.2 The introductory sections

Each book begins with the five introductory parts presented in section 9.1, namely (a) a welcome note to the learner, (b) an introduction to the activities, (c) the



achievement criteria, (d) a note to the teacher, and (e) a table of the musical elements as they are structured across the different book Units. The purpose of these introductory sections is to share useful information while creating a positive, encouraging atmosphere facilitating sense of achievement from the very beginning.

First, introductory notes are presented for the learner and for the teacher: *A welcome note to the learner* and *A note to the teacher*. These notes introduce the pupil and the teacher to the material, highlighting the contextual application and value of sight-reading skills to the development of general pianistic skills, while explaining the focus and purpose of the material. In the *Getting to know the activities* section, the content and purpose of each activity is explained, along with helpful guidance and hints to the learner and the teacher about how to embark upon each section and how to 'use' it effectively, yet flexibly. *The achievement criteria* provide some guidance, through reflective questions, for the book users to evaluate and appraise performance and the progress achieved, while the introduction closes with the table of *The musical elements per Unit* which, as the name suggests, indicates the various musical elements utilised in the activities of each Unit. The following sub-sections present each part in greater detail, including their purpose and function within the books.

### **9.2.1 A Welcome note to the learner**

The books begin with a welcome note to the learner. In the note, the book author is 'speaking' directly to the learner, welcoming them to the world of sight-reading. After providing examples of various occasions where sight-reading is useful in 'our musical experiences' and for practice, the author points out that sight-reading skills can be developed early on and reinforces that the book serves this purpose. The note closes with a statement/wish for the learner to enjoy the journey, and the author's signature (name), for a more personal and direct closure. A prompt at the bottom of the page leads the reader to next pages containing information about the book activities and the achievement criteria. *A Welcome note to the learner*, from the Preparatory Level book, is illustrated in the following figure (Figure 9.1):

## A WELCOME NOTE

Dear learner,

*Welcome to the world of sight-reading!*

As you might already know, sight-reading is a skill that we use very often in our musical experiences. When playing a new piece for the first time, from your solo repertoire, or with someone else, or in an ensemble, you will find that you often need to play the music in front of you on the spot, as well as you can – that's when you are sight-reading! Good sight-reading skills are also useful when learning a new piece: they can speed up the first steps of your practice, as they enable you to play the music in front of you as accurately as you can since your very first approach. Think about it – isn't this cool?

**You can become an effective sight-reader** by gradually building this musical skill! There are various strategies to help you develop your sight-reading from your very first piano lessons, or when working on your own. That's what this book is for – I think you'll find it useful.

So, if you are a beginner in your first stages of piano learning, this book is for you.

*Let the journey begin – I hope you enjoy it!*

Elena

Please read the following pages for useful information about how to use the different types of activities in this book and the achievement criteria.

Figure 9.1. A Welcome note to the learner (Preparatory book)

Including a note to the learner and to the teacher was important for the devised books of this series. Specifically for *A Welcome note* to the learner, the primary aim was to create a connection between the author and the central user of the book, the learner, by personally welcoming them (the learner) to the book and to the sight-reading world, during their first steps. In the note, the author's voice is analogous to the language used within the rest of the book: relatively simple, direct, collaborative ('we', 'our') and like a conversation. As explained in Chapter 8, section 8.3.3, it was important to write in an approachable manner, to create the impression of an author-collaborator, rather than that of a detached authority. A friendly and positive tone has been employed, encouraging the learner, and fostering a sense of

possibility and achievement from early on ('You can become an effective sight-reader').

Although the level of the books (Preparatory & Level 1) and the context to which they are addressed is likely to involve younger learners who are working with a piano teacher, it was intended for the language, the sentence content and for the overall tone of the book to be inclusive of a wide age-range of learners, such as learners who have begun learning music beyond their childhood years (e.g. in early adolescence), as well as without excluding piano learners of different contexts, such as adult learners who are working independently, without a teacher. The phrase 'from your very first piano lessons, or when working on your own' is representative of this approach. The same text has been used for the *Welcome note* to the learner in both devised books, with the only alteration being in the sentence quoted in the previous sentence from the Preparatory Level book. In Level 1 book, the equivalent sentence is phrased as 'There are various strategies to help you develop your sight-reading early on in your piano studies, or when working on your own', substituting 'from your very first piano lessons' (Preparatory Level) with 'early on in your piano studies' (Level 1), as the Level 1 book can be used by learners who may be beyond their first lessons or first year of lessons of learning the piano, or who may want a slightly more advanced start to playing at sight, particularly if working independently.

### **9.2.2 A note to the teacher**

Similarly to the *Welcome note* to the learner, *A note to the teacher* is provided within the first pages of each book, to establish a connection between the author and the teachers using the book as a resource for sight-reading. This note is written in a communicative manner, yet this time with a slightly more formal language than the note for the learner as a sign of respect to colleagues. The note to the teacher explains the level of the material, and points out benefits of developed sight-reading skills, emphasising the importance of an early start for the continuous development of these skills throughout the subsequent years of piano studies. The note closes with a wish for an enjoyable experience, and the author's full signature, for a personal closure, yet more formal than the one to the learner. The following figure (Figure 9.2) illustrates *A note to the teacher* from the Preparatory Level book):

### ***A NOTE TO THE TEACHER***

Dear colleague,

Thank you for considering this book as a resource for teaching sight-reading.

This book (Preparatory level) is part of the series '*My first steps in the world of sight-reading*'. The material is designed for beginner learners in the first year of piano study, with the intention to nurture and facilitate the development of sight-reading skills from the earliest stages of music learning.

With an early start, learners can enjoy the benefits of effective sight-reading skills in their general music studies in later years, from practising new repertoire, to participating in ensembles, chamber music and accompanying activities. The strategies developed in the early stages of learning are envisaged to continue being practised throughout their studies to improve these skills further, thus also leading learners more naturally to being successful with sight-reading exams at any level.

Acknowledging the various elements and potential challenges to be considered in each lesson, please feel free to use this book as flexibly as needed. The musical material of each Unit may be distributed across two or more lessons, depending on learners' individual needs and the overall pacing of each lesson. I encourage you to combine elements from the different activities in each session, to form a well-rounded sight-reading engagement.

My very best wishes for a creative and enjoyable journey in the world of sight-reading,

Eleni Perisynaki

Figure 9.2. *A note to the teacher* (Preparatory book)

Alongside the paragraph emphasising the importance of an early development of sight-reading skills due to the immediate benefits they offer to practice and ensemble playing, as well as for establishing foundations for a long-term development of sight-reading skills in later years, also linking to relevant examinations, the final acknowledgement may be particularly useful in relation to practical aspects of using the books. While creating the books, it was considered essential to recognise and promote a flexible use of the book, according to learners' needs, lesson pacing, specific lesson aims, general musical goals, challenges, and limitations. Therefore, there is flexibility and freedom on how the book is used, how many of the activities are included in each sight-reading session, and how frequently sight-reading is practised. Finally, the teacher is advised to aim to combine elements from the

different types of activities, in order to approach parameters involved in sight-reading more holistically in each relevant (sight-reading) practice session.

### 9.2.3 Getting to know the book activities and the Bee character

The Units of the two books comprise six different types of activities, each of which is targeted to the development of specific skills related to sight-reading. The justification for the inclusion of these types of activities and their purpose has been explained in Chapter 8 (section 8.2), linked to the associated creative principles of the devised book series, as informed by literature and the research projects of the present thesis. More analytical information and details about each activity are presented in section 9.3.

At the start of each book, an introduction to each activity is provided for the book user(s), through the section *Getting to know the book activities*. This section, which appears after the *Welcome note* to the learner, introduces the main character of the book, the Bee, along with explanations and instructions concerning each type of activity. The explanations provided in this section share information about how each activity is linked to sight-reading, their purpose, and how the learner and the teacher, if applicable, can utilise them. Care has been taken that the explanations are informative, simple in language and useful, while being concise and presented in a manner which will feel approachable to the learner. The following extracts from the Level 1 book (Figures 9.3 and 9.4) demonstrate how the activities *Building on Rhythm*, *Exploring the Keyboard*, and *Let's observe!* are explained within this section.

★ '*Building on Rhythm*'

Rhythm is key to any music playing, including sight-reading. These activities aim to help you develop your rhythmic skills and *sense of pulse*. This means that you will need to *feel the beat steadily* while playing the different rhythms. The rhythmic elements of this activity are found in any music piece, so this also benefits your general piano skills. You will notice that there is no pitch to the notes here; this is so that you can focus your full attention on rhythm. You can play the passages however you prefer! You may want to clap or tap the rhythm, to press one key with one finger, to sing rhythmic syllables, or in any other way. Feel free to experiment!

Figure 9.3. *Building on Rhythm* explanation (*Getting to know the book activities*, Level 1)

★ 'Exploring the Keyboard'

As the name suggests, these activities invite you to *explore* your instrument. The goal is to familiarise yourself with the *keyboard topography* of the piano – this simply means getting to know the piano keyboard as well as possible. This way, finding the right keys for the notes on the score will be straightforward when playing at sight, even without needing to look at your hands!

★ 'Let's observe!'

This activity strengthens your *observation skills*. You will observe pairs of short melodies to spot the difference between them, either in pitch, rhythm or other elements, such as dynamics or articulation. You can also find similarities and discover rhythmic or melodic patterns. Try to spend around half a minute looking at each pair, but **it's more helpful not to rush!** *Careful observation can lead to more effective sight-reading, so aim to observe the music meaningfully, rather than quickly.*

Figure 9.4. *Exploring the Keyboard & Let's observe!* explanation (*Getting to know the book activities*, Level 1)

At the start of the *Getting to know the book activities* section the main character of the books, the Bee, is also introduced. As explained in section 8.3.3, it was decided to include a book character, employing a role similar to that of a hero, or more specifically, that of a musical helper, friend, or companion, to provide prompts, tips and reminders or strategies to the learner, amongst others. Figure 9.5 below illustrates the introduction of the Bee:

**GETTING TO KNOW THE BOOK ACTIVITIES**

Before we start, let's get to know the hero of this book, Bee, and the book activities. Bee loves music and will be your musical friend throughout this book. In every activity, Bee will be asking questions or giving you tips and sight-reading strategies to help you build your sight-reading skills.



Hello! Welcome to the world of sight-reading!

I am Bee, I love music and I'm so glad to be your musical companion!  
We will see each other very often in this book. When we meet, I will ask questions to help you think about your playing. I may also give some useful tips and reminders, to help you develop your sight-reading skills further.  
I'm looking forward to our musical journey together! Enjoy!

Figure 9.5. The introduction of the Bee character (*Preparatory book*, Level 1 book)

The book character was created with the intention to provide a friendly voice, a helpful companion to promote critical thinking, independent learning, and reflective practice before, during and after the activities. The specific visual representation of the bee character was selected as a neutral, positive figure, appropriate for learners

of any age, without being restrictive to age groups by being limited to an audience of young learners, for instance. A group of notes has been included alongside the bee icon, instead of letters or symbols suggesting a buzzing sound, for a musical reference.

The singing bee can appear in various places within the activities, and speaks in a floating, borderless, bubble, to add a less formal, yet more direct and perhaps more engaging and appealing way of communication between the author and the learner. The following figures with extracts from various parts of the two books, illustrate the different roles of the Bee, which are: (a) to provide tips and share sight-reading strategies; (b) to give useful reminders, (c) to ask questions, for the learner to recall previous knowledge, to reflect on their learning or to promote critical thinking; (d) to provide encouragement; (e) to share information about different composers, styles, or pieces.

a) Providing tips and sharing sight-reading strategies:

In the following figure (Figure 9.6), collated from examples through the two books, Bee is giving useful advice to the learner, while also sharing sight-reading strategies. Whether urging the learner to fully count the beats of the longer notes, while reinforcing the need for a steady pulse, or sharing tips about imagining the music through the title, handling mistakes, or finding patterns, these prompts link to strategies which are key while playing at sight.



Try to count the beats of longer notes *patiently*, without rushing. Keeping a steady beat is key in sight-reading.



**Useful tip 1:** The title and notes on the score can help you *imagine* what the piece should sound like.  
**Useful tip 2:** In case of a mistake, the key is to *keep the pulse going, focusing on what comes next!*



This time also look for *patterns*. These are similarities or repeated elements in the rhythm or in the pitch of a melody. It is helpful to find any patterns beforehand, as you'll sight-read more effectively when you know what to expect!

Figure 9.6. Bee providing tips and strategies

b) Giving useful reminders:

As illustrated in Figure 9.7 below, Bee also gives useful reminders to the learner, to help them establish useful sight-reading practices, and to reinforce strategies which have been previously introduced and practised. Here, Bee is prompting the learner to remember to notice the time signature, to ensure that they count correctly as they play, and to choose an appropriate speed to feel comfortable while playing, ensuring that they play with flow.

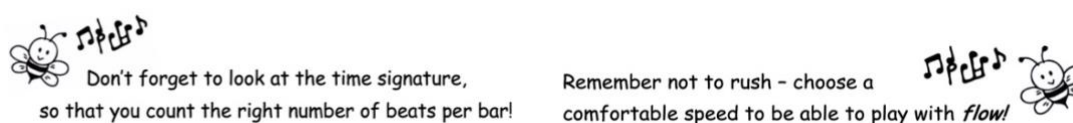


Figure 9.7. Bee giving reminders

c) Asking questions:

A key role for Bee is to ask different types of questions, for the learner to recall previous knowledge, to reflect on their playing or to think critically about the music or their performance. Figure 9.8 below demonstrates the Bee asking such questions. On the left, Bee asks the learner to recall previous knowledge, namely the beats of the crotchet and of a minim. On the right, the two bees encourage the learner to think critically about aspects of the music and their technique, after recalling the meaning of the dynamics *forte* and *mf* (top Bee), or after thinking about the character of a 'march' (bottom Bee).

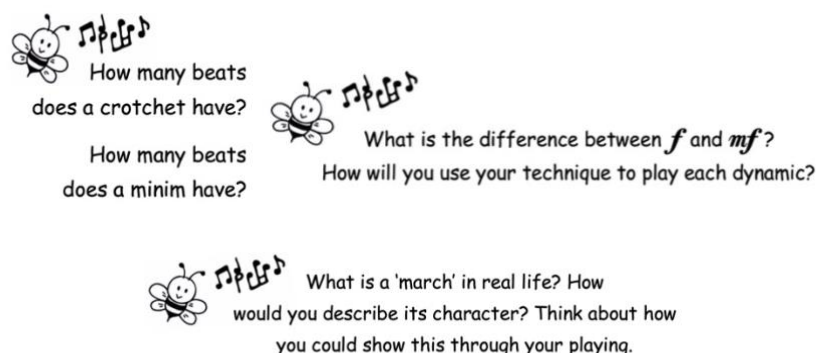


Figure 9.8. Bee asking questions to recall previous knowledge and to think critically



Figure 9.9 is an example where the bee promotes reflective practices through the questions; in this instance, for one of the duet pieces. Initially, the questions concern reflection *after* performance at sight, but also *during* performance, if the duet is played again. Finally, the phrase ‘Talk about it with your partner’ encourages the players to open a reflective dialogue about the music and the balance between the two parts of the duet.

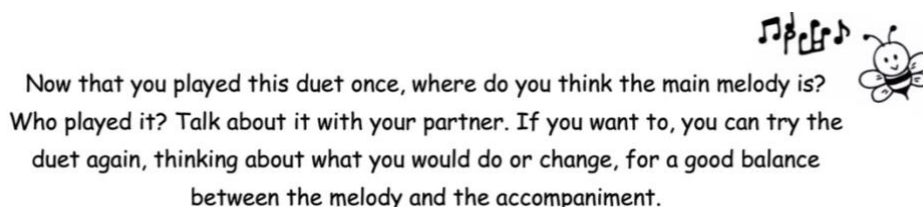


Figure 9.9. Bee's questions promoting reflection

d) Providing encouragement:

As a musical friend, Bee also encourages the learner, particularly in cases of more challenging or more difficult tasks and musical examples. In the following figure (Figure 9.10) the bee on the left is encouraging the learner to continue looking for the difference between the two music passages, after reassuring them that it is normal to sometimes need more time to spot the difference, while communicating in a manner which can help to boost their confidence in achieving the task ('I'm sure you'll find them!'). Similarly, the words of the bee on the right ('This means that your observation skills are getting stronger') provide encouragement, as well as reassurance that progress is being made through the systematic sight-reading practice and the activities, while strengthening the learner's confidence.

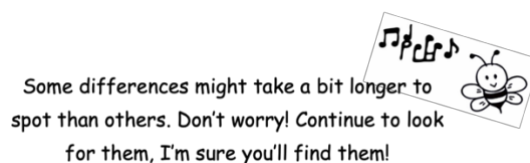


Figure 9.10. Bee providing encouragement and strengthening confidence

e) Sharing information:

Occasionally, the bee is used to provide information to the learner about different composers, eras, pieces, or musical terms or styles. Beyond enriching the learner's music knowledge, such information may be used as an opportunity for further discussion between the teacher and the pupil, or for further relevant research, if a

learner is working independently. As shown in Figure 9.11, Bee (at the top) is explaining the meaning of the music term *moderato*, while the bee (at the bottom) is sharing information about the composer Giovanni Perluigi da Palestrina and the musical style of the motet, referring to the arranged version (by me) of his motet 'Dies sanctificatus', which appears in the *Performing at sight* activity of Unit 4 in the Preparatory book (p. 35).

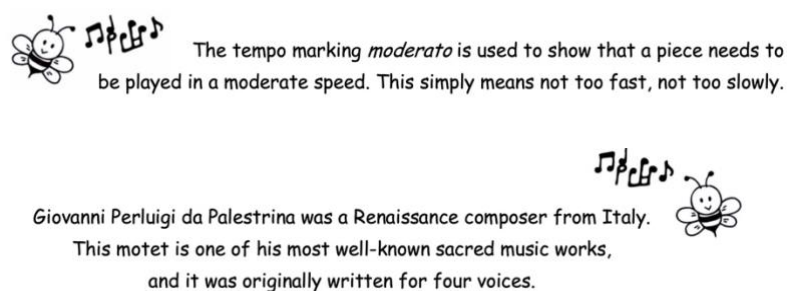


Figure 9.11. Bee sharing information about terminology (top), composer and style (bottom)

#### 9.2.4 The achievement criteria

In the introductory section of each book a set of 'achievement criteria' is also presented. As mentioned in Chapter 1, at the beginner stages of Conservatoire music education in Greece there is no established sight-reading examination, and there is also an absence of criteria for evaluating sight-reading performance at the final (advanced) levels, in which sight-reading is included. Under this circumstance, including a set of criteria as guidelines to help to estimate progress would be valuable for the purposes of the devised material. In the process of developing these criteria, particular emphasis has been placed on reflective practice, and its implications in promoting self-improvement and learning independence (section 8.4).

Recognising the contribution of reflection to self-evaluation in terms of raising awareness of strengths and weaknesses in any educational context, a set of 'achievement criteria' is provided in the form of reflective questions. This terminology has been selected to promote a positive perspective linking to achievement in a perhaps more informative manner, rather than a specific marking system (for example if stated as 'marking criteria'). The list of questions has been designed to invite learners to approach their experience from a reflective perspective. It is envisaged that this approach of focusing on accomplishment and on the development of skills

will facilitate a sense of continuous development for learners, while also forging skills of autonomous learning.

As explained in Chapter 8 analysing the design and creative principles of the devised piano sight-reading material, further opportunities are presented within each book to reinforce reflective practice as a means of self-evaluation, in addition to the achievement criteria: dedicated sections after each activity (*'Let's reflect!'*), the final page of each Unit appraising progress within the Unit (*'Congratulations!'* page), and at the end of the book, where an overall appraisal is invited, reflecting on progress throughout the book. More detailed explanations and the rationale for each of these elements is analysed in section 9.4 of this Chapter.

The 'Reflective Questions on achievement', as provided within the introduction of the books, are presented in the following table (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Reflective Questions on achievement (as presented in the books)

<b>Table of Reflective Questions on achievement</b>	
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ How effectively did I use my preparation time? ★ What did I do during preparation? ★ Which elements did I observe? ★ Is there anything I didn't notice?</li> <li>★ What did I mentally rehearse during preparation? ★ How did this help my sight-reading playing? ★ What do I need to observe more closely next time?</li> </ul>
<b>Performance (general)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ How do I feel about my performance? ★ What makes me feel this way?</li> <li>★ Did the piece make sense to me?</li> </ul>
<b>Flow</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ How fluent was my playing? ★ Did I play with a steady pulse? ★ Was I comfortable with the tempo I chose? ★ Were there any places where I needed to stop or slow down, and why? ★ Or any places where I felt relaxed?</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Did I play the rhythm/note values accurately? ★ How did I feel about the different rhythms in the piece? ★ Is there anything I could have played more accurately? ★ Were there any rhythms I was unsure about?</li> </ul>
<b>Pitch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ How accurately did I play the notes? ★ How easily did I find the notes in this hand position? ★ Were there any notes that I was unsure about?</li> </ul>
<b>Musical elements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ How musically did I play? ★ Which musical elements did I do well?</li> <li>★ Is there anything I could have achieved better? ★ Were there any elements that I forgot to do? ★ How did my playing show the character of the piece?</li> </ul>

<b>Table of Reflective Questions on achievement</b>	
<b>Challenges</b>	* Are there any places I found difficult? * What was challenging about them? * What did I do about them? * How can I overcome these in the future?
<b>Other positives</b>	* What am I most happy about? * What did I achieve best in my playing? * How much did I enjoy my performance?
<b>Improved areas</b>	* How have I improved since last time? * What areas did I achieve better this time? * Why do I think this is? * How do I feel about this improvement?
<b>Future goals</b>	* Which are my next sight-reading goals? * What should I focus on in my next practice? * How can improve further? * What else do I want to achieve?

As illustrated in Table 9.1, the reflective questions serving as the achievement criteria have been organised according to ten themes: (1) preparation, (2) general performance, (3) flow, (4) rhythm, (5) pitch, (6) musical elements, (7) challenges, (8) other positives, (9) improved areas, and (10) future goals. In the process of devising these thematic categories, the areas identified within the marking criteria of the appraised exam boards' sight-reading piano syllabi have been considered, namely fluency, rhythm, pitch, musicality/markings, and delivery/confidence, as presented in Table 7.6 of Chapter 7 (section 7.4).

Similar to the exam boards' marking criteria, some of the themes included in the achievement criteria of the devised books are specifically related to aspects of sight-reading, such as preparation, flow, or the execution of rhythm, pitch, and musical elements. Additional themes have been included, in alignment with the creative principles and the philosophy promoting reflection of the achievement criteria. These focus on the learner's perception of their feelings (general performance theme) and progress, including challenges, positives, improvements which have been made, as well as goals for further development. Thus, not only is appraisal of specific sight-reading elements promoted, but also the development of reflective strategies is fostered. It could be argued that such reflective skills may be utilised and employed in learning contexts beyond sight-reading, even beyond music learning altogether, facilitating mindful, reflective, independent learners.

## 9.2.5 The elements per Unit

The final introductory section of each book features a table illustrating the *Musical elements per Unit*. The table is a useful tool at the beginning of the book, for both the learner and the teacher, outlining the musical elements utilised in each Unit, while explicitly informing the book user(s) about the new elements introduced per Unit, by signposting them. The page number for each Unit is also provided, so that the learner and the teacher can easily find sections which focus on specific musical elements, if they wish or need to do so. Figure 9.12 below, extracted from the two books, illustrate the tables with the *Musical elements per Unit*, as presented at the end of the introductory sections in the Preparatory level and the Level 1 books.

LEVEL 1 – MUSICAL ELEMENTS PER UNIT		PREPARATORY LEVEL – MUSICAL ELEMENTS PER UNIT	
<b>UNIT 1</b> Page 9	New elements: <i>C</i> , <i>legato</i> Thumbs sharing middle C, <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>p</i> Rests: semibreve, crotchet.	<b>UNIT 1</b> Page 9	$\frac{2}{4}$ , minim, crotchet Single note for each hand (middle C). Hand position: Thumbs sharing middle C.
<b>UNIT 2</b> Page 19	New elements: $\leftarrow$ $\rightarrow$ New hand position: RH thumb on C <sub>5</sub> , LH 5 <sup>th</sup> finger on C <sub>3</sub> $\frac{2}{4}$ , $\frac{3}{4}$ , $\frac{4}{4}$ , <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>f</i> Rests: semibreve to crotchet.	<b>UNIT 2</b> Page 16	New elements: $\frac{4}{4}$ , <i>mf</i> , semibreve New notes per hand: D (RH), B (LH). Notes of the same value per bar, crotchets in pairs of repeated notes.
<b>UNIT 3</b> Page 29	New elements: <i>staccato</i> , dotted minim and rest Same hand position as up to Unit 2. $\frac{2}{4}$ , $\frac{3}{4}$ , $\frac{4}{4}$ , <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>f</i> , $\leftarrow$ $\rightarrow$ Rests: semibreve to crotchet.	<b>UNIT 3</b> Page 23	New elements: <i>f</i> Different values per bar. Combination of previous elements, crotchet pairs with different notes.
<b>UNIT 4</b> Page 39	New elements: quavers (pairs), accents. Various hand positions in C major. $\frac{2}{4}$ , $\frac{3}{4}$ , $\frac{4}{4}$ , <i>C</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>f</i> , $\leftarrow$ $\rightarrow$ Rests: semibreve to crotchet, and dotted minim.	<b>UNIT 4</b> Page 30	New elements: $\frac{3}{4}$ , <i>p</i> New notes per hand: E (RH), A (LH). Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 5</b> Page 49	New element: G major. New hand position: various G major hand positions. Combination of previous elements.	<b>UNIT 5</b> Page 39	New elements: crotchet rest New notes per hand: F (RH), G (LH). Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 6</b> Page 60	New element: F major. New hand position: various F major hand positions. Combination of previous elements.	<b>UNIT 6</b> Page 48	New elements: semibreve rest New notes per hand: G (RH), F (LH). Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 7</b> Page 70	New elements: Natural minors (A, D, E). Tied notes. Various hand positions. Combination of previous elements.	<b>UNIT 7</b> Page 57	New elements: minim rest Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 8</b> Page 80	Recapitulation / Overview, elements from all Units.	<b>UNIT 8</b> Page 65	Recapitulation / Overview, elements from all Units.
<b>Page 89</b>	Terminology & List of featured composers	<b>Page 73</b>	Terminology & List of featured composers

Table terminology:

LH = Left Hand / RH = Right Hand

Hand position pitch indications: middle C = C<sub>4</sub>

Table terminology:

LH = Left Hand / RH = Right Hand

Figure 9.12. Musical elements per Unit: Preparatory level; Level 1

As observed in Figure 9.12, the contents of each table delineate the progression of the musical elements through the course of the book, also demonstrating the gradual advancement of the musical complexity as the Units

progress. The inclusion of the specific musical elements has also been informed by the cross-examination of the sight-reading specifications in the piano syllabi of the exam boards, analysed in Chapter 7. Each level starts from simple components, gradually adding more (as well as more complex) elements, corresponding to each level. Musical elements are introduced in a step-by-step, logical manner, parallel to the learner's overall musical learning beyond sight-reading (lesson pieces, scales, music theory, technical capabilities and skills), which would facilitate the learner's understanding, sense of achievement, accomplishment, and progress in relation to sight-reading and the various skills involved (such as rhythmic skills, observation skills, command of keyboard topography, musical delivery, or ensemble skills, amongst others). The *Musical elements per Unit* for each level are aligned with the established specifications for each level of the devised (and the further envisaged) sight-reading material, as described in Chapter 8 (section 8.5).

### **9.3 The activities**

This section provides analytical information about each type of activities included in the devised sight-reading books, as informed by the principles employed for the creation of the proposed educational material. As stated in Chapter 8, the employed approach towards key parameters of the sight-reading process have led to the generation and design of six types of activities, each of which is supporting the development of associated sight-reading skills. The devised books feature the following types of activities:

1. Building on Rhythm
2. Exploring the Keyboard
3. Let's observe!
4. Melodies on the spot
5. Performing at sight
6. Fun for two
7. Reflective sections: (a) *Let's reflect* and (b) the *Congratulations!* page

The subsequent subsections (9.3.1-9.3.6) dedicated to each activity type individually, explaining their rationale, format, and function in more detail.

As stated in section 9.1, each of the devised books comprises eight Units of activities, with Units 1-7 gradually building on the development of sight-reading skills, leading to the final Unit (Unit 8) which serves as a conclusive 'revision', an opportunity to apply all skills and strategies developed through the course of the book for a final time. For Units 1-7, the specific course of activities is outlined in the subsequent diagram (Figure 9.13). As can be observed from the diagram, a *Let's reflect!* box with associated reflective questions appears after each activity, to provide an opportunity for the learner to reflect on various aspects related to their playing and their achievement. More information about the *Let's reflect!* boxes is provided in section 9.4.1. The structure of Unit 8 is described in section 9.5, as the course of activities is slightly differentiated to serve the purposes of the final revision exercises.

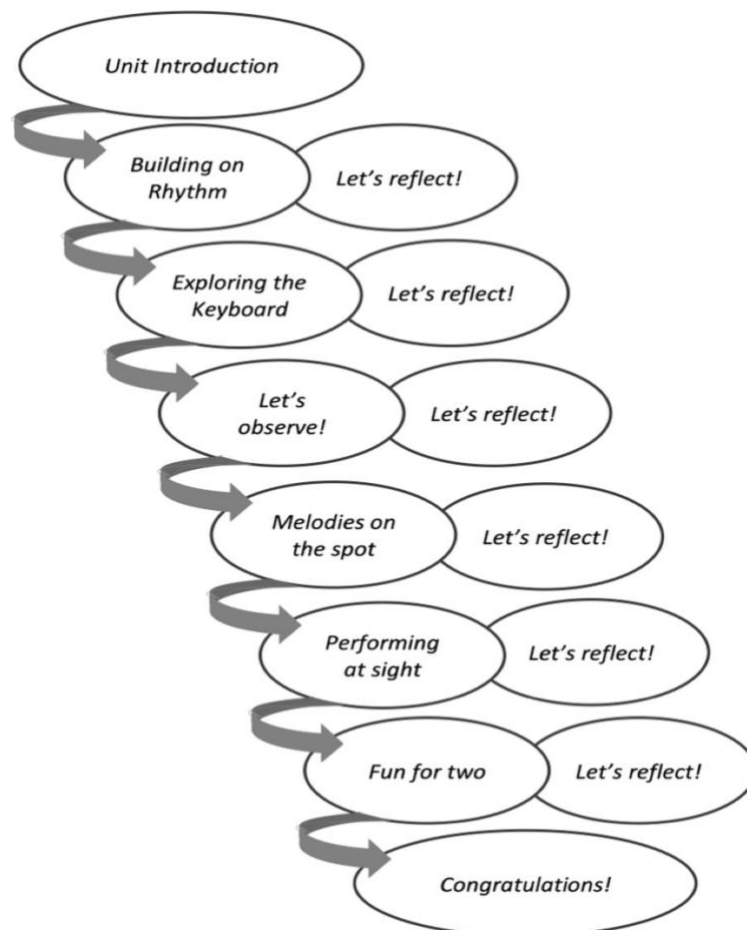


Figure 9.13. The Unit activities in order of appearance

Additional elements incorporated within the activities seek to provide learners with opportunities to connect to previously acquired knowledge and to reflect upon aspects of performance at sight. The activity instructions are simple in language yet

analytical in terms of providing explanations, so that they are informative enough and should be clearly understood by learners who may be working independently, without a teacher. Through the instructions, as well as through the helpful suggestions of the book musical companion, the Bee, it has also been sought to reinforce sight-reading strategies and contextual knowledge, while encouraging learners to think about various aspects involved within activities in a reflective manner.

In each Unit, a generous number of musical examples is provided. For example, the Level 1 book contains ten musical examples in the rhythm activity, six tasks of note groups to find on the keyboard, three pairs of melodies to observe and identify the difference, and eight melodies to play at sight. For the *Performance at sight* pieces and the *Fun for two* duets, between two and up to four pieces are included in every Unit of each book, with the music ranging from adapted versions of works by composers covering all musical eras, including composers perhaps less-frequently encountered in piano method books of these levels, to Greek traditional melodies and well-known children's tunes. The ample number of musical examples in each activity provides a rich supply of different types of material, covering a range of diverse combinations of the featured rhythmic and other musical elements, for the learner/teacher to use as flexibly as they see fit.

The rationale behind this approach is underpinned by consideration that it is preferable to include a generous quantity of examples, rather than for the user(s) to feel a shortage of material. In alignment with the prompt for the teachers to use the books as flexibly as needed depending on the needs of their individual learners, and the possibility to distribute the Unit contents across several piano lessons, it remains up to the book user(s) to determine how many or how few examples they need to work on each time, and which these would be, based again on individual needs, acquired skills, time availability and learning objectives. Although the proportional provision of musical examples may be subject to change in case of potential future publication of the books, it is envisaged that the rationale will remain the same, maintaining a generous 'pool' of musical examples in each Unit of the books.

Finally, for all the activities, the learner is encouraged to spend some time in preparation of the task that follows. Although approximately half a minute is proposed as preparation time, it is often encouraged through the instructions or the Bee, to



raise this up to a minute, particularly when the music is more detailed or complex, or for longer sight-reading pieces. On all occasions, however, the amount of preparation time is to be provided flexibly for each task, depending on the learner's needs and acquired level of skills.

### **9.3.1 Building on Rhythm**

*Building on Rhythm* is the first type of activity the learner encounters at the beginning of each Unit. This activity focuses explicitly on rhythm, aiming to the development of rhythmic skills within the context of sight-reading application, while also benefitting the learner's general musical skills. The musical tasks utilise only rhythm-related elements, namely values and rests, without the inclusion of pitch, explicitly to enhance the sense of pulse and to establish a profound understanding of rhythmical elements utilised in the sight-playing activities of each Unit.

The information in the introductory book section *Getting to know the book activities* explains that the rhythms in the *Building on Rhythm* activity can be performed in a variety of ways, depending on acquired skills and individual preferences. The learner may clap or tap the rhythms, pronounce rhythmic syllables, press one note on the keyboard with one finger, or combine some of the above ways. Experimentation is also encouraged for the learner to even come up with their own way of delivering the rhythms at sight.

As explained in section 9.3, a considerable number of rhythms have been included in this activity, for the learner to utilise as many or as few as are needed. In the Preparatory book, eight rhythms are provided in this activity at the start of each Unit, while in the Level 1 book, ten rhythms are presented. This discrepancy is naturally attributed to the difference in level and progression from one level to the next: in the Preparatory level, basic rhythmic elements are included, while in Level 1, learners become familiar with a greater number of musical elements, including additional values and rests, tied and dotted notes, as well as types of articulation. Therefore, there are more combination possibilities, leading to a greater variety of rhythms for learners to practise and familiarise themselves with, both for sight-reading purposes and beyond. Two musical examples, extracted from Unit 5 of the

books, are presented below, demonstrating how the rhythms are presented in each book level (Figure 9.14):



Figure 9.14. *Building on Rhythm*: Preparatory level, Unit 5

As observed from the above extracts from the Preparatory level book, the rhythmic tasks in the *Building on Rhythm* activity reflect the musical elements designed for the specific Unit (Unit 5), as presented in the tables ‘Musical elements per Unit’ (Figure 9.12) in section 9.2.5 of the present chapter. The rhythms in Figure 9.14, set in 2/4 and 3/4, utilise simple note values (crotchets and minims), while featuring the crotchet rest – the new element presented in this Unit.

The following example is from the Level 1 book *Building on Rhythm* activity:



Figure 9.15. *Building on Rhythm*: Level 1, Unit 5

As observed in Figure 9.15, the examples contain more complex rhythms than in the Preparatory level, with the utilised values also including pairs of quavers and dotted minims. Crotchet rests also appear, as well as some articulated notes: two accented crotchets in rhythm 4, and two *staccato* crotchets in rhythm 5. Articulation elements, such as *staccato* and accents are included from Unit 3 of the Level 1 book onwards; these elements are incorporated to enable the learner to practise them in a simpler – rhythm only – context. Drawing attention to such elements within this context could possibly aid in making their delivery more achievable in subsequent, more musically complex contexts, where pitch, dynamics and additional musical elements are involved. It is envisaged that this approach could reinforce such elements holistically, while encouraging the learner to consider these from the first,

most fundamental, step of sight-reading preparation, the rhythmic understanding of the music.

### 9.3.2 Exploring the Keyboard

The second type of activity that the learner encounters in every Unit of each book is *Exploring the Keyboard*. The tasks included in this section intend to help the learner gain familiarity with the keyboard topography<sup>48</sup> of the piano. The preliminary aim is to aid the practical application of sight-reading skills related to instrument manipulation by developing the learner's awareness of the keyboard layout, structure, key patterns, and physical orientation, with an ultimate, long-term, goal for the learner to be able to play the notes without looking at their hands.

In this activity, the learner is invited to 'explore' the keyboard through tasks which link note symbols and pitch to the equivalent keys on the piano, in isolation of rhythm. For each level, this activity focuses on the notes/keys of each Unit, but the learner may use any finger to find them on the keyboard. According to the activity instructions at the start of the first Unit, as well as in the *Getting to know the activities* section of the introduction, the learner can explore the keyboard using any finger of each hand to find the notes/keys; they can even use the same finger for all notes. Learners could also attempt to sing the pitch of the note if they wish to do so. Acknowledging potential challenges in spontaneous naming of the notes, without ignoring learners who may achieve this with ease, singing and/or naming the notes is not viewed as compulsory in this task, as the prioritised skill is to find the location of the note on the keyboard.

The following figure (Figure 9.16) is an example of this activity in the Preparatory level book. The learner is initially asked to identify the new notes of each Unit, finding them in all possible registers of the keyboard, using each hand separately.

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<sup>48</sup> As explained in Chapter 6, the terms 'keyboard topography' or 'keyboard geography' are frequently used alternately to refer to the layout of the black and white keys on the piano keyboard. The term 'topography' is used in the present thesis for consistency, as well as to avoid potential confusion of meaning within the explanations of the devised book activities, particularly in the Greek versions (in Greek the two terms are not as semantically related: the term 'geography' is associated with the science of Geography, while 'topography' can be used to refer to a greater range of surfaces and relevant characteristics).

Then, the process is repeated, this time for note groups, combining both hands; the learner may play in the hand position of the Unit, if they wish to do so.

Right hand      Left hand

1

Hands together

2      3

If you place both thumbs on middle C, which note are you playing with the fifth finger of each hand?

Figure 9.16. *Exploring the Keyboard*: Preparatory level, Unit 6

A similar approach is followed for this activity in the Level 1 book, this time providing groups of notes for the learner to identify on the keyboard, initially for each hand separately, and then for both hands together, as shown in Figure 9.17.

### Exploring the Keyboard

You will now continue to practise finding the notes of this hand position on the keyboard.

The more confident you become in finding these notes on the keyboard, the more easily you'll be able to play them at sight!

If you want to, try to find each note without looking at your hands – this will be fun!

Let's go!

Right hand

A

B

Left hand

A

B

**Hands together**



Figure 9.17. *Exploring the Keyboard: Level 1, Unit 3*

Although finger numbers are not provided, the learner may practise finding the notes using the fingers according to the hand position of each Unit. For example, in Units where new key signatures and new scales are introduced, the learner is prompted to use the fingering of the various hand positions through the activity instructions, as illustrated in Figure 9.18 below. On such occasions, namely in Units 5, 6 and 7 of the Level 1 book, more examples are provided for each hand in comparison to earlier Units, prioritising the exploration of various hand positions of each hand, rather than fewer hand positions combining both hands.

**Exploring the Keyboard**

This activity is slightly different, as there are no examples for hands together – this is because you will be playing at sight in various G major hand positions later. However, there is more exploration for each hand alone this time to help you get used to the G major notes.

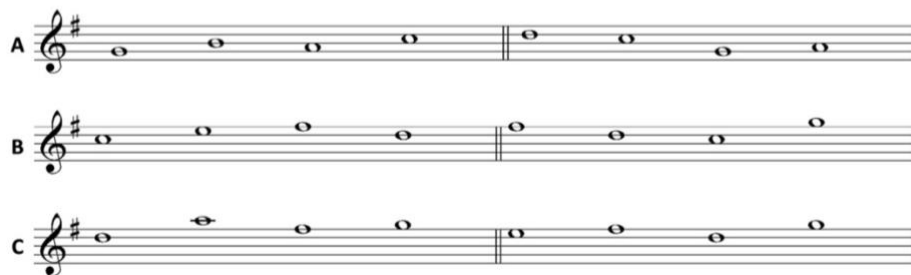
You can keep using one finger for all notes or practise the new hand positions if you want to. To do this, use the *thumb of your right hand* and the *fifth finger of your left hand* for the lowest note.

Let's explore G major!



There is a key signature this time! So, every time you see F, that's F sharp - remember to press the black key!

**Right hand**



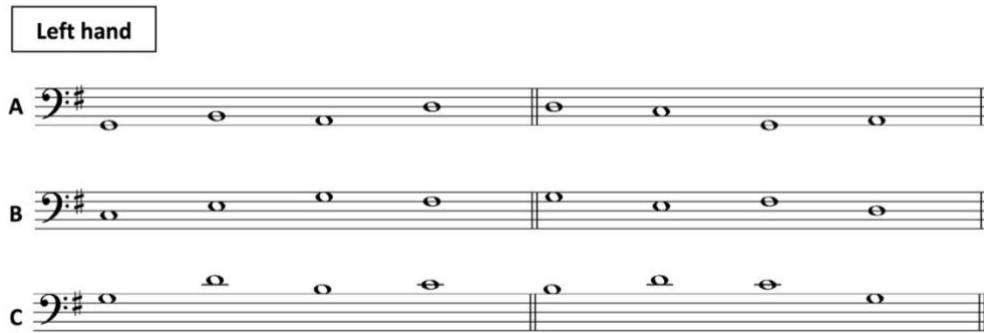


Figure 9.18. *Exploring the Keyboard: Level 1, Unit 5*

### 9.3.3 Let's observe!

After keyboard exploration, the activity *Let's observe!* appears in each Unit. As hinted by the title, this activity seeks to enhance learners' observational skills, which are employed during performance at sight. The learner is invited to observe pairs of seemingly identical short melodic passages for approximately half a minute, to spot one difference between the two, for example, in pitch or rhythm. Although the main task for the learner is to find the difference, the activity also provides an opportunity to draw further comparisons, by specifically signposting similarities, as well as to identify rhythmic and/or melodic patterns. The learner is frequently encouraged, through the activity instructions or the words of the Bee, to also consider how the melodies of each pair will sound, thinking about the impact of this difference on the sound as well, and thus promoting inner hearing.

This activity is designed to strengthen skills related to the visual processing of musical information which occurs before sight-reading tasks during the observation time. Since parameters involved during active playing are not included in this activity, such as instrument manipulation, use of fingering, and translation of visual stimuli to movement on the keyboard, emphasis is placed explicitly on skills involved in the mental preparation and visual observation, which will be applied in the musical examples of the subsequent activities of sight-reading pieces.

The music excerpts of this observation activity are included among the melodic passages presented in the next set of activities (*Melodies on the spot*), to enhance the cohesion of the material structure and progression through the Unit, while reinforcing the learner's sense of purpose, by asking them to apply any observations they made during the observation activity to practice. It is envisaged that the *Let's observe!*

activity could significantly reinforce the learner's observational skills, particularly in the earlier levels, as it provides a dedicated setting where such skills and strategies can be practised systematically; this could potentially make them transferrable thereafter for effective practical application in the context of sight-reading pieces.

For the Preparatory level, where hands are either playing separately or sharing the melody, there is a pair with notes for the right hand, a pair for the left hand, and a third pair which combines both hands. This is illustrated more specifically in the following extract (Figure 9.19) from Unit 1 of the Preparatory level book, where this activity is introduced to the learner for the first time.

## Let's Observe!

In this activity, you will need to observe each pair of melodies closely. They may seem identical, but they're not! One difference is hiding in each pair. Can you spot it? Pay your full attention to find it. When you do, think about how the sound would change in each pair.

Let's start observing!



Look at each pair for about **half a minute** *as closely as you can*. Each difference may be hiding in rhythm, pitch, or in any other musical element! Good luck!

### Pair 1 – Right hand

A 

B 

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A 

B 

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A 

B 

Figure 9.19. *Let's observe!* Preparatory level, Unit 1

The number of three pairs of melodies is maintained in the Level 1 book. This time, each melodic pair features music where the melody is shared between the two hands, in alignment with the musical elements of this level. Figure 9.20 illustrates the activity as it appears for the first time in the Level 1 book, in Unit 1.



## Let's Observe!

Look at the following pairs of melodies closely. They may seem identical, but they're not!

There is *one* difference in each pair. Your full *attention* and *observation* are required to find it, and some are more difficult to spot than others.

Can you find it? When you do, talk about it with your teacher.



Try to spend about half a minute on each pair.

Observe *as closely as you can*, as each difference may be hiding in pitch, rhythm, or in any other musical element! Good luck!

**Pair 1**

**Pair 2**

**Pair 3**

Figure 9.20. *Let's observe!* Level 1, Unit 1

### 9.3.4 Melodies on the spot

In the *Melodies on the spot* activity, melodic passages are offered for learners to play at sight. The learner is expected to combine the skills practised during previous


activities, namely rhythm, awareness of keyboard topography, and observation, with pitch, in order to apply them collectively to practice. The melodic tasks have been devised to fulfil the level specifications by incorporating the technical and musical elements outlined for each Unit (Figure 9.12 in section 9.2.5). The melodies from *Let's observe!* also appear in the music of this activity (one version from each pair of melodies), so that the learner can practically apply their observations to their playing at sight. The musical examples from the observation activity are signposted in the instructions in case the learner wants to start with these. For all melodies in both books, fingering is provided for the starting note of each hand.

In the Preparatory level book, twelve melodies are included in each Unit, divided into three groups of four, for a balanced practice of hands: there are four melodies for the right hand only, four for the left hand only, and four for both hands sharing the melody. The following melodies (Figure 9.21) have been extracted from Unit 2 of the Preparatory level book, containing the first musical example for each hand/hand combination.



Don't forget to look at the time signature, so that you count the right number of beats per bar!

Right hand



Left hand



Hands together

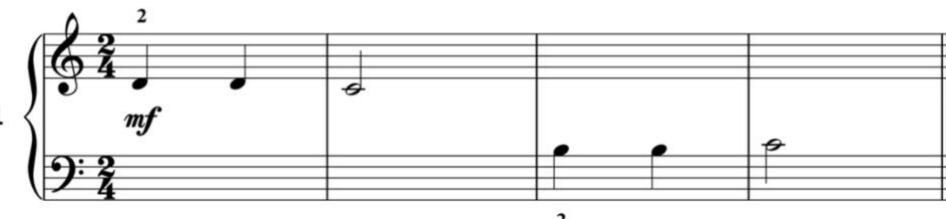


Figure 9.21. *Melodies on the spot*. Preparatory level, Unit 1

For the Level 1 book, where hands are not playing separately, but share the melody, eight musical examples have been devised for the *Melodies on the spot* activity of each Unit. Figure 9.22 shows two melodies extracted from Unit 3, where dynamics and different types of articulation (*legato*, *staccato*) are also employed.



Figure 9.22. *Melodies on the spot*. Level 1, Unit 3

### 9.3.5 Performing at sight

In the *Performing at sight* activity, learners have the opportunity to apply sight-reading skills obtained through the previous activities to existing compositions, including pieces of Greek cultural relevance. More specifically, Western classical public domain music is utilised, with occasional appropriate adaptations, such as transposition or simplification, in order to provide a more ‘real-life’ simulation of sight-reading, through works of various composers, styles and musical eras. It is acknowledged that sight-reading repertoire possibilities are by no means limited to the compositions employed in the present material. These selections, which reflect the outlined specifications and principles detailed in Chapter 8, are to be viewed as an indication of particular characteristics or as a guide for repertoire which could be appropriate for sight-reading in each level. In addition, the music included in this activity, as well as in the *Fun for two* duets, allows the possibility for the learner and the teacher to work on these pieces beyond the initial approach through sight-reading, by continuing to work on them as lesson or repertoire pieces.

As analysed in Chapter 8, in addition to existing compositions, elements related to the specific educational context for which the material is designed have been incorporated, to enrich style variation and to promote cultural relevance, such

as traditional tunes, folk modes, and rhythmic patterns. Sight-reading may provide a potentially useful context and opportunity to engage with culturally relevant material, which might have otherwise remained excluded due to limitations relating to lesson duration, content, and standard repertoire (Chapter 8, section 8.3.6).

Due to the gradual progression of the Preparatory level, which starts from very simple and basic elements in the initial units, such as one, two or three notes in each hand, the *Performing at sight* activity is first presented after several units in this level, from Unit 4 onwards, including elements encountered by learners in previous sight-reading activities. For both levels, Preparatory and Level 1, the pieces in the *Performing at sight* activity are four-bars long, with the exception of the final Unit (Unit 8) of the Level 1 book, which features eight bars. Between two to four pieces appear in each Unit, in balance with the number of duets in the *Fun for two* activity. For example, in the Level 1 book, Unit 4 features four *Performing at sight* pieces and two *Fun for two* duets, while Unit 5 contains three pieces for each of the two activities. The last Units in each book contain only one *Performing at sight* piece, for revision purposes, as described in more detail in section 9.5.

Figures 9.23 and 9.24 illustrate two *Performing at sight* pieces from the Preparatory level book, extracted from Unit 6 and Unit 4, respectively. For both pieces, the Bee provides some contextual information, and there is a title as well as a descriptive performance indication for each piece to inform the learner's sight-reading process as a subtitle. The composer's name is also stated along with the opus or catalogue number (Figure 9.23), or the area of origin of Greek songs or melodies (Figure 9.24). Finger numbers are provided for the first note of each hand.



Henry Purcell was a well-known English composer in the Baroque period. His work 'Rigaudon' or 'Rigodoon' is a dance, composed for the keyboard.

**Rigaudon**  
With flow  
Purcell. Z. 653

4  
mf  
1

Figure 9.23. *Performing at sight*. Preparatory level, Unit 6 – Composer’s music (Purcell)



This is a traditional tune that young ladies sing to the bride-to-be on her wedding day. Can you show the joy of this occasion through your playing?

**Wedding preparation song**  
With joy  
Greek folk song of Epirus

2  
p  
3

Figure 9.24. *Performing at sight*. Preparatory level, Unit 4 – Greek traditional melody

Figures 9.25 and 9.26 below contain extracts from the *Performing at sight* activity of Level 1, Units 4 and 6, respectively. As in the Preparatory level, a title and performance indications are provided for each piece, as well as the name of the composer and opus/catalogue number (Figure 9.25) or the region of origin for the piece of cultural reference (Figure 9.26). Finger numbers are again provided for the starting note of each hand, to indicate the hand position for each extract.



The *menuet* or *minuet* was a popular type of ballroom dance, especially in the 18th-century Europe. Keep this in mind as you observe and play this piece. The composer, Ignaz Pleyel was also a well-known piano maker!

**Menuet**  
**With pride**

Pleyel, B. 817



Figure 9.25. *Performing at sight*. Level 1, Unit 4 – Composer’s music (Pleyel)

**The swing**  
**Cheerfully**

Greek folk song of East Aegean islands



Figure 9.26. *Performing at sight*. Level 1, Unit 6 – Greek traditional melody

### 9.3.6 Fun for two

The *Fun for two* activity includes sight-reading duets designed to promote sight-reading skills within an ensemble context. In addition to strengthening both the learner’s sight-reading and ensemble skills, the duets add versatility to the book activities as they provide opportunities for sight-reading to become more enjoyable, through collaborative music making between the learner and the teacher, or with a slightly more advanced musical partner. A variety of pieces are employed in these activities, such as arrangements of existing music, classical or with cultural reference, as well as original compositions for the purposes of the Units.

The inclusion of sight-reading duets in the present material was considered of particular value by the author, as it is envisaged that they could impact aspects of the learner’s experience with sight-reading in a positive manner. As analysed in Chapter 2, relevant literature examines the role of ensemble participation and collaborative activities (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996), suggesting teacher-student sight-reading duets and accompanying activities are beneficial in the context of sight-reading (Zhukov, 2014b; Watkins & Scott, 2012; Wristen, 2005; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). In addition

to the benefits of such activities, which relate to the strengthening of the sense of flow and the maintenance of a steady pulse (Keyworth, 2005; Kostka, 2000), piano duets are a useful introduction to ensemble playing, which might be a less common opportunity for piano learners in comparison to ensemble opportunities for other instruments (Chapter 5).

Duet activities in this section are more flexible in terms of length and intend to incorporate an element of fun into sight-reading, allowing for a creative – and potentially enjoyable – approach towards performance at sight, taking advantage of the psychological benefits of collaborative music making particularly relating to aspects of confidence (Watkins & Scott, 2012; Macmillan, 2010; Booth, 1971). Therefore, the duet length may vary from four to eight bars, with the music occasionally extending into two lines in both parts (*primo/secondo*), particularly for some of the eight-bar duets. There are two longer exceptions in the Level 1 book, the first comprising a duet of ten bars (Unit 5, ‘The phantom tells his tale of longing’, F. Coleridge-Taylor) due to the original phrasing; the second exception is the longest duet of the series, of 16 bars and extending into three lines of music for each (*primo/secondo*) part (Unit 7, ‘La bella Cubana’, J. White). As acknowledged in the relevant activity instructions, these duets may take longer to prepare in terms of observation before playing at sight; additionally, they could offer an opportunity for further work, beyond the first approach through sight-reading. The *Fun for two* activity contains two or three duets in each Unit.

The following figures provide an example from this activity in each book. Figure 9.27 illustrates an eight-bar duet from the Preparatory book, along with the duet instructions and the Bee’s tips. This is one of the first times the learner in the Preparatory level encounters a line change in their music, therefore the learner is prompted to practise looking ahead more explicitly. The music is an adaptation from T. Greene-Wiggins’ ‘Water in the moonlight’ (no opus/catalogue number), reflecting Unit 4 musical elements: 3/4 time signature, notes from A<sub>4</sub> to middle C for the left hand and from middle C to E<sub>4</sub> for the right hand, minims, crotchets and *piano* dynamic. The *secondo* part for the teacher or a more advanced partner is written in slightly smaller font size, so that the learner can distinguish their part more easily. The *secondo* part may seem complex, but indeed it is not difficult as it consists of repeated

rhythmic patterns: depending on the player's level, some initial preparation may be needed in relation to the rhythmic elements of the right hand in the accompaniment, as notes and harmonies are relatively straightforward. Use of pedal at the *secondo* player's discretion would be useful to show the smooth and dreamy character of the music, as prompted in the duet instruction. As in the previous activities, finger numbers are provided for the starting note of each hand for the learner; the *secondo* part also includes some fingering indications which may be useful.

For this third duet, you will need to place both thumbs two octaves higher (two Cs higher). You will also need to move your seat to the right, so that you are sitting comfortably. You and your partner may want to play through your parts to get an idea of the music, before you play together. If you do, listen to the other part carefully, to understand what your partner will be playing in the duet and get used to the rhythms. The *secondo* player may use the pedal as they feel, to show the dreamy character of the music.

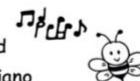


In this duet, you will be practising a new sight-reading skill: **looking ahead**. As there are two lines of music this time, you will need to look further ahead, over your partner's music, when the line changes. The goal is to keep playing, without stopping. So, practise looking from the top to the bottom line of your part a few times, before you start to play.

**Water in the moonlight\***  
Like a dream

**Greene-Wiggins**  
(no Opus/catalogue number)

Thomas (Tom) Greene-Wiggins, was an African-American pianist and composer. He was born blind, but he loved composing and playing the piano from a very young age, and he was named a piano prodigy. Amazing!



\* This piece has been adapted for the purposes of this book. Original composition is in B flat major.

Figure 9.27. *Fun for two*. Preparatory level, Unit 4 (adaptation of existing music)



Figure 9.28 presents an eight-bar duet, this time within one line of music, composed from the author for the purposes of this Unit (Unit 1, Level 1 book), containing the new musical elements: tied notes and E natural minor<sup>49</sup>.

*Melancholy waltz* EP  
 With no hurry

Figure 9.28. *Fun for two*. Level 1, Unit 7 (author’s composition)

## 9.4 Achievement and reflective opportunities within each Unit

As explained in the design and creative principles detailed in Chapter 8 promoting reflective thinking has been prioritised during the creation of the two books. As learners may sometimes perceive sight-reading as a difficult and perhaps unenjoyable part of the music lesson, during the creative process it was essential to include components within the books which would support the learner’s awareness of their progress. Therefore, various opportunities for reflection have been incorporated, alongside elements consolidating the learner’s achievement, for example through the *Let’s reflect!* question boxes after each activity and the *Congratulations!* page at the end of each Unit, explained in the next subsections (9.4.1 and 9.4.2). The *Certificate of Award* presented the very end of the books is another component serving the purpose of confirming progress and achievement, as detailed in section 9.6.1.

### 9.4.1 Let’s reflect!

After every activity, the learner is presented with boxes of questions entitled *Let’s reflect!* Aligned with the creative principles of the devised books, these questions offer

<sup>49</sup> As explained in the Level 1 specifications (Chapter 9), in the Unit 7 duets, the teacher/*secondo* part may use harmonic minor accidentals for an enriched harmonic environment in the accompaniment.

opportunities for the learner to practise reflection throughout the course of the books in a continuous and systematic manner, promoting reflective thinking and independent learning skills.

Each *Let's reflect!* box contains several questions based on the preceding activity, focusing not only on the learner's performance and delivery, but also on their learning process. As there are several questions in each box to promote independent learning, the learner may choose to engage with some, or with all of the questions each time. The *Let's reflect!* boxes in Figures 9.29 and 9.30 provide relevant examples following the *Performing at sight* and the *Fun for two* activities, respectively:

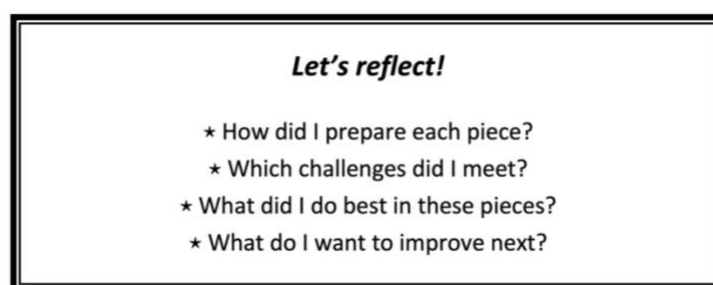


Figure 9.29. *Let's reflect!* after the *Performing at sight* activity (Preparatory level, Unit 5)

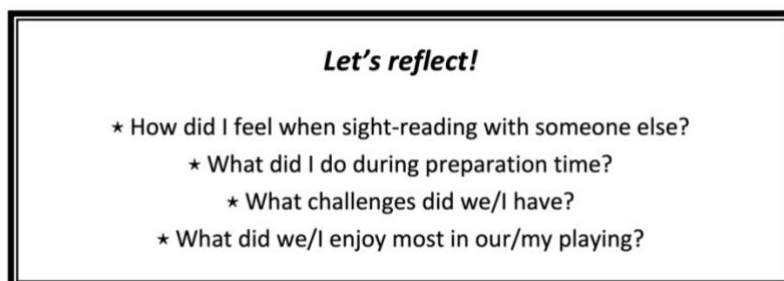


Figure 9.30. *Let's reflect!* after the *Fun for two* duets (Preparatory level, Unit 1)

As illustrated in the above figures, the questions are written in the first person ('I') so that the learner feels that they are asking these to themselves; this also applies to the *Fun for two* duets, where 'we/I' is written, to also continue the sense of collaboration established through the duet, while enabling the musical partners to engage in a reflective dialogue about their joint performance. Open-ended questions, such as 'How did I feel when sight-reading with someone else?' encourage the learner to express their thoughts and feelings in a free and open manner, while closed questions such as 'What did I do during preparation time?' and 'What do I want to

improve next?’ prompt the learner to articulate and identify specific elements while reflecting on their experience. Questions may also be utilised as starting points for further discussion between the learner and the teacher. Additionally, as well as helping learners identify and articulate challenges, the questions are also designed to promote their understanding of aspects that may link to positive emotions and motivation in instrumental learning, by also thinking about strengths, enjoyment, and satisfaction; for example, by stating elements they were happy with or particularly enjoyed. It is envisaged that this reflective approach may become an established habit, transferrable to other parts of the piano lesson, for example when working on repertoire, as well as to a learner’s individual practice.

### **9.4.2 Congratulations!**

Extending the reflective approach facilitated through the *Let’s reflect* question boxes, the *Congratulations!* page appears at the end of every Unit and invites the learner to reflect on their experience with sight-reading through the Unit (for Units 1-7; *Congratulations!* in Unit 8 is presented in section 9.5). This page has been included as a conclusion of every Unit to provide affirmation to the learner for their progress by congratulating them for completing the Unit, a table with reflective prompts is included, encouraging the learner to appraise their progress through the Unit activities (Figure 9.31).

As depicted in Figure 9.31, the learner is prompted to think critically about (a) what they learnt, (b) aspects they improved, (c) elements they particularly enjoyed or achieved well, and (d) areas to be developed further in subsequent endeavours. The prompts are phrased openly to encourage the learner to write down their thoughts without feeling restricted, while the final prompt relating to further developments has been purposefully phrased as such (instead of asking to identify ‘weaknesses’ for example), in the hope that this will feel encouraging and positive to the learner. In Unit 8 of the two books, an overall reflection is encouraged, with the learner being invited to reflect on their overall experience and progress throughout the entire book, with a further *Congratulations!* page, as detailed in section 9.5.

## ***Congratulations!***

***You have completed Unit 7!***

***Only one Unit left to complete this book!***



Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.

Unit 7
<i>I learnt...</i>
<i>I improved...</i>
<i>I enjoyed very much / I achieved well...</i>
<i>What I aim to improve further in my next practice is...</i>

Figure 9.31. *Congratulations!* page and table with reflective prompts (Level 1, Unit 7)

### **9.5 Unit 8: The final Unit**

The final Unit of the books, Unit 8, is a conclusive Unit acting as a 'revision' for the skills developed throughout the course of the book. This Unit is an opportunity for the learner to put to practice for a final time all the different sight-reading skills and strategies they developed and practised through the different types of activities throughout Units 1-7 of the book.

Unlike the previous Units, whose specific course of activities is aligned to and focuses on Unit goals and musical elements, the structure of the final Unit focuses specifically on the preparation for and the sight-reading performance of the two main pieces of the revision, which are included in the *Performing at sight* and the *Fun for two* activities. This time there is no *Melodies on the spot* activity, while the rhythmic activity (*Building on skills*), the keyboard exploration (*Exploring the Keyboard*), and the

observation activity (*Let's observe!*) activity are all constructed to aid the preparation of the *Performing at sight* piece and the *Fun for two* duet.

To illustrate the rationale of the activities included in the final Unit of each book and to complement the explanations for each activity in the present section, musical extracts are presented, from the Level 1 book. The two main pieces of Unit 8 in the Level 1 book, namely the *Performing at sight* and the *Fun for two* pieces, are presented in the following figures, to act as reference points during the subsequent explanation of the different activities in Unit 8. *The cat and the cricket* is the *Performing at sight* piece and *Little leg dance* is the duet of the final *Fun for two* activity, both presented below (Figure 9.32):

*The cat and the cricket*  
With mischief EP

Figure 9.32. Unit 8 – Performing at sight (Level 1 book)

The *Performing at sight* piece of Unit 8 in the Level 1 book has been composed by the author for the purposes of this revision activity. The title is 'The cat and the cricket' and there is a performance indication ('With mischief') above the music, right below the title. The music is an eight-bar piece in G major, set in 3/4, with each hand playing in basic five finger hand positions of G major. Finger numbers are provided for the starting note in each hand, as well as for the first note that each hand plays in the second half of the piece (bar 5). The note values include crotchets, pairs of quavers, one dotted minim at the end, and two pairs of tied notes for the left hand, as well as rests from semibreve (as whole-bar rests) to crotchet rests. Different types of articulation are included, such as *legato slurs*, *staccato* notes, and several accented notes. Dynamics and dynamic changes also appear, starting from *mf*, moving to *piano* through a *diminuendo* (hairpin symbol in bar 3) and coming back to *mf* towards the end with a *crescendo* in the second half (hairpin symbol in bars 5-6).

The final duet of the Level 1 book, *Little leg dance*, is an adaptation of a Greek folk tune from Thrace (in Greek named 'Το ποδαράκι') meaning 'the little leg' (Figure 9.33). The duet comprises two four-bar phrases, each consisting of two smaller two-bar sub-phrases in A-A-B-B<sub>1</sub> form, with distinct rhythmic patterns and repetitions. The music is written in quadruple time using the notes of A minor, as the original traditional melody is in the Dorian mode. In the *primo* part for the learner, finger numbers are provided for the starting note in each hand, as well as for the first time the right hand plays in the second line, after several beats of silence. Note values from minim to quaver pairs are used, and rests from semibreve (as whole-bar rests) to crotchet. Articulation includes *staccato* and accented notes, as well as *legato* slurs, for crotchet couples in the top line or longer slurs in the bottom line. There are also dynamic changes in each line, with the top line changing from *forte* to *piano* in bar 3, and with the same dynamic changes taking place in the second line, going gradually back to *forte* at the end (*crescendo* hairpin symbol in bar 7).

*Little leg dance*  
Rhythmically

Greek folk tune from Thrace

Figure 9.33. Unit 8 – *Fun for two* (Level 1 book)

The details of the *Performing at sight* and the *Fun for two* pieces of Unit 8 have been provided first in order to contextualise the subsequent explanations of the activities leading to these two pieces. As before, the first activity of Unit 8 is *Building on Rhythm*. Unlike earlier Units, in Unit 8 the rhythmic activity is divided in two parts, with each part dedicated to each of the two main pieces, distinctly indicated with the title of each piece. The rhythm of each four-bar phrase of each piece is presented twice, once including only the note values and rests, and the second time adding elements such as dynamics and articulation, thus resembling more closely the version that the learner will later need to sight-read, excluding pitch. As before, the activity is followed by questions in the *Let's reflect!* box which invite the learner to reflect on their rhythmic performance for a final time.

Little leg dance

1 

2 

3 

4 

Figure 9.34. Unit 8 – *Building on Rhythm*: part focusing on the duet ‘Little leg dance’ (Level 1)

Figure 9.34 illustrates the part of the *Building on Rhythm* activity which is dedicated to the duet piece in the final Unit. Examples 1 and 2 depict the rhythm of the learner’s part in the *Fun for two* duet, using only the note values which shape the melody shared between the two hands. Examples 3 and 4 also include the articulation (*staccato* markings and accents) featured in the final version of the duet, as well as the dynamic changes. The legato slurs have not been included, as it was not considered likely to achieve these when executing this activity, for example if the

learner was clapping their hands, tapping their feet, or using a percussion instrument (unless they chose to use rhythmic syllables).

The second activity of the final Unit is, as previously, *Exploring the Keyboard*. This time the activity explores the hand position of each piece, so that the learner prepares for the notes they will need to play at sight in the pieces later, by practising finding them on the keyboard in this activity. The following extract demonstrates the activity *Exploring the Keyboard* in Unit 8 of the Level 1 book, in alignment with the hand position of each of the two sight-reading pieces. In the activity instructions, the learner is prompted to ‘place on the *lowest note* the *thumb of your right* hand and the *fifth finger of your left* hand’ if they decide to use all fingers to practise the hand position when finding the note keys on the keyboard (Figure 9.35).

### Exploring the Keyboard

Here you can explore the areas of the keyboard which you will use in each of the final pieces.

As previously, feel free to explore however you like! If you decide to use all fingers to practise hand position as well, then you know what to do: place on the *lowest note* the *thumb of your right* hand and the *fifth finger of your left* hand.

Let’s explore the keyboard one more time!

The image shows two musical exercises. The first, 'The cat and the cricket', consists of two staves: a treble clef staff with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5, and a bass clef staff with notes G3, F3, E3, D3, and C3. The second, 'Little leg dance', also consists of two staves: a treble clef staff with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5, and a bass clef staff with notes G3, F3, E3, D3, and C3. Each exercise is enclosed in a rectangular box with its title.

Figure 9.35. Unit 8 – *Exploring the Keyboard* (Level 1 book)

The third activity is, as previously, the observation activity. In this final Unit, the activities *Melodies on the spot* is not included. Therefore, instead of looking closely at three pairs of melodies, the learner is encouraged to observe directly the two pieces of the playing activities (*Performing at sight* and *Fun for two*). This time, the learner is provided with a list of questions focusing observation on various thematic areas: including the title, articulation and the identification of patterns, amongst others. In the instructions, the learner is asked to observe each piece for about a minute. Although it is acknowledged that there may not be enough time to consider all of the



questions, the learner is encouraged to think about as many of the different areas as possible. The list of the thematic observation questions is presented in the following figure (Figure 9.36).

Title/Subtitle:

Look at the title and subtitle of the piece. What pictures do they create in your imagination? What do you think the **character** of the piece will be like?

Time signature/Values:

Let's observe the time signature and clap a bar. Which note values are you likely to find in this piece?

Key:

Which key is this piece in? Are there any black notes which you might need to play? If so, which fingers will you use in each hand?

Hand position/Register:

Which is the highest and lowest note for each hand? Find them in the score and on the keyboard. Which note will each finger play?

Dynamics/Expression:

Let's look at the dynamics. How (loud) does the piece begin and how does it end? Can you describe how the dynamics change through the piece?

Articulation:

What types of articulation can you observe in this piece? Let's briefly explain what each one means.

Patterns:

Let's observe the two hands. Can you find any rhythmic and/or melodic patterns? Which similarities and/or differences have you spotted between the two hands?

Inner hearing:

Try to hear the melody in your head and imagine how it may sound.

Hand relationship/balance:

Observe the notes for each hand; do they seem to share the melody, or is it like a question and answer?

Other observations:

Which other elements can you observe (tied/dotted notes, rests, etc.)? Are there any places which seem particularly challenging (more demanding rhythms, detailed articulation, the music changing line)?

Figure 9.36. Unit 8 – *Let's observe!* List of thematic observation questions (Level 1 book)

The final activities of Unit 8 are, as described previously, the *Performing at sight* and the *Fun for two* activities, the music pieces of which are provided at the start of the present section (section 9.5), in Figures 9.32 and 9.33. The entire revision Unit is focused on the two pieces, preparing the learner step-by-step for the sight-reading performance of the final pieces, through the preceding activities of rhythmic practice, keyboard exploration and observation. As before, after each piece, a set of reflective

questions is provided through the *Let's reflect!* boxes, for the learner to think critically on their playing for a final time.

Upon completion of Unit 8, a final reflective opportunity is offered for the learner to reflect upon their progress by thinking about their entire learning experience throughout the book. This concludes the reflective process established through the equivalent reflective pages presented at the end of each individual Unit, as described in section 9.4.2 of this chapter. The final *Congratulations!* page invites the learner to reflect for a final time, this time appraising their overall experience with sight-reading through the course of the book, by reviewing and identifying: (a) strategies they learnt, (b) skills they developed and strengthened, (c) weaknesses they overcame, and (d) elements they particularly enjoyed or achieved well. The prompt encouraging the learner to think about their future goals (purposefully phrased in an open manner) is also inclusive of general musical goals, as the learner's stated aims may or may not be specifically related to sight-reading (Figure 9.37).

### ***Congratulations!***

*Well done for completing the entire book!*

*I hope you've enjoyed your journey through the world of sight-reading!*

Now let's reflect on your overall experience in this book.



<b>In this book</b>
<i>I learnt these strategies...</i>
<i>I strengthened these skills...</i>
<i>I overcame these weaknesses...</i>
<i>I enjoyed very much / I achieved well...</i>
<i>I aim to improve in the future...</i>

Figure 9.37. Unit 8 – Final *Congratulations!* reflective page (Level 1 book)

## 9.6 The conclusive sections

After the revision Unit (Unit 8) and the learner's final reflection on their overall experience with sight-reading, the books conclude with three final sections: (a) a certificate of award, (b) a section dedicated to terminology, and (c) a list of the featured composers' names, as detailed in the following subsections.

### 9.6.1 Certificate of award

At the end of each book, a *Certificate of Award* (Figure 9.38) congratulates the learner for their 'consistent work' and provides affirmation that they 'have become a great beginner sight-reader'. It also prompts them to the next book of this series, to continue their sight-reading 'journey'.



Figure 9.38. Certificate of Award for completion (Preparatory & Level 1 books)

In alignment with the creative principles promoting the learner's sense of achievement, it was essential to include this additional component as a conclusion of the books. Most importantly, the certificate serves as a recognition and validation of the learner's progress. As the book character, the Bee, reaches the beehive in this final part of the book, similarly the learner has reached their intended learning goals and their sight-reading 'destination' through their efforts along the course of the book. Thus, the certificate is a reward, both a tangible praise and a psychological trophy, to confirm what the learner has accomplished, while reinforcing their sense of achievement which has been promoted throughout the book. The learner may receive the certificate from themselves or from their teacher, or it may even be perceived as affirmation from the author of the book. The certificate may also have a positive psychological effect on the teacher, who may feel rewarded by their pupil's progress and skills development. Finally, the certificate may also function as evidence documenting the learner's progress in, formal or informal, record keeping.

### **9.6.2 Terminology**

Towards the very end of each book, an additional section is dedicated to terminology, providing a concise, yet informative, explanation of the musical terms encountered within the book Units. The purpose for this type of terminology 'glossary' is to enable learners to access the meaning of musical terms in an immediate and direct manner, particularly those who may be working independently, or are practising sight-reading at home. The teacher may also find this useful, particularly in relation to region-specific terminology they may not be familiar with, such as the explanation provided for the Cretan musical instrument 'lyra', featured in the following extract. As illustrated in Figure 9.39, this part of the book includes terms such as time signatures, notes, values, rests, dynamics, as well as terms related to music history eras, tempo indications, styles (e.g. 'march'). Sight-reading strategies, such as 'looking ahead', or 'mental practice', also appear in the glossary, along with their explanations. The various musical terms appear in alphabetical order.

## Terminology & List of featured composers

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$\frac{2}{4}$  : This time signature indicates that there are two (2) crotchet beats (4) in each bar.

$\frac{3}{4}$  : This time signature indicates that there are three (3) crotchet beats (4) in each bar.

$\frac{4}{4}$  : This time signature indicates that there are four (upper 4) crotchet beats (lower 4) in each bar.

**Accompaniment:** A part of music which supports (accompanies) the main melody.

**Bar:** A unit containing the number of beats indicated by the time signature, separated on the staff by vertical bar lines. Also known as 'measure'.

**Baroque:** A period or musical era of Western music, roughly between 1600 and 1750.

**Classical (period):** A period or musical era, roughly between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Crotchet:** The note which has a quarter of the value of the semibreve. In time signatures where the lower numeral is 4, a crotchet equals one beat. Also known as 'quarter-note'.

**Crotchet rest:** Absence of sound, equal to one crotchet beat.

**Duet:** A composition for two performers. A piano duet may be for two performers on one instrument, or on two instruments, one for each performer.

**Dynamics:** Markings which indicate the volume with which notes and sounds are expressed.

**Forte (*f*):** A dynamic marking meaning that the music is to be played with strong sound.

**Looking ahead:** The act of looking further down the score, ahead of the point being played.

**Lyra:** A pear-shaped traditional (folk) Greek instrument of Crete, the size of a violin. It has three strings and is played with a bow, held vertically – similarly to the cello – placed on the lap of the performer.

**March:** Music with strong repetitive rhythms, usually used to accompany military processions.

**Melody:** A tune, a line of musical sounds (pitch and rhythm) which are perceived as one unit.

**Mental practice:** The act of thinking and practising the sound of the music silently, in the mind or imagination. Also found in this book as 'imagining the music/the sound', 'hear the music in the head', or 'singing it silently'.

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Figure 9.39. *Terminology* section (Preparatory book)

### 9.6.3 List of featured composers

The very last section of the book is a list of the composers' names whose music is featured in the book activities. This alphabetical list contains information about composers' years and countries of birth and death and states the Units where their music appears within the book, for the learner's and/or the teacher's reference. As explained in Chapter 8 (section 8.3.5), it was an essential creative principle to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in relation to the composers featured in the book. Thus, composers of various eras and nationalities, have been included, alongside women composers, and composers whose music may not be as widely known in the Greek context (to which the devised sight-reading material is addressed), or those composers who may not be as frequently encountered in piano method

books as others. The list in Figure 9.40 includes the names of the composers, in addition to the author, whose music appears in the Preparatory level book.

**List of featured composers:**

- Chaminade, Cécile (France, 1857-1944, Monaco). Unit 8.
- da Palestrina, Giovanni Perluigi (1525-1594, Italy). Unit 4.
- Dett, Robert Nathaniel (1882-1943, Canada). Unit 5.
- Greene-Wiggins, Thomas [Blind Tom] (1849-1908, USA). Unit 4.
- Haydn, Joseph (1732-1802, Austria). Unit 7.
- Johnson, Francis (Caribbean, 1792-1844, USA). Unit 6.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus (1756-1791, Austria). Unit 5.
- Purcell, Henry (1659-1695, England). Unit 6.

Figure 9.40. *List of featured composers* (Preparatory book)

## 9.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the first two books of the envisaged sight-reading series, which have been developed for the purposes of this thesis. The different parts of the books are outlined, and the rationale for including each is explained, demonstrating the embodiment and realisation of the creative principles, detailed in Chapter 8, within the created material, alongside the obtained insights from the experiences of sight-reading publication authors. Each structural component is analysed in detail, including the different introductory sections, the types of activities and the concluding book sections, supported with musical examples and extracts from the devised books. The purpose and structure of the final Unit (Unit 8) of the books are also described, consolidating the strategies and sight-reading skills developed through the book by the learner by applying them for a final time in the Unit activities. The achievement criteria to evaluate performance at sight are also presented, along with an analysis of the reflective opportunities provided for the learner across the book Units.

## **CHAPTER 10: STUDY 3: ANALYSIS OF PIANO TEACHERS' EVALUATIVE SURVEY REVIEWS OF THE TWO CREATED BOOKS**

This chapter presents the results of the third and final research project of this thesis, in which piano teachers (Greek and international) were invited to review the devised sight-reading material. The teachers appraised the two books through an evaluative survey, providing insights into their understanding of the purpose and underpinnings of the devised material by sharing feedback on the different book components and the pedagogical approach of the material. The responses were analysed interpretatively; emergent themes are discussed below. The feedback also identified strengths and areas with scope for further development, and suggestions for future improvement. A reflexive discussion focusing on commercial and pedagogical aspects, as well as personal reflexive considerations is also presented, including a revised book 'Unit' responding to the received feedback.

### **10.1 Introduction**

This research project comprises a survey in which piano teachers reviewed the two devised books (Preparatory Level and Level 1). Due to Covid-19 restrictions, pilot testing of the material in piano beginner lessons was not feasible at the time, so a survey was utilised as an alternative method. In the subsequent sections, the purpose of the survey and the review aims are presented (section 10.2), followed by methodological and ethical considerations (section 10.3), including details of recruitment and the inclusion criteria (sections 10.3.1 and 10.3.2). The results are presented, detailing the teachers' review feedback (section 10.4), including suggestions for further improvement; a reflexive discussion on specific aspects from the survey feedback is presented in section 10.5.

### **10.2 Research purpose and survey aims**

The purpose of this research was to explore piano teacher's views on the devised material. This research, conducted through a survey, has been included to inform the development of this project of sight-reading material creation, particularly as I

envisage creating further material for more advanced levels; therefore, the reviewers' feedback on the first two books was particularly welcome in order to further inform my creative process for future developments. Revising the two current books lies beyond the purposes of this thesis; however, the revised 'Unit' presented in section 10.5.3 demonstrates my response to the reviewers' feedback, showing how I would incorporate their recommendations and suggestions.

The primary aim of the survey was to gain insights towards reviewers' perceptions of the two sight-reading books, as well as towards their understanding of the connection of the material to the development of pianists' sight-reading skills. More specifically, the survey aims were the following:

- (f) to explore piano teachers' views on the devised sight-reading books,
- (g) to explore their perceptions of how the material may contribute to the development of sight-reading skills,
- (h) to gain insights about their understanding of the purpose of the material, the different book components, the activities, and the underpinning principles,
- (i) to understand ways in which teachers may use the material in and beyond the piano lesson and with different types of learners,
- (j) to collect feedback identifying strengths as well as areas for further development, based on teachers' suggestions for improvement,
- (k) to obtain a wider perspective towards my material from piano teachers in Greece and internationally.

The devised material has been presented in this thesis in the same format as used by the teachers received for reviewing purposes, so that their feedback, discussed below, can be viewed in accordance with the versions of the books submitted as part of this thesis (Appendix 6).

### **10.3 Methodology**

For the purposes of this research project, the survey was conducted with piano teachers in Greece, as well as outside of Greece. The teachers were asked to review the devised sight-reading material, namely the two books, provided in English as well as translated into Greek by the author. The survey design considered the



methodological parameters of survey research (Chapters 3 and 4); the platform of Google forms was selected considering Greek respondents in particular, who may not have been familiar with other survey formats, such as Qualtrics. On that premise, using a more familiar survey tool may have contributed to bypassing potential feelings of hesitation due to lack of familiarity with the survey format.

The survey was provided in English as well as in Greek (translated by the author), and teachers were offered the option to complete it in their preferred language<sup>50</sup>. Both versions were piloted and tested for clarity and potential amendments. The evaluative questions required:

- (e) single-selection responses
- (f) multiple selection boxes
- (g) written responses through short or longer open-text boxes
- (h) small-scale ratings (Likert scales) with corresponding point descriptions (for example, 1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful)<sup>51</sup>.

The responses have been analysed utilising an interpretative, thematic approach; this also applies to the scale ratings and to questions which did not require written text-responses. No attempt was made to reach generalised conclusions from quantitative results, and it is acknowledged that the findings from this survey represent only this specific sample of piano teachers.

Prior to the commencement of the study, respondents were informed about the research purpose and their role through an information sheet/consent form (Appendix 2), following the procedure detailed in Chapter 4.9. Feedback was anonymous, to enable respondents to express their opinions freely and honestly. The survey questions are presented in Appendix 5.

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<sup>50</sup> All Greek teachers provided feedback through the Greek version of the survey. Their responses were translated into English by the author for the data analysis in this Chapter.

<sup>51</sup> It is recognised that the use of different numbers of response options for each question is idiosyncratic (as is the absence of a truly 'neutral', middle option in most cases); this would not be repeated in future investigations. In future evaluations, a scale with a neutral mid-point would be used.

### **10.3.1 Recruitment and inclusion criteria**

Potential reviewers were approached from a wide network of colleagues in Greece and beyond. Invitations for participation were communicated through personal contact and via email to Conservatoire piano teachers from various Greek cities, as well as to piano teaching members of staff, Graduate Teaching Assistants and PhD candidates from the Music Department of the University of York, and alumni from the MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching plus members of the Music Education Forum of the University of York Music Department. There were two simple criteria for inclusion: (a) reviewers needed to be piano teachers, and (b) to have some teaching experience with beginner learners.

Potential reviewers were informed about the purpose of the survey through an invitation email. A consent form and information sheet were sent to those who expressed interest in reviewing the books. Upon receiving signed consent, reviewers were given access to the books in digital form (PDF files), while printed versions were sent to two reviewers who requested them for easier engagement. Non-Greek reviewers received the original sight-reading material written in English, while the Greek reviewers received translated versions of the two books. A period of two weeks was provided before sending the survey link to enable reviewers to spend some time engaging with the books independently, before accessing the survey. A period of one month was given for the review process and a reminder email was sent three days before the survey deadline; extensions were provided to those who requested them.

### **10.3.2 Survey respondents**

The books were reviewed by 19 piano teachers (17 female/2 male). 12 were Greek (teaching in the Greek context), and 7 were from various countries, including the UK, Italy, Cyprus, Iran, and the USA. All international respondents, and some of the Greek respondents, had studied and/or worked as music teachers in the UK. Their age range was from 25 to over 45 years, with four aged under 35 (25-35 years), four between 35-45, and eleven over 45 years of age. The reviewers' teaching experience ranged from 3 years to 37 years: three teachers had under 10 years of experience at the time of the survey, eleven teachers had been teaching between 10 to 25 years, while five had over 25 years of teaching experience.

The respondents' details are outlined in Table 10.1 below (code number, Greek/International identity, gender, age group, qualification(s) best supporting their piano teaching, years of experience (YoE), piano teaching contexts, lesson format):

Table 10.1 Survey respondents' details

Code no.	Identity	Gender	Age	Qualification	YoE	Piano teaching contexts	Lessons
R1	Greek	Female	45+	Piano Dip. / MA Music Education	28	Conservatoire; privately; online; group; 1:1	Group, 1:1
R2	Greek	Female	45+	Mag.Artium (Austria)	22	Music school; Conservatoire; privately	1:1
R3	Greek	Female	25-35	Piano Diploma	3	Privately; online	1:1
R4	Greek	Female	45+	Piano Diploma	37	Privately	1:1
R5	Greek	Female	35-45	Piano Diploma	13	Conservatoire; primary school	1:1
R6	Greek	Female	45+	Piano Diploma	35	Conservatoire; privately	1:1
R7	Greek	Female	45+	Piano Degree	30	Public music education; privately	1:1
R8	Greek	Female	45+	Piano Degree/MA Piano teaching	10	Conservatoire; Music school; privately	1:1
R9	Greek	Female	35-45	Piano Degree	20	Conservatoire; privately	1:1
R10	Greek	Male	35-45	MA Piano Performance	10	Music school (state)	1:1
R11	Greek	Female	45+	Piano Degree	15	In early years centre; privately	1:1
R12	Greek	Male	35-45	MMus, PgDip, Piano Diploma	18	Conservatoire (piano & chamber music)	1:1
R13	International	Female	45+	DipABRSM	30	Privately	1:1
R14	International	Female	45+	MA Music Education, LTCL	20	Online	1:1
R15	International	Female	25-35	MA Music Education	5	Privately; Higher education; face-to-face	1:1
R16	International	Female	25-35	MA Music Education	15	Piano institution; advisor in Higher Educ.	Group, 1:1
R17	International	Female	45+	MA Music Education	12	Private teaching (piano & theory)	1:1

Code no.	Identity	Gender	Age	Qualification	YoE	Piano teaching contexts	Lessons
R18	International	Female	25-35	MA Music Education	8	Private face-to-face; online; school	Group, 1:1
R19	International	Female	45+	MA	23	Peripatetic (school, UK university); privately	1:1

As detailed in Table 10.1, the respondents stated the qualification they consider that best supports their teaching. Many stated more than one qualification, such as diplomas and performance degrees from exam boards (DipABRSM, LTCL) and from Greek Conservatoires (74%); 37% mentioned their postgraduate studies in Music Education and one respondent also referred to MA studies (no further information was provided).

In relation to their music teaching, various teaching contexts were mentioned, ranging from one-to-one private lessons to working in Conservatoires, music schools, higher education institutions and in public schools; online and face-to-face lessons were also mentioned. All reviewers gave one-to-one lessons, with three of them also teaching in groups. The following subsections (within section 10.4) present the reviewers' feedback on the devised books. 17 teachers (of 19) reviewed both books; two reviewed only the Preparatory level book, due to their particular interest in beginners, and their time limitations.

#### **10.4 Survey results: Teachers' feedback**

The analysis of the responses is presented in the following sections, which detail the feedback on the books according to the following thematic areas:

- (a) the progression of the material,
- (b) the different types of activities,
- (c) the approach to evaluation and reflection,
- (d) the elements of written language,
- (e) the opening and closing sections,
- (f) the visual presentation of the books and practical aspects,
- (g) their overall impressions on the resources, focusing on the usefulness of the material towards its purpose (to set the foundations and to promote an early development of piano beginners' sight-reading skills), and its pedagogical value.

### **10.4.1 Progression of the material**

The reviewers were asked about their opinions on the progression of the material in the books, in relation to the distribution of musical elements in each Unit (section 10.4.1.1) – summarised in the ‘Musical elements per Unit’ table at the start of the books – and through the musical content within the book activities (section 10.4.1.2).

#### **10.4.1.1 Musical elements per Unit**

The reviewers evaluated the progression of musical elements within the Units through a Likert scale from 1 to 5 which stated different levels of appropriateness and achievability<sup>52</sup>. Most respondents felt that the musical elements progressed in an appropriate and achievable manner, describing progress as ‘(very) appropriate and (highly) achievable’ (rating 5: 58%; rating 4: 26%). Three teachers found progression ‘mostly appropriate and achievable’ (rating 3: 16%), while no lower ratings were stated (ratings 1 and 2: 0%).

The respondents also shared their feelings towards the table indicating the musical elements of each Unit at the start of the books, through Likert scale ratings ranging from ‘not at all useful’, to ‘very useful’<sup>53</sup>. All felt that the table of musical elements per Unit was ‘useful’ (10.5%), ‘quite useful’ (21%) or ‘very useful’ (68%)<sup>54</sup>.

Some respondents provided additional thoughts on the progression of the musical elements per Unit and the aforementioned table, stating that it helps the teacher and the learner to be aware of the exact focus of each Unit and that this is a necessary element which can be used as the lesson plan. Some suggestions were made for improvement visually, such as adding different colours to the table per Unit, providing more space between the Unit cells (R8), or using the symbols for the note values to further support learners (R18). One teacher also expressed their wish to try the book with pupils of various ages and abilities to see practically how progression would be perceived by learners (R19).

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<sup>52</sup> 1=Not at all appropriate & completely unachievable, 2=Slightly appropriate/achievable, 3=Mostly appropriate & achievable, 4=Appropriate & achievable, 5=Very appropriate & highly achievable

<sup>53</sup> 1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

<sup>54</sup> It is acknowledged that sometimes the sum totals of percentages do not add up to a full 100%. The number of reviewers (19 teachers) resulted in percentages with several fractional parts; these were rounded up/down, leading to such discrepancies.

### 10.4.1.2 Musical content

A multiple-selection question invited the reviewers to select all statements which they felt best describe the overall progression of the musical content in the book and the activities. The statement options were the following:

- a. The book has a good and appropriate overall progression.
- b. The book has a quite good overall progression, with places where it could be improved.
- c. The progression in the book does not make sense.
- d. Within each Unit, the activities progress logically.
- e. Within each Unit, the progression of the activities is quite logical, but there are sections where it can be developed better.
- f. Within each Unit, the progression of the activities sometimes does not make sense.
- g. Within each Unit, the progression of the activities never makes sense.
- h. Other...

The reviewers found that the books have a good and appropriate overall progression and that the activities progress logically overall (options a and d), with three teachers stating that there are sections where progression can be developed better (option e). Some further suggestions were provided: one respondent stated that some pupils 'might find it moves too quickly' (R19) if they find specific elements quite challenging (for example, quavers). Another reviewer made relevant comments linking to different ways of using the books. They believed that 'the progress in the preparatory book might be a bit too slow if the books are used along with other piano books' (R18). However, they also identified potential in using these books as method books: 'If we use the sight-reading book a lot more, then it would become a normal but very detailed/focussed piano book rather than a book solely to boost the sight-reading skills' (R18). Teachers were also prompted to give examples of pages where they felt that the progression of the material was particularly effective, and where it could be further improved. One respondent (R5) recommended expanding the book series with further books for more advanced learners. As previously stated, their



suggestions for improvement will be considered for the further development of the devised material; within this thesis, the revised 'Unit' presented in section 10.5.3 illustrates how I would respond to the received feedback.

### **10.4.2 Feedback on the different activity types**

The reviewers provided feedback on the different types of activities used in the books. Each of the following subsections (10.4.2.1 – 10.4.2.6) is dedicated to a specific activity.

#### **10.4.2.1 Building on rhythm**

Reviewers were asked their opinion on the number of musical examples included in the 'Building on rhythm' activity. 74% of the respondents found the number of rhythms 'just about right' and 26% (including the responses in the 'other' option), suggested that sometimes fewer examples may be needed. They also expressed their views on the importance of rhythm for sight-reading, with everyone highlighting the key role it holds within the sight-reading process in maintaining a sense of pulse and musical flow. Some viewed rhythmic accuracy as more important than note/pitch accuracy, while the value of developing good rhythmic skills was also linked to general music learning beyond the sight-reading context. 10.5% also mentioned that rhythm is an element which learners sometimes find challenging (R17, R19).

Teachers were also asked how they thought the 'Building on rhythm' activity might affect sight-reading effectiveness, to gain insights on their understanding of the purpose of this activity and its connection to developing sight-reading skills. Their responses all indicate that they consider good rhythmic skills as a priority and the foundation for good sight-reading skills. In summary, the ideas mentioned suggest that a consistent, systematic, step-by-step rhythmic training can contribute to better understanding of musical elements in general, and that more accurate and automatic performance of rhythms and rhythmic motifs can enable learners to move more quickly on to other elements such as notes, dynamics, and articulations. There was also one idea suggesting 'rhythm duets' between the teacher and the learner (R9). Good rhythmic skills were also linked to less anxiety during performance at sight, due to fewer stops and rhythmic inaccuracies; in this sense, good rhythmic skills were

stated as having potential to ‘hide’ melodic errors, while errors in rhythm are more ‘obvious’ as they disrupt flow (R8).

### 10.4.2.2 Exploring the keyboard

Considering that the teachers may not have been as familiar with the keyboard exploration activity as with the rhythmic examples, they were initially asked if they understood its purpose. 79% responded ‘Yes, I have understood the purpose of this activity’ and 21% responded ‘I think I have understood the purpose of this activity’. No responses were received for the options ‘I am not sure I have understood the purpose of this activity’ and ‘No, I haven’t understood the purpose of this activity’ (0%). A follow-up question prompted the reviewers to explain how they thought this activity links to sight-reading skills. A variety of responses indicated teachers’ different perspectives, which are summarised in the following identified connection themes (Table 10.2):

Table 10.2 Connections identified between 'Exploring the Keyboard' and sight-reading skills

Emerging themes	Quoted responses
<i>The keyboard exploration supports the development of note recognition skills</i>	‘Reinforcement of new notes by seeing them separately and with the notes learned previously’, ‘naming and singing of the notes and using different fingers contributes to sight-reading skills’ (R14); ‘great idea for finding notes one at a time’ (R19); ‘familiarity with the piano keyboard from an early level can aid music reading’ (R11)
<i>The exploration contributes to greater familiarity with the piano keyboard</i>	‘Helps the learner to familiarise themselves with the keyboard and various distances so that they can move more freely’ (R3); ‘because we need to have a sense of the keyboard layout’ (R2); ‘It links to the spatial layout of the piano keyboard and helps pupils familiarise themselves across the different registers’ (R6); ‘the more certain one is in finding the note keys, the more easily they will be able to play them at sight’ (R7); ‘given that the books are addressed to beginners, who are not yet familiar with the piano keyboard, the exploration outside/beyond the context of a music piece is very useful’ (R12)
<i>The exploration enables more accurate navigation on the keyboard</i>	‘The pupil learns to find the correct position and to place their hands quickly and accurately’ (R1); ‘the learner becomes able to find the hand position on the piano with greater ease, including the starting

Emerging themes	Quoted responses
<i>The exploration contributes to playing while looking at the score</i>	<p>playing position and any changes within a piece' (R5); 'it is essential, to understand the playing position in a sight-reading piece' (R4)</p> <p>'It helps students to visualise and feel the position of their hands within the keyboard, which is essential for sight-reading because you don't get much time to look at your hands' (R15); 'knowing exactly where your hands are going is vital to sight-read effectively' (R15); 'professional sight readers never look their hands, they keep playing by trusting their fingers' (R16); 'for learning the geography of the piano and not needing to look at the keyboard' (R19); 'keyboard topography is the second most important element on SR [...] learners will need to keep their eyes focused on the score and much less on their hands, and therefore it is important to be able to navigate across the keyboard with their peripheral vision' (R8)</p>
<i>Other</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'It is a preparation to understand what is coming up' (R18)</li> <li>- 'The learner acquires understanding of pitch and sound distances between notes and learns to hear it in their head before playing' (R9)</li> </ul>

As stated in Table 10.2, the main themes link the keyboard exploration activity to sight-reading in relation to the development of note recognition skills, increasing familiarity with the piano keyboard enabling more accurate navigation on the keyboard and playing without needing to look at one's hands while looking at the score; various other connections were also perceived, such as understanding what comes next in the music, and developing the ability of inner hearing by linking pitch and 'sound distances' (R9) to physical distances between note keys on the keyboard.

#### 10.4.2.3 Let's observe!

Reviewers validated the inclusion of the 'Let's observe!' activity in the books, describing it as 'useful' (5%), 'quite useful' (16%), and 'very useful' (79%) through the Likert rating scale<sup>55</sup> provided. In addition, most teachers felt that the number of musical examples in this activity, namely three pairs of melodies, was appropriate (89%), while one respondent felt that the examples were too many (R1), and another suggested that there is potential to include more examples for observation (R2).

<sup>55</sup> 1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

Reviewers were also able to identify important links between this activity and the development of good observation skills, attention to detail and focus; concentration, patience, and alertness; the ability to gradually observe more quickly and to identify patterns effectively. It was also mentioned that through this activity the learner is trained to consider all musical information on the score and has the opportunity to imagine how the melodies may sound, to think about the difference that occurs in the sound between two almost identical versions of the same melody, to look ahead in the score and to learn how to prepare (to play at sight). The positive tone of approval in some reviewers' written responses, through phrases such as 'this is an excellent section!' (R9) and 'this is a highly successful activity choice!' (R12) suggests that some teachers found particular value in this activity.

Suggestions for improvement concerned the name of the activity; 'Spot the difference' was a potential alternative (R19), as this is how children would understand the task. Another suggestion was to avoid specifying the observation time (half a minute), inviting the learner to announce the difference once they have found it, instead. Keeping the written instructions as simple as possible was also recommended. Positive comments were also made, describing the employed approach as 'very useful' (R11) and 'very appropriate', 'holistic', 'step by step without being simplistic', including observation 'challenges for older learners as well as adult beginners' through 'attention to detail' (R8).

#### **10.4.2.4 Melodies on the spot**

The overall feedback shared for the activity 'Melodies on the spot', the first activity of playing at sight short melodies featuring the musical elements of each Unit, was generally positive. The number of melodies in each Unit was considered appropriate from all reviewers ('Just about right': 89%; 'very appropriate': 5%); just one teacher (5%) felt that fewer melodies were needed. All reviewers considered that the amount of finger numbers<sup>56</sup> provided for each hand in each melody was sufficient and found them 'mostly helpful' (10.5%), 'very helpful' (31.5%), or 'necessary' (58%).

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<sup>56</sup> 1=Not at all helpful, 2=Slightly helpful, 3=Neither helpful, nor unhelpful, 4=Mostly helpful, 5=Very helpful, 6=Necessary

Feedback on the balance of musical elements for each melody was also requested, through a Likert scale from 1 to 5<sup>57</sup>. The feedback was positive overall, as most teachers felt that the musical elements were either ‘mostly balanced’ (21%) or ‘well-balanced’ (74%), except for one respondent (5%) who described them as ‘slightly balanced’ (R11). It would have been interesting to gain more insights concerning this reviewer’s response in order to understand their perspective better and what particular issues they may have experienced with the balance of the musical elements in this activity; however, no relevant clarification was provided in the subsequent question inviting further thoughts or suggestions. One teacher recommended ‘to include a note for the learner to read through the music within the available time’ (R2), while there was also a comment which noted that ‘the book promotes independent thinking and focused engagement’ (R8).

#### **10.4.2.5 Performing at sight**

For the ‘Performing at sight’ content, which includes pieces and adaptations of existing music, culturally relevant material, and new compositions for the purposes of the books, the respondents’ reviews were explored, regarding the representation of different musical eras and composers. 79% of the teachers felt that different musical eras are sufficiently represented. From the 21% remaining responses (from four reviewers), there was one response stating inefficient representation, and three written responses (within the option ‘other’), stating that ‘more can be added’ (R6), that there are some recurring composers such as Kabalevsky and Bartók (R13), and that they did not pay much attention to this as they feel that the development of sight-reading skills is transferable across different eras and genres (R15).

In relation to representation of composers (male/female/composers of colour) through the musical material, 89% found that there is sufficient representation. In the two written responses of those who selected the option ‘other’ (10.5%), representation was stated as ‘better than usual’ by one respondent (R13), who suggested that music of more women composers could be incorporated; the second

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<sup>57</sup> 1=Completely unbalanced, 2=Mostly unbalanced, 3=Slightly balanced, 4=Mostly balanced, 5=Well-balanced

written response did not consider composer representation a criterion they would use 'to judge a book about sight-reading' (R15).

Feedback was also collected on the inclusion of familiar pieces (such as children's tunes) and culturally relevant material (such as traditional Greek tunes), with a prompt for teachers to also state any potential effects of this on sight-reading. The reviewers' feedback was positive about the inclusion of these types of material, as they felt that it adds variety to music styles, and that it is 'a very interesting element' (R9) of the books, a 'great idea' (R19), 'enjoyable' (R11), 'appealing and different' (R13). In relation to cultural elements, some reviewers stated that this enables learners to find relevance and connections to their cultural identity (R3), also drawing links to the Kodály method (R16). It was additionally stated that children's tunes and traditional elements are 'closer' to young learners' musical experiences, particularly beginners', which can aid the sight-reading process: even if the tunes are not familiar, learners may be familiar with the character or style of the music (R5).

There were also several comments identifying positives in using familiar tunes as material for sight-reading. Reviewers believed that familiar tunes make the sight-reading process easier and more interesting for learners (R7), can provide motivation (R8, R14) and facilitate progress; learners may also find such pieces easier to sight-read and therefore enjoy the process more (R14). Another benefit mentioned was that such material enables learners to link the sounds to the music symbols and notation on the score (R11). Further comments stated that such material may be particularly engaging for young learners (R15), while it also increases the potential of the books to be used by a wide range of learners and age groups (R8). Finally, it was pointed out that older beginners, such as adolescents, may find this type of material 'childish', compared to 'pop songs' for instance; in their response, this reviewer also recognised that 'it is very hard to cater for all' (age groups) (R18).

The final question in this section explored the reviewers' thoughts on whether the books, or specifically the 'Performing at sight' section, could be used as a method book, such as by approaching pieces through sight-reading first, and then working on them as repertoire pieces. The options 'Yes'/'No'/'Maybe'/'I don't know'/'Other' were provided, with nearly everyone (95%) finding potential for this part of the book to be

used beyond sight-reading purposes ('Yes': 68%; 'Maybe': 21%); one more teacher (5%) commented that it would depend on the learner (R19), also finding potential in playing the pieces for fun and for practising memorisation. One opposite response (5%) was also received ('No') (R13).

#### **10.4.2.6 Fun for two**

Reviewers were also asked to rate the usefulness of the duets in the 'Fun for two' activity, using Likert scale ratings from 1 to 5<sup>58</sup>. All respondents found the duets a useful part of the book, with 89% rating them as 'very useful' and 11% as 'quite useful'. The teachers also gave feedback on the visual presentation and the length of the duets.

Regarding the visual presentation, linking to the score size and the readability of the written music, 53% described the duet layout as 'very appropriate and easy to read', 21% as 'appropriate and readable', 21% as 'small but readable overall', though 5% found it 'quite small and rather hard to read'<sup>59</sup>. Relevant suggestions recommended increasing the staff size in the teacher's part (R13, R14), with one reviewer proposing equal-sized parts for both players, considering readers with potential vision-related challenges (R15).

According to the responses in the relevant multiple-selection question<sup>60</sup>, the duet length was mostly viewed as 'about right' (68%), 'appropriate' (42%), 'flexible enough' (37%) and 'varied, in a positive way' (68%); 10.5% found the duets 'mostly about right, sometimes too short' (R6, R9), and one respondent viewed them as 'mostly about right, sometimes too long' (R2).

The reviewers' impressions of the teacher's and the learner's parts were also explored, as well as their opinions about the level of difficulty in each part. The level of difficulty in the teacher's part<sup>61</sup> was perceived as appropriate ('very appropriate':

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<sup>58</sup> 1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

<sup>59</sup> 1=Very small & hard to read, 2=Quite small & rather hard to read, 3=small, but readable overall, 4=appropriate & readable, 5=very appropriate & easy to read

<sup>60</sup> Multiple-selection statements: 'too long' / 'about right' / 'flexible enough' / 'not flexible enough' / 'appropriate' / 'not very appropriate' / 'mostly about right, sometimes too long' / 'mostly about right, sometimes too short' / 'varied, in a positive way' / 'varied, in a negative way'

<sup>61</sup> 1=Too difficult, 2=Difficult, 3=Sometimes challenging, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Appropriate, 6=Very appropriate

79%; 'appropriate': 10.5%), while 10.5% described it as: 'mostly appropriate' (R11) and 'sometimes challenging' (R19). These responses were in agreement with their further comments and thoughts.

Specifically, views on the teacher's part (*secondo*) were positive, suggesting that this activity was well-received by the reviewers. Some of the perceived positives were that the two parts of the duets (*primo/secondo*) were appropriately balanced; that the teacher's part complemented the learner's part nicely in terms of rhythm, harmonic environment, and character, while supporting the learner. It was also stated that the accompaniments make the learner's part more interesting and appealing, which could also have a positive impact on students' engagement and enjoyment. Further comments expressed the reviewers' excitement towards this activity: 'Lovely! Nice accompaniments' (R17), 'Very beautiful, easy and catchy' (R16), 'They look lovely! Such a treat to have parts like this' (R19), 'loved them! Very impressed with the author's own compositions and arrangements' (R14). These are encouraging and affirmative of the creative decision to include duets in the devised sight-reading material.

In addition, some reviewers also recognised the potential for the teacher's part to be performed by a 'slightly more advanced learner' (R1), while it was also stated that it is 'absolutely achievable and sight-readable even for teachers who are not particularly good at sight-reading' (R15). Contrasting this, two duet examples were provided by another reviewer, who proposed adding a simpler version as an '*ossia*' in case these specific accompaniments felt intimidating (R19). This links to another response which suggested that the teacher could adapt their part if learners needed a simpler accompaniment (R2).

The same questions were asked in relation to the learner's part (*primo*) in the duets<sup>62</sup>. The *primo* part was perceived as appropriate ('very appropriate': 53%; 'appropriate': 31.5%), while 10.5% described it as 'mostly appropriate' (R2, R11) and one reviewer (5%) as 'sometimes challenging' (R19). Teachers' first impressions and

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<sup>62</sup> 1=Too difficult, 2=Difficult, 3=Sometimes challenging, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Appropriate, 6=Very appropriate



thoughts on the learner part revealed that they felt that it progresses appropriately across the books, reflecting the musical elements within each unit and in an achievable pace. Some comments were also made in relation to the musical content of the duets, for example that imitation of patterns between the *primo/secondo* parts would be useful for the learner (R8), and that the level 'might be slightly more challenging, particularly at the end of the Level 1 book' (R15). Further comments suggested that the music could be slightly more advanced for older learners (R10); examples were also mentioned by a reviewer who felt that there was sufficient variety in the musical complexity of the learner's part in the duets within the same unit (R19).

Finally, the reviewers shared some overall thoughts about the duet activity, including ways in which the duets could have a positive effect on sight-reading, not only during the process of playing at sight and on the development of relevant skills, but also in terms of collaboration and enjoyment, amongst other aspects. Comments viewing the duets as 'a brilliant idea!' (R19) and 'best bit, from enjoyment point of view' (R13) suggest that this activity was well-received by teachers. Providing more duets in the books (R4) and adding elements for playing with other instruments or vocalists (R16) was recommended. A suggestion of presenting the *primo/secondo* parts on opposite pages was also made, along with a proposal of an additional 'challenge' activity prompting the learner to think about a musical term (Italian, German, French) which would correspond to the descriptive performance indications (R14).

### **10.4.3 Evaluation and reflection**

Reviewers also provided feedback on book components which related to evaluation of performance and reflection. Specifically, teachers shared their opinions on the criteria of achievement at the end of the book introductions (section 10.4.3.1), and the 'Let's reflect!' activity (section 10.4.3.2).

#### **10.4.3.1 Criteria of achievement**

Teachers were asked how useful they found the evaluative questions provided within the 'Achievement Criteria' table at the start of the books. Most teachers (94.5%) felt they were useful ('useful': 10.5%; 'quite useful': 21%; 'very useful': 63%); notably, one

respondent (5%) rated the evaluative questions as 'not at all useful' (R13), potentially preferring a different marking system, as detailed in relation to the findings in the next section.

Reviewers shared their preferences in relation to the mode of evaluation utilised in the books. 53% preferred the reflective questions, 21% preferred both reflective questions and marks, and 5% (one respondent) stated marks (only) as the preferred evaluation mode (R7). 21% gave a response for 'other', with two relevant recommendations, and two highlighted positives. The suggestions stated that (a) fewer questions were needed (R15), and that (b) it would have been more useful 'for the teacher to use them when needed depending on the pupil's performance' (R11); those who identified positives stated that (a) they preferred the questions in the 'Let's reflect!' activities (R13), and (b) that they found the reflective questions on achievement 'a very creative idea' (R16).

Some reviewers also shared further thoughts in relation to evaluation. These included recommendations such as to use marks alongside the questions, either as numbers, or as small faces showing feelings ('emojis') (R9), and to invite learners to express their feelings about what they have learnt on a 'blank page' (R16), for example through art. A reviewer (R19) suggested simplifying the 'instructions' (perhaps meaning the phrasing/written language of the questions), and another teacher felt that these questions may be 'more a prompt for the teacher' (R13). Finally, it was also stated that 'reflection could be an entirely new concept for teacher and student' (R14).

#### **10.4.3.2 Reflective questions (Let's reflect!)**

Respondents were also asked to provide feedback on the reflective questions used in the 'Let's reflect!' activity boxes. 79% felt that the number of reflective questions in each box was 'about right', while 21% felt that fewer questions were needed. Rating the usefulness of the reflective questions using a Likert scale from 1 to 5<sup>63</sup>, 63% described the reflective questions as 'very useful', 31.5% found them 'quite useful', and one respondent (5%) rated them as 'only slightly useful' (R13). In addition, most respondents (84%) believed that the reflective questions could act as initiators of

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<sup>63</sup> 1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

collaborative discussion between teacher and pupil; 10.5% were unsure ('Maybe') (R7, R15), and one reviewer (5%) claimed that 'it's all up to the teacher delivering the lesson and the pupil's willingness to learn' (R4).

Some suggestions for improvement and further thoughts about the 'Let's reflect!' questions were also provided. These were quite diverse, ranging from suggestions to reducing the number of questions and providing briefer prompts depending on the learner's age and age and personality, to incorporating visual elements to add humour to the questions. 'Exploring the learner's knowledge through the reflective questions' was also proposed, in order 'to clarify concepts or resolve the pupil's questions' (P9); linking back to previous practice was also suggested, such as by asking 'how did you feel [compared to] last time' (R18), to compare with the current lesson and reinforce the pupil's progress.

#### **10.4.4 Elements of written language**

Feedback was also sought on elements relating to the written language of the books. The following sections focus on feedback on the activity instructions (sections 10.4.4.1), on the Bee companion character (section 10.4.4.2) and on the author's voice (section 10.4.4.3).

##### **10.4.4.1 The activity instructions**

In relation to the activity instructions, the reviewers gave feedback on how clear these were, as well as how helpful and informative. According to the responses, there was enough clarity in the activity instructions<sup>64</sup>, with 89% stating that these were 'always' clear; the rest found them clear 'most times'. Similarly, the reviewers regarded the activity instructions as informative/helpful<sup>65</sup> ('always': 89%; 'most times': 10.5%). In addition, most reviewers felt that the learner would understand what they need to do from the written instructions of the activity ('always': 63%; 'most times': 31.5%), however, 5% (one respondent) felt that the learner would 'rarely' understand what to do from the activity instructions (R19). The reviewers also provided examples from

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<sup>64</sup> 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Most times, 5=Always

<sup>65</sup> 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Most times, 5=Always

the books where they felt that the activity instructions were particularly effective, as well as of places where these could be improved.

#### **10.4.4.2 The Bee**

Feedback was sought on the companion character of the Bee. All respondents provided positive comments about their first impression of the Bee and some showed excitement: 'Lovely idea!' (R19), 'I love it!' (R18). They found the Bee 'appealing' (R13), 'sweet' (R14), 'fun' (R14), 'cute' (R16), 'simple and easy to spot on the page' (R19), an 'on-point addition' (R11) and an 'interesting' element (R9). Some respondents also felt that the Bee helps learners to focus, shares useful reminders, helpful advice, and makes instructions more appealing. It was also believed that the Bee would be particularly effective for children and younger learners, and that it represents hard work, commitment, and systematic effort in a nice way. Suggestions were made for the Bee to be featured more within the books, and to add colour to make its visual appearance even more attractive.

Reviewers also appraised the Bee's questions with a Likert scale from 1-to 5<sup>66</sup>. All respondents agreed that the Bee's questions were useful, with 79% describing them as 'very useful', and 21% as 'quite useful'. The Bee's instructions<sup>67</sup> were perceived as 'very helpful' (84%) and 'mostly helpful' (16%).

Reviewers were also invited to share their thoughts about how the Bee might be perceived by learners. Adding to their previous responses, most thought that learners would find the Bee a positive and fun educational element, a useful 'little helper' (P8) and musical companion; it might also be perceived as a mediator between the teacher and the pupil, helping like a friend or as a source of support during practice at home. In addition, some respondents felt that the Bee would be appropriate for all age groups, including older learners, as it has a useful and helpful role; others felt that it might not be as interesting for adolescents or adults.

Teachers shared practical as well as creative ideas about the Bee. Beyond the addition of colour, developing Bee's personality further was also proposed, by

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<sup>66</sup> 1=Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

<sup>67</sup> 1=Not at all helpful, 2=Only slightly helpful, 3=Neither helpful, nor unhelpful, 4=Mostly helpful, 5=Very helpful

changing its appearance and character along the course of the book; introducing another bee in the 'Fun for two' activity was also suggested, to act as the Bee's musical partner in the duets. One reviewer (P4) highlighted the importance of simple instructions and repetition for younger learners, while it was suggested that the Bee could also make an appearance at the end, to inform the users about the next steps beyond this book (for example, if there is a book for the next level).

#### 10.4.4.3 The author's voice

The following two questions were asked to elicit views on the author's voice, alongside prompts to explain briefly:

- (a) how the author's voice came across to you, as the teacher?
- (b) how might the author's voice come across to the pupil?

Various descriptions were provided for question (a), all of which were positive. As illustrated in Table 10.3 below, the responses referred to the author's voice in relation to personality and writing tone, the level of professionalism and pedagogical traits, and to the author-teacher relationship.

Table 10.3 Perceptions of the author's voice

Quoted perceptions of the author's voice	
Author's personality & writing tone	'Very friendly, chatty style' (R14), 'softly and flexibly' (R15); 'upbeat and positive' (R14); 'thoughtful' (R19); 'loves music and cares about learners' (R7); 'patient' (R3); 'pleasant personality' (R9); 'kind' (R8), 'friendly' (R13)
Author-teacher relationship	'The author is leaving me the chance to decide how to structure lessons in a flexible way' (R15); 'the author is sharing with me her ideas on teaching this component' (R18); 'the author is interested in helping the teacher' (R6)
Professionalism	'Really professional' (R11, R16); 'everything is in detail' (R18); 'very careful, clear, measured' (R19); 'with deep knowledge and awareness of what is needed to develop sight-reading skills' (R3); 'appropriate voice, suitable to the audience' (R5); 'very systematic' (R6, R8); 'skilled' (R7); 'analytical' (R8); 'with sense of responsibility' (R8)
Pedagogical elements	'Creative and student-centred' (R16); 'encouraging' (R2, R17); 'not patronising' (R12, R17); 'a helpful guide' (R2); 'interested in helping [...] the learner [...] in an enjoyable way' (R6); 'appropriate goal setting' (R11); 'passionate for the topic' (R8)

Table 10.4 summarises the responses to the second question, asking reviewers how they thought the learner might perceive the author’s voice through the books. Mostly positive traits were identified, with comments referring to the author’s personality, attitude towards the pupil and learner independence, amongst others. Some teachers were unsure how learners might perceive the author’s voice (neutral perceptions); one sceptical opinion was received, stating that the learner may find the author’s voice ‘complicated’ and ‘confusing’ (R19). It would have been interesting to gain more insights on this reviewer’s perspective to understand better which elements might contribute to this perception; however, no further explanation was provided.

Table 10.4 Teachers’ quoted ideas of learners’ perceptions of the author’s voice

Teachers’ quoted ideas of learners’ perceptions of the author’s voice		
Positive perceptions	Personality	‘Happy’ (R14); ‘pleasant’ (R1); ‘good’ (R4); ‘inspires trust’ (R5); ‘kind’ (R8, R12); ‘positive’ (R11)
	Attitude towards the learner	‘Reassuring’ (R14), encouraging (R14, R17); ‘helpful’ (R1); ‘a friend’ (R17); ‘a guide’ (R6); ‘supportive of pupil’s efforts’ (R6); ‘collaborator’ (R7); ‘close to the learner’ (R5)
	Learner’s independence	‘It can be a great guide to the students if teachers are not around’ (R18)
	Other	‘Like the voice of the Bee’s mum’ (R9) ‘good professional level’ (R10)
Neutral perceptions	Not sure	‘Good question, it’s difficult to answer’ (R15); ‘might be perceived in a neutral way by pupils, which is a positive’ (R15); ‘not easy to say’ (R16); ‘I don’t know’ (R2)
	Other	‘Possibly reminding a teacher’ (R3)
Negative perceptions	Complicated. Confusing (R19)	

### 10.4.5 Opening and closing book sections

The survey also invited reviewers’ feedback on the opening and closing sections of the books. Their opinions about the introduction parts ‘A welcome note’ to the learner, ‘A note to the teacher’ and ‘getting to know the book activities’ are outlined in section 10.4.5.1. Feedback was also shared on the terminology section and the list of featured

composers at the end of the books (section 10.4.5.2), as well as on the completion certificate (section 10.4.5.3).

#### **10.4.5.1 Introduction sections**

Reviewers were asked to share their thoughts about how their pupils might perceive the introduction 'A welcome note' to the learner at the start of the books. Most respondents thought that the learners' impression of this introduction would be positive, suggesting that they would find it friendly and encouraging, and that they would be interested and curious about what comes next. They also thought that learners would understand what sight-reading is and its importance as a musical skill, as well as the goals and purpose of this material. The writing tone and the use of the second person were perceived to add immediacy and establish a dialogue between the author and the learner, and some thought that it was short and concise and therefore easy for the learner to read; phrases (such as 'isn't this cool?') were thought to be motivating for the learner. Alongside these, some respondents noted that the introduction to the learner might feel a bit long or complicated, particularly for younger learners, in which case the teacher could summarise its content. It was also mentioned that some learners may not read the note, moving straight on to the Units.

Considering a teacher's potential impression from reading the introduction 'A note to the teacher', the reviewers' comments were predominantly positive. They expressed the view that a teacher reading this part of the introduction would clearly understand the purpose of the book and the rationale of promoting the development of sight-reading skills from an early level. It was stated that teachers may feel that the author is a colleague who respects them, providing flexibility to adapt the material, as well as space for creativity and for the teacher's initiative. Some reviewers thought that this introduction displays professionalism and support to the teacher ('it does not sound like the author is the authority', R6). However, some respondents considered that this introduction may be uninteresting or unnecessary, and referring to the benefits of good sight-reading skills was not needed. Interestingly, two quite contrasting opinions were also expressed: one found the note to the teacher 'a bit too short!' (R13), requesting more reference to research and how the books were

informed, while the second implied that it is perhaps rather long and that a novice teacher 'might feel a bit inadequate reading all of it' (R19). This respondent (R19) also made a useful suggestion about mentioning elements which make this book original in comparison to existing sight-reading publications, such as the observation activity and the duets.

For the section of the introduction, 'Getting to know the activities', the reviewers were asked to give feedback on the clarity of the explanations provided for the different types of activities and the extent to which their purpose would be understood by the teacher and the learner, as well as on the variety of activities and their perceived connections to sight-reading skills. A list of statements<sup>68</sup> was provided for reviewers to select as many options as they felt that best represented their opinions on these aspects.

Almost all respondents (95%) stated that the explanations of the activities were clear and sufficient; just one reviewer (5%) felt that the explanations could benefit from further information. It was believed that the teacher and the learner would generally understand the purpose of each activity, either 'clearly' (63%), or 'to some extent' (10.5%); however, 21% felt that the purpose of each activity might be clear to the teacher but not so much for the learner. Two clarifications were provided through the option 'other', stating that the information for the activities provided in this section would be appropriate for the teacher, but a simpler format and less text might be needed for younger learners, who might not read or remember all the information. In addition, 63% felt that a variety of different activity types has been

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<sup>68</sup> Multiple selection statements: Explanations are clear and sufficient. / Explanations are quite clear but could benefit from further information. / Explanations are not very clear; further information is necessary. / The teacher and the learner can clearly understand the purpose of each activity. / The teacher and the learner may understand the purpose of each activity to some extent. / The teacher may understand the purpose of each activity, but the learner may not. / The purpose of each activity is not clear, either to the learner or to the teacher. / There is a variety of different types of activities. / The types of activities are limited. / The activities look useful and link clearly to sight-reading skills. / The activities look useful, but it is not clear how they link to sight-reading skills. / The activities do not look very useful, although they may link to some sight-reading skills. / The activities look slightly useful, and there seems to be some link to sight-reading skills. / The activities do not look useful, and they do not seem to link to sight-reading skills. / Some activities may benefit further musical skills, in addition to sight-reading. / The activities do not seem to benefit any other musical skills, other than sight-reading. / The activities do not seem to benefit any musical skills, including sight-reading. / Other...



included, while one reviewer (5%) felt that the types of activities are limited. The reviewers' statements also revealed that they perceived the activities clearly linked to the development of sight-reading skills (89%), while 53% believe that further musical skills may benefit from the activities in addition to sight-reading skills.

Most suggestions and further comments focused on the amount of text in the 'Getting to know the activities' section. Although the level of information provided was perceived as useful and necessary, some respondents felt that it might be more appropriate for the teacher, than for the learner, who might not want to read it. The same was stated by one participant about the introduction sections overall ('may be 'skipped over' or ignored by some students', R14). The use of simpler language, less text, more bullet points, and more visual elements summarise the reviewers' recommendations for the introduction sections.

#### **10.4.5.2 Terminology section and list of featured composers**

Reviewers viewed the terminology<sup>69</sup> section at the end of the books positively: 79% described it as 'very useful' and 10.5% as 'quite useful', while two respondents (10.5%) rated this section as 'not at all useful' (R19) and 'only slightly useful' (R13). Views on the list of featured composers were also explored: 84% suggested keeping it in the final version of the book; 16% were neutral towards keeping or removing it from the final version.

#### **10.4.5.3 The certificate**

Reviewers were asked if it would be useful to include the certificate of completion in the final version of the books. 79% responded positively, proposing to keep it in the final version; 10.5% stated that it makes no difference if it is included or not, and one reviewer (5%) responded that it should be removed from the final version (R13). One response (5%) also stated that this certificate would only be appropriate if the books are addressed to children (R14).

Teachers' views on the potential effect of the completion certificate on the pupil were also explored. Most teachers identified positive implications of the certificate, stating that it would provide an incentive for success and achievement, it

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<sup>69</sup> 1=Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

would motivate learners to continue, or that it could be a goal, a milestone for the learner to achieve. The certificate was also perceived as a positive reward, providing encouragement as well as recognition for the pupil's efforts and progress. Some teachers also considered that the certificate would be particularly effective for younger learners, while another teacher also referred to older ages, for which relevant adjustments may be needed in terms of visual presentation. A similar opinion stated that learners may ignore the certificate unless they are very young. One final response referred to the teacher's discernment in using the certificate depending on individual learners (R4).

### 10.4.6 Visual presentation

The respondents' feedback was also requested on the visual presentation of the books. The following sections present their first impressions (section 10.4.6.1), and their views on visual presentation and layout (section 10.4.6.2).

#### 10.4.6.1 First impression from presentation

The reviewers shared their first impression of the books' presentation and visual appearance. As illustrated in Table 10.5 below, relevant strengths were identified, as well as aspects with scope for further development.

Table 10.5 First impressions from presentation (quoted)

First impressions from presentation (quoted)		
Positives	Overall presentation	'Clear' (R15) 'clear and mostly well-spaced out' (R13); 'well-presented and clear layout' (R14); 'professional' (R15); 'simple and basic, but interesting to look at and well-spaced' (R17); 'the book does look professional' (R18); 'of a very high standard' (R3); 'positive and interesting' (R6); 'interesting activities' (R7) 'well-thought out' (R10); 'accessible to children' (R9)
	Pages	'The pages are not crowded with many shapes and designs that can cause distraction for very young students' (R16); 'explanations are detailed' (R15)
	Visual elements	'The font and the idea of Bee is great' (R16); 'the text boxes, the instructions and the Bee are attractive to the learner' (R5); 'excellent design' (R7); 'pleasant' (R9)

First impressions from presentation (quoted)		
	Structure	'Clear structure, consistent throughout the book which makes it easy for the teacher and learner to navigate through the book' (R1)
Improvements	Pages	'I would prefer for activities to be within a page' (R2)
	Text	'Sometimes the explanations under activities were too long' (R15); 'text heavy' (R19); 'some pages are a little bit too wordy' (R18)
	Design & visuals	'The cover page needed to be designed by the experienced designers' (R18); 'needs more colour (R6) and the Bee to stand out even more' (R4); 'adding colour would make the book more attractive even for older learners' (R8)

As illustrated in Table 10.5, positive comments were made about the overall presentation of the books, the layout of the pages and the visual elements, as well as the structure of the book. Overall, the books were perceived as clearly presented, with an appropriate layout, and with logical and consistent structure, which enabled easy navigation across the book. As noted earlier, the inclusion of the Bee was also perceived as a positive element which enhanced the visual presentation, while the simple design, without excessive visual distractions, was also positively appraised. Respondents' first impressions also provided useful feedback on aspects with scope for further improvement. These included the addition of colour, a more professional design of the book cover, and the concision of the written text. Keeping the activities within a page was also recommended; this suggestion possibly referred to containing the examples of each activity within a page, rather than all the activities of each Unit, so that they would not spread across different pages.

#### 10.4.6.2 Visual presentation and layout

The survey also included questions focusing on the visual presentation and the layout of the material. In particular, reviewers were asked to evaluate aspects such as: (a) the level of professionalism displayed by the visual presentation and layout of the books, (b) the balance in the visual appearance of pages, as well as (c) the appropriateness of the font size and (d) of the text formatting. Feedback was provided using a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

Respondents were overall satisfied with the visual presentation and layout of the books, rating it as 'highly professional' (53%), 'of good professional standard' (16%), and 'sufficiently professional' (31.5%)<sup>70</sup>. Focusing on the layout of pages, these were mostly perceived as balanced<sup>71</sup>, with 58% rating them as 'well balanced' and 21% as 'mostly balanced'; the 21% responding 'slightly balanced' suggests that the visual appearance of pages could be improved.

Both text formatting and font size were positively perceived overall and viewed as appropriate. Specifically, the formatting of text<sup>72</sup>, such as titles, headings, use of italicised, underlined or bold words, was rated as 'very appropriate' by 26%, 'mostly appropriate' by 53%, and 'sometimes appropriate' by 10.5%. The font size<sup>73</sup> was predominantly described as appropriate and readable (42% 'very appropriate/readable'; 42% 'mostly appropriate/readable'), while 16% found it 'sometimes appropriate/readable'.

The reviewers also provided examples of pages which they found balanced and visually appealing, or overwhelming and less visually attractive, as well as suggestions for improvement. This provided more insights towards the opinions expressed through the previous ratings. The stated suggestions for improvement proposed:

- using more images and adding colour to the books (R6, R13) to make them more visually attractive (such as for the Bee's words)
- using a larger font size for younger learners (R12)
- using different fonts for headings and more diverse formatting (such as *italics*) to reinforce repeated information (R19), or to make information stand out more (R18)
- avoiding putting 'too much' on a page (R18)
- presenting both parts of the duets in staves of equal size (R14)

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<sup>70</sup> 1=Not at all professional, 2=Slightly professional, 3=Sufficiently professional, 4=Of good professional standard, 5=Highly professional

<sup>71</sup> 1=Not at all balanced, 2=Mostly unbalanced, 3=Slightly balanced, 4=Mostly balanced, 5=Well-balanced

<sup>72</sup> 1=Not at all appropriate, 2=Mostly inappropriate, 3=Sometimes appropriate, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Very appropriate

<sup>73</sup> 1=Not at all appropriate/unreadable, 2=Mostly inappropriate/unreadable, 3=Sometimes appropriate/readable, 4=Mostly appropriate/readable, 5=Very appropriate/readable

- keeping one type of activity per page along with the corresponding ‘Let's reflect!’ question box (R2), so that the same activity would not spread across several pages, particularly if this involved turning the page (R19).

These suggestions will be considered as future developments of the devised resources; the revised ‘Unit’ in section 10.5.3 demonstrates how I would incorporate teachers’ feedback in future revisions of the material.

### **10.4.7 Pedagogical value**

The following sections present the reviewers’ feedback on ways in which they would use the material in their piano lessons, on the extent to which the material promotes an early development of sight-reading skills, and on the groups of pupils for which the books may be appropriate (10.4.7.1). Reviewers also indicated whether they would recommend the books to colleagues and shared reasons for their opinions (10.4.7.2).

#### **10.4.7.1 Application in piano lessons**

Through a multiple selection question, reviewers were asked to select the statements which best described the ways they would use the books in their teaching. Most respondents envisaged using the books, either in a separate sight-reading part of the lesson (42%), or in sight-reading activities which would then evolve into repertoire practice (42%), in one-to-one lessons (58%), or in a group setting (26%). 58% stated that they envisage using the books in combination with other method books or repertoire pieces, and 16% also saw potential for the devised material to be used as a method book itself. Finally, one teacher (5%) claimed that they would also use the books for sight-singing and ‘as a proper beginner book to start with’ (R18).

The respondents also described how much they thought that the books support the embedding and integration of sight-reading from the early levels of piano learning, using a Likert rating scale from 1-5<sup>74</sup>. All respondents perceived that the material serves this purpose (‘very much’: 79%; ‘quite a bit’: 21%). They also shared their opinions about target users, through multiple selections from various groups of learners. Specifically, 79% thought that the books would be appropriate for ‘children

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<sup>74</sup> 1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Sufficiently, 4=Quite a bit, 5=Very much

of any age’, 68% specifically selected the ‘young children’ option, and 47% also found them appropriate for ‘adolescent learners’. The same percentage of reviewers (47%) stated that the material could also be used by ‘adult (beginner) learners’. In addition, 31.5% considered the material appropriate also for learners with specific learning difficulties/special learning needs. Reviewers also felt that the books would be appropriate for learners who are working with a teacher (79%), as well as for those who study music independently (53%).

#### 10.4.7.2 Recommendation to colleagues

A series of questions explored of the reviewers’ perceptions of the pedagogical value of the material. 95% would recommend the books to colleagues and just one reviewer (5%) felt that they may recommend them (‘Maybe’, R11). The reviewers were also prompted to explain their reasons for potentially recommending the books as a resource to colleagues. Their responses referred to aspects which were perceived as strengths of the books, as detailed in Table 10.6:

Table 10.6 Quoted reasons for recommending the books to colleagues

Quoted reasons for recommending the books to colleagues	
<i>The usability and of the books</i>	‘accessible’ (R1), ‘comprehensive’ (R1), ‘user-friendly’ (R6), ‘ease of use’ (R17)
<i>The structure</i>	‘well-written’ (R4), ‘simple, comprehensive structure’ (R2), ‘logical, well-thought out’ (R13); ‘introduces each involved skill separately’ (R8)
<i>The progression of the musical content</i>	‘cohesively progressive’ (R1), ‘the requirements are increased very progressively in terms of difficulty’ (R12), ‘gradual progression’ (R6), ‘the content is aligned with the skills of learners at this level’ (R4)
<i>The goal setting</i>	‘clear goal setting’ (R4), ‘goals are achievable’ (R8)
<i>The activities</i>	‘interesting activities’ (R5), ‘fun’ (R1)
<i>The instructions</i>	‘clear instructions’ (R8); ‘understandable’ (R4); ‘easy to follow’ (R6); (its overall tone) ‘positive, fun’ (R14); ‘encouraging’ (R12)
<i>The focus on the learner</i>	‘friendly towards the pupil’ (R12), ‘self-evaluation’ (R8), ‘reflective sections’ (R17)
<i>The potential for flexible use</i>	‘can be very easily utilized alongside a beginner method book for further support’ (R11); ‘can be used during lessons as a starter or wrap up at the beginning or at the end of the lesson’ (R18)

Quoted reasons for recommending the books to colleagues	
<i>The systematic approach towards sight-reading</i>	'systematic' (R13), 'great methodology' (R12), 'well-researched' (R7, R14)
<i>The contribution to the development of sight-reading skills</i>	'give useful advice on how to help the learner develop their SR skills' (R3), 'focused on key parameters influencing sight-reading' (R12); they cover all the relevant important aspects of sight-reading since the very basis (R15)
<i>The facilitation of musical skills beyond sight-reading</i>	'covering a wide range of musical skills which learners need to develop throughout their music studies' (R5), 'useful for ensemble skills' (R6), 'for the development of all musical skills' (R9)
<i>The originality as a teaching resource</i>	'the duets' (R19); 'there is no other resource for sight-reading' (R4); 'as there is limited resource for sight-reading in my country, this book would be a great help' (R16)

### 10.4.7.3 Student-centred learning, learning independence and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Respondents perceived that independent, student-centred learning is promoted through the books (95% 'yes', 5% 'maybe'). A follow-up question prompted them to explain their responses further, by providing examples of specific book elements which they felt promote independent and student-centred learning.

In relation to student-centred learning, many respondents referred to the books' inclusion of open-ended and reflective questions. The use of reflective questions in particular was mentioned several times, occasionally with strong statements, such as 'reflective questions definitely tend to promote student-centred learning' (R15) and 'The reflective sessions are most useful when it comes to student-centred learning' (R18). The questions were also viewed as opportunities for discussion with the teacher, helping the pupil better to understand their learning process and thus to improve.

The progression of the books and the gradual increase in the level of difficulty were also perceived as student-centred elements, as it was claimed that they enable flexible use of the material and adaptation to the pupil's needs. Use of praise, the positive tone and the encouraging comments presented through the Bee's prompts (R13) and the written text (such as the activity instructions) were considered as 'totally focused on the student' (R14). It was also claimed that the writing style in the second

person create a sense of familiarity and immediacy, encouraging the learner to continue their efforts. One reviewer made the following statement: 'there are many strategies that are suggested for student-centred style of teaching, such as questioning, praising, reflecting and I found them all together in this book' (R16).

In addition, self-evaluation through the reflective questions was perceived as an element promoting independence. Learners' reflections were claimed to lead to self-initiated improvement, while the ability to reflect was perceived as a transferable skill with potential to be applied to other contexts ('able to evaluate their playing even when practising at home' (R3); 'transfer what they learnt to other fields' (R4)). Further elements identified in relation to learning autonomy included comments showing that the books could encourage the learner to think independently, to explore and experiment with different ways of playing. The instructions were also perceived as factors enabling the learner 'to work responsibly and independently' (R9), without necessarily needing the teacher's guidance ('the learner can follow the clear, detailed instructions even without guidance' (R6); 'the instructions are clear and explain what the learner needs to do without needing guidance from a teacher' (R5)).

One further question explored whether the reviewers felt that EDI is promoted/respected through the material. A brief prompt<sup>75</sup> explaining EDI was included for those who may not have been familiar with the term. Most respondents responded positively (79%), while 16% were unsure ('Maybe': 5%, 1 response (R2); 'I don't know': 10.5%, 2 responses (R15, R19)). One response, through the option 'Other' stated that this reviewer did not think that learning disabilities and different religious beliefs are represented (R13). In a question relating to style, some suggestions for including more contemporary music were made, especially from female composers, also including jazz, blues, popular music, or material from film/animation movies; providing contextual information for composers through a brief summary when they first appeared was also proposed.

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<sup>75</sup> The survey question was as follows: 'Do you feel that the book(s) respects inclusion, equality, and diversity? (such as gender identity, cultural background, nationality, religious beliefs, specific learning difficulties, people with disabilities, from minorities, etc.)



## **10.4.8 Overall impressions**

The final questions of the survey explored practical parameters related to the devised books, including commercial aspects such as the book length and a potential price point (section 10.4.8.1). The reviewers' overall impressions of the material were expressed, as well as some final thoughts and suggestions (section 10.4.8.2).

### **10.4.8.1 Length and estimated price**

One of the practical aspects that the reviewers were requested to evaluate was the overall length of the books<sup>76</sup>. 95% viewed the book length as 'appropriate', while 5% felt it was 'too long' (1 response, R13). Linked to this, the reviewers were prompted to suggest a price point which they would consider appropriate for this material if it was available in the market. Their responses provided a wide range of different suggested prices, from £6.99 (R19) up to 50€ (R7). Differences were observed between the international (non-Greek) reviewers, whose suggested prices were between £6.99-£15, compared to the Greek teachers whose recommended prices ranged from 7€ (R12) up to 50€ (R7), with an average of a little over 22€. The lowest suggestion (£6.99) was proposed 'same as (for) similar sight-reading books' (R19), while the explanation provided for one of the two highest price points proposed by the Greek teachers (40€) was that 'there is no other similar book in the Greek market' (R5). These discrepancies are discussed in section 10.5.1.

### **10.4.8.2 Final thoughts and overall impressions**

At the end of the survey, the reviewers were invited to share any final thoughts and suggestions about the material. Some suggestions for further improvement recommended simplifying and editing down the written text, for example with a 'reduced-text' version for younger learners (R14), where a teacher's version could include suggestions for further prompts and questions; a different Bee illustration was suggested for a version for 'older students' (R14). An 'accompanying method/tutor/theory book' was also proposed (R14), to be used alongside the devised material. One reviewer was sceptical about the appropriateness of the books for independent

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<sup>76</sup>Single options: Too long / Appropriate / Too short / Other

learners (R13), while another one would have liked to try the duets in practice to explore whether there are any challenges in their practical application (R19). In addition, one reviewer claimed that they are looking forward to the next levels ('I am looking forward to level two and above' (R18)), and another one provided some enthusiastic congratulatory comments ('Did I mention how excellent I think this is? Well done on all of your incredibly hard work! Such a clever idea to make use of all of these different ideas' (R19)). Finally, one reviewer expressed the desire to translate the books to their own language to be able to use them with their beginner pupils (R16).

The reviewers' overall impressions of the devised material were positive, occasionally accompanied with comments of approval ('excellent (R7), 'excellent impression' (R8), 'excellent and useful' (R17), 'definitely positive!' (R15)). Positive comments were made about the usefulness of the books in fulfilling their purpose by promoting the development of sight-reading as well as general musical skills. The appropriateness of the content to beginner pupils was mentioned ('amazing book for beginners' (R14), also praising the content ('the content is excellent' (R19)). The material was also perceived as 'well thought out' (R13), 'detailed, intelligently researched, thorough' (R14) and 'systematic' (R6). For one reviewer, the material felt like 'a proper book to start with at the beginning' (R18), while some Greek reviewers also described the material as 'innovative' (R5) and 'original' (R6), due to lack of other similar resources ('the first systematic approach [to sight-reading] I have come across' (R6)). Finally, one reviewer expressed the opinion that the books could become commercially available in their current format (R12).

## **10.5 Reflexive discussion**

Recognising the breadth of aspects which could be discussed from the findings of this study, this discussion focuses on three areas emerging from the survey responses: commercial aspects, pedagogical aspects, and personal reflexive considerations. Considering literature on reflexivity, the aim of the following sections is to approach these focus areas from a reflexive perspective (May & Perry, 2017; Denscombe, 2010;

Hellawell, 2006; Bolton, 1997). Therefore, I challenged my own beliefs, personal understandings, and potential biases as the creator of the reviewed material, in order to try to interpret and gain deeper understanding of how the reviewers have understood my approach and my written work, considering their comments and suggested improvements. As previously stated, a revised 'Unit' is provided in response to teachers' feedback, illustrating how I would incorporate relevant suggestions for future presentation of the material (section 10.5.3).

### **10.5.1 Commercial aspects**

A variety of responses from the reviewers addressed commercial aspects of the material which were of particular interest, such as suggestions relating to the visual appearance of the books, its format, or an estimated price point.

In relation to visual appearance, the inclusion of colourful elements was suggested in various points in the survey. It was expressed that use of colour could make the material more visually appealing while supporting visual learners. This was also proposed for the Bee character, along with potential for this to be developed into a defined personality along the course of the books, with relevant adaptations to the illustration. These are interesting suggestions, some of which had been considered prior to the creation of the books, such as using colour or the symbols of note values in the 'Elements per Unit' tables in the book introductions (for example, using the symbol of a minim in the table, instead of writing the word 'minim'); however, considering the encountered limitations (for example, the symbols/fonts used did not appear consistently across the pages and in different file types), it is acknowledged that such developments, as well as the design of a commercial book cover, would require work from a professional graphic designer, which would be an important step for the further development of the material in future publication. Insights into teachers' preferences in terms of format (in print/digital) is another aspect to be considered<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> 11 reviewers stated that they prefer their material in both printed format and digitally (as an e-book); 7 reviewers preferred a printed version exclusively, while one participant preferred the digital version only.

The suggested price points for the book evidenced interesting differences between Greek and non-Greek reviewers. As stated in section 10.4.8.1, international (non-Greek) reviewers suggested prices between £6.99-£15, while a broader range, from 7€ up to 50€, was proposed by Greek teachers. The lowest and highest suggestions were explained by the reviewers: the lowest (£6.99) was considered as the 'same as similar sight-reading books', while the two highest price points were attributed to originality and lack of relevant resources in the Greek context. These discrepancies provide interesting insights towards teachers' perceptions of educational material, drawing links to availability and accessibility of resources. It could be argued that number of available sight-reading publications in the UK may have resulted in a lower price expectation from the reviewers than in Greece, where this is new material, and no other sight-reading resources are available. Questions arise, such as to what extent does the number of available resources affect market prices? Are music books and relevant resources in general more expensive in Greece than in the UK, for example? How are teachers' perceptions of cost influenced by availability and accessibility of resources? Music teachers' criteria and factors influencing their choices from resources on the topic would be another interesting area to investigate. Although such questions are beyond the purposes of the present thesis, further research would be illuminating.

### **10.5.2 Pedagogical aspects**

The reviewers shared their opinions on various pedagogical aspects of the material, demonstrating their perceptions towards and understanding of the underpinning principles and pedagogical parameters employed. It is positive and reassuring that all reviewers found value in the devised material and envisaged using it in their lessons. The different ways in which they felt the books could be utilised is aligned with the recommended use of the material as stated in the introduction sections, which encourage teachers to use the books as flexibly as appropriate, depending on pupils' needs.

The comments made in relation to student-centred teaching, reflection and independent learning indicate that the teachers recognised the pedagogical value of

the material promoting these philosophies. Reviewers' references to specific elements from the books where such underpinnings are evident – for example, the supportive and encouraging writing tone, space for exploration, experimentation, and initiative, as well as to learners' potential use of the material independently – support that my effort to promote a student-centred, facilitative approach has been communicated through the book content. This was a personal challenge identified from the beginning stages of the creative process, demanding constant reflexivity. The statement that 'reflection could be an entirely new concept for teacher and student' was very encouraging, as it would have been a positive accomplishment of the devised material if teachers/learners who are not familiar with reflective practices became initiated to the process and started to approach teaching and learning from this perspective.

In addition, appraisals finding the material useful in promoting a wider variety of musical/instrumental skills beyond sight-reading have been very encouraging from a pedagogical perspective, as I strived for the material to contribute more holistically to the development of beginner piano learners' musical skills. In addition, the purpose of the activities was understood by teachers and linked to the development of relevant skills contributing to effective sight-reading.

Reviewers' recommendations have been helpful in identifying ways in which the material can also be developed further in relation to pedagogical aspects. Further to elements of visual presentation, developments will need to be made in the duet activity ('Fun for two'), particularly to the teacher's part (*secondo*) for visual accessibility purposes. There were also some suggestions to use 'fewer examples', such as in the rhythm or observation activity; however, as explained in Chapter 9, the rationale for including a wide number of musical examples was to provide a plethora of options for teachers and learners to choose from and to use as flexibly as needed, and to prevent feelings of a shortage of musical material. Finally, although it was generally recognised by respondents that the books aimed to represent a wide range of composers and repertoire, I will aim to source further repertoire from female and underrepresented composers in subsequent levels, to promote EDI to an even greater extent.

### 10.5.3 Responding to reviewers' feedback

As stated previously, providing a revised version of the two created books lies beyond the purposes of the thesis. However, a revised 'Unit' is presented below in order to demonstrate ways in which the reviewers' feedback could be incorporated in future revisions/developments of the resources. For this purpose, Unit 2 from the Level 1 book has been revised and presented in section 10.5.3.1.

For the revision purposes, the reviewers' comments and suggestions concerning improvements were examined, leading to two broad feedback categories: (a) general feedback and (b) activity-based feedback. I then considered the potential impact on and contribution of the proposed suggestions in these two categories to the improvement and further development of the material. This reflection enabled me to make editorial decisions while maintaining the creative and pedagogical underpinnings which guided the development of my resources. The reviewers' suggestions for improvement which have guided the revision process of the Unit presented subsequently in this section, are illustrated in Table 10.7.

Table 10.7 Reviewers' feedback incorporated in the revised Unit

<b>Reviewers' feedback incorporated in the revised Unit</b>	
General feedback	To shorten written text
	To simplify activity instructions
	To consider places where meaning could be clearer
	To aim to keep each activity within a page
Activity-based feedback	<i>Building on rhythm</i> • Fewer rhythms needed
	<i>Exploring the keyboard</i> –
	<i>Let's observe!</i> • Half a minute may be too long
	<i>Melodies on the spot</i> • Fewer melodies needed
	<i>Performing at sight</i> –

<b>Reviewers' feedback incorporated in the revised Unit</b>	
<i>Fun for two</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hand position to be indicated with less text and to be more visible</li> <li>• The <i>secondo</i> part to be of the same staff size as the <i>primo</i></li> </ul>
<i>Let's reflect!</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer reflective questions needed</li> <li>• To simplify the wording of the reflective questions</li> </ul>

This process also included deciding whether there were any suggestions which did not feel necessary to include. For example, it was suggested to present the *primo/secondo* duet parts on opposite pages. I decided not to incorporate this, because I believe that this layout would be more challenging for the *secondo* player than the current layout of the music (one part on top of the other). Currently, having the *secondo* part appear under the learner's (*primo*) part would allow the teacher or partner to keep track of the pupil's part more easily than if having to look across a page while playing. The current layout might also enable the learner to have some perception (through peripheral vision) of how their partners' music is progressing, and, therefore, to have a feeling of what they may be likely to hear while sight-reading (for example, if the *secondo* part has more or faster-moving notes, compared to the *primo* part), which would not be possible if the music was spread into two pages. Feedback relating to graphic design (such as the design of the book cover, the addition of colourful elements and of more varied illustrations of the Bee) has not been implemented, as this would concern a potential preparation for publication process and necessitate the contribution of design professionals.

### **10.5.3.1 Revisions and application: Unit 2, Level 1**

The following pages demonstrate a revised version of Unit 2 in the Level 1 book<sup>78</sup>. The revisions incorporate the reviewers' suggestions for improvement, illustrated previously in Table 10.7. In the revision, activity-based feedback has led to activity-

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<sup>78</sup> The revised version of this Unit can be accessed through Appendix 6.

specific amendments, including changes made to the *Let's reflect!* boxes after each activity. In addition, the following general amendments have been made for all activities:

1. The activity instructions have been shortened to reduce the amount of written text and have been simplified to improve clarity of meaning; some additional changes were made to the written text for further clarification.
2. The number of examples has been reduced in the activities where this was suggested (*Building on rhythm*, *Let's observe!*, *Melodies on the spot*), maintaining a sufficient level of variety and practice options.
3. The activities have been presented entirely within the same page, except for *Let's observe!* and *Melodies on the spot*, which spread across three pages (each of which develops within about 1.5 pages).

The following pages present the revised version of Level 1, Unit 2. Due to the parameters/settings of the page layout of the book files, which is different to the layout of the present document, the pages of the revised Unit are presented below as Figures. A description of the amendments made to each activity is also provided. Each figure presents a two-page layout of the activities, as they would appear in a physical (printed) copy of the book (except for the *Melodies on the spot* activity, where a page turn is needed).

**Building on rhythm** (Figure 10.1):

In this activity, fewer rhythms are now included, while maintaining the variety of rhythms and other musical elements, as originally intended. Specifically, this activity now features six rhythms for the learner to sight-read, namely two for each time signature (2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 or C), while it originally included ten rhythms in total (two for 2/4 and 4/4, and four for 3/4). For the accompanying *Let's reflect!* box, the number of reflective questions is reduced to three questions (originally four) and its shape/format has been altered to fit better within the same page; the new version of the question box has replaced its previous version in the other activities as well. In the original version, the reflective questions were the following:



1. How accurately did I play each rhythm?
2. How did I do in counting the rests?
3. Was there anything I found confusing?
4. How did I prepare for each example?

As illustrated in Figure 10.1, question number 3 has been removed so that the questions of this section focus on more specific elements, and the word 'rhythm' has replaced the word 'example' in the final question.

***Exploring the keyboard*** (Figure 10.1):

In this activity, the changes concerned the reflective questions following the music task. Previously, the *Let's reflect!* box included the following questions:

1. How easily did I find the key for each note?
2. How did I do in recognising the notes in each hand?
3. Were there any notes I was unsure about in the new hand position?

As show in Figure 10.1 below, in the revised version the word 'recognising' has been replaced by 'naming' in the second question, and the third reflective question has been shortened; the *Let's reflect!* question box (in the new format) has been moved to the same page as the musical examples.

**UNIT 2**

New elements:  
Hand position

In this Unit, you will be playing in the following hand positions:

Right hand

C above middle C

Left hand

C below middle C

**Building on Rhythm**

Play the following rhythms in any way you prefer. You will find various time signatures, so make sure that you pay attention to each before you start! Remember to think a steady slow pace to start feeling the pulse. While playing each rhythm in your head, don't forget to count the rests carefully.

When you are ready, count a bar in and let's go!

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

**Let's reflect!**

- How accurately did I play each rhythm?
- How did I do in counting the rests?
- How did I prepare for each rhythm?

**Exploring the Keyboard**

You will now practise finding some more notes on the keyboard. You may use the same finger for each key or move your hands to the hand position of this Unit. Can you name each note you play?

Let's start exploring some more!

What similarities and differences can you find between the notes that each hand will play now, compared to the previous hand position? What about their sound?

Right hand

B

Left hand

B

Hands together

A

B

**Let's reflect!**

- How easily did I find the key for each note?
- How did I do in naming the notes in each hand?
- Were there any notes I was unsure about?

Figure 10.1. Revised Building on rhythm & Exploring the keyboard activity (L1, U2)

**Let's observe!** (Figure 10.2):

The feedback on this activity was positive, with one comment concerning the duration of the observation (half a minute), suggesting that this amount of time may be longer than needed. This has been addressed by changing the activity instruction to propose 'about half a minute' of observation time, alongside an additional prompt for the learner to announce the difference if they will have found it sooner. A smiling emoji has been added to the instructions, as a more substantial encouragement to reinforce the claim that learners' observation skills are getting stronger, and some further amendments have been made for more simple phrasing and better clarity of meaning. For comparison purposes, the previous instructions are provided below:

*Observe* the following melodies closely for *half a minute*, to find *one* difference in each pair. Feel confident that you'll gradually start to find this easier, as you have already started to build your observation skills! Remember that the differences might be anywhere, so look carefully!

When you find each, think about how the music would sound in each way.  
 (Original Level 1, Unit 2, p. 23)

In relation to the reflection box, just one edit has been made to the third question for less complexity and more flexibility in terms of content, asking the learner to state differences they found easier/harder to spot. This question was previously phrased as: 'Were there any pairs where it was harder to find the difference?'

**Let's Observe!**

Observe the following melodies closely for about *half a minute*, to find *one* difference in each pair.  
 If you find it sooner, just say it out loud! ☺ This will become easier as your observation skills are already getting stronger! Remember that the differences might be anywhere, so look carefully!  
 When you find each difference, think about how the music would sound in each way.

Try to observe each pair *meaningfully*, to really pay attention to the music, as you will later play these melodies at sight in the next activity!

**Pair 1**

**Pair 2**

**Pair**

**Let's reflect!**

- Was half a minute enough to observe each pair?
- How easily did I find each difference?
- Which was the easiest/hardest difference to find?

**Melodies on the spot**

Time to play at sight again! You have already spent some time preparing the first three melodies before – now observe each of the other melodies for half a minute, too!  
 Remember to repeat the steps to help you sight-read more effectively: try out the *rhythm*, observe closely the notes and other musical elements and try to *hear each melody in your head*. Finally, think a *slow steady pulse* before you begin, so that you play in a comfortable speed.  
 The finger numbers will help you find the correct hand position.

Here you go!

This time also look for *patterns*. These are similarities or repeated elements in the rhythm (rhythmic patterns) or in the pitch of a melody (melodic patterns). It is helpful to find any patterns before you start playing, so that you know what to expect while sight-reading!

Figure 10.2. Revised Let's observe! activity (L1, U2)

**Melodies on the spot** (Figure 10.3):

In addition to the amendments made to the written instructions, the ending of the Bee's text was altered for more simplicity and clarity of meaning. The original instructions were as follows, for comparison with the revised version:

Time to play at sight again! You have already spent some time preparing the first three melodies in the previous activity – now observe each of the other melodies for half a minute, too! During this time, it is important to repeat the preparatory steps, to help you sight-read more effectively. Try out the rhythm, observe closely the new notes and musical elements, try

to hear each melody in your head and think a slow steady pulse before you begin, so that you choose a comfortable speed to play in. The finger numbers will help you place your hands in the new hand position. Here you go! (Original Level 1, Unit 2, p. 25).

In addition, as fewer examples were recommended by one reviewer, two melodies have been removed, resulting in a total of six melodies (originally eight). This also applies to the number of reflective questions, which was reduced by two (originally five questions, now three). The questions which remained in both versions focus on notes, challenges and patterns, which is a concept explicitly addressed in this activity. The questions which were removed, although equally useful, are also presented in further Units in similar phrasing. Some edits were also made to the first question to simplify its wording. The previous questions were:

1. How accurately did I play the notes of each melody in this hand position?
2. Were there any places that I found more challenging?
3. Did I find any patterns? If so, how did it help my sight-reading?
4. How musically did I play each melody?
5. What could I have done better?

Pair

**Let's reflect!**

- Was half a minute enough to observe each pair?
- How easily did I find each difference?
- Which was the easiest/hardest difference to find?

**Melodies on the spot**

Time to play at sight again! You have already spent some time preparing the first three melodies before – now observe each of the other melodies for half a minute, too!

Remember to repeat the steps to help you sight-read more effectively: try out the *rhythm*, observe closely the notes and other musical elements and try to *hear each melody in your head*. Finally, think a *slow steady pulse* before you begin, so that you play in a comfortable speed.

The finger numbers will help you find the correct hand position.

Here you go!

This time also look for *patterns*.  
These are similarities or repeated elements in the rhythm (rhythmic patterns) or in the pitch of a melody (melodic patterns).  
It is helpful to find any patterns before you start playing, so that you know what to expect while sight-reading!

**Let's reflect!**

- How accurately did I play the notes of each melody?
- Were there any places that I found more challenging?
- Did I find any patterns? If so, how did this help my sight-reading?

Page  
turn

Figure 10.3. Revised Melodies on the spot activity (L1, U2)

**Performing at sight** (Figure 10.4):

No changes were made to the musical content of this activity; the primary changes focus on the reflective questions, which are now three instead of six: questions 2 and 6 have been removed, and questions 4 and 5 have been merged. The revised questions now include explore (1) the learner's feelings and perception of their performance (strengths/weaknesses), (2) the elements from the observation time they feel helped their sight-reading and (3) potentially challenging points and ways the learner adapted while playing at sight. Question 2 (original), although useful, could be rather vague to the learner, while the contents of previously question 6 have now been incorporated into revised question 1. The phrasing of question number 3 (original) has also been adapted for more clarity. Again, the *Let's reflect!* box (in its new format) has been moved to fit within the same page as the musical examples of the activity. The reflective questions in the original version were:

1. How do I feel about my performance?
2. How fluent was my playing?
3. Which points from observation helped my sight-reading?

4. Were there any places where I needed to stop or slow down? Why?
5. What did I do then? What can I do in similar cases in the future?
6. Which was the best aspect of my performance and why?

**Let's reflect!**

- How accurately did I play the notes of each melody?
- Were there any places that I found more challenging?
- Did I find any patterns? If so, how did this help my sight-reading?

#### Performing at sight

Now that you have practised sight-reading a bit more, let's try to play these pieces. While you observe each piece, keep looking for patterns. Also, think about the character of the music and the markings on the score that make it sound more musical. You can make *mental notes* about things you observe, so that you remember these better while playing at sight.

Have fun!

Remember not to rush - choose a comfortable speed to be able to play with *flow*!

#### Unison melody no. 2

Bartók, Sz. 107, No. 2  
'Mikrokosmos I'

Steadily



What do markings < and > mean?  
How will you use your technique to achieve this sound?

#### Etude - Study

Lemoine, Op. 37, No. 3

Singing

#### Light rhythmic song

Schumann, Op. 68, No. 3  
'Album for the young'

Not very fast

#### Let's reflect!

- How do I feel about my playing? Think about strengths and weaknesses.
- What helped the most, from what I had observed before playing?
- Were there any places where I needed to stop/slow down? What did I do?

Figure 10.4. Revised *Performing at sight* activity (L1, U2)

### Fun for two (Figure 10.5):

In order to reduce the wordiness of the instructions, a box was added to describe the hand position of each player, which now can be found on the page more easily than before. The text of the original instructions was as follows:

It's time for the exciting duets! This time the music you will read at sight is in the new hand position of this Unit. However, for both of these duets, you will need to move both of your hands on the next (higher) C, so that you can feel comfortable while playing (left hand fifth finger on middle C, right hand thumb on C above middle C). As these pieces are slightly longer, you might need some extra time to observe each. This is absolutely fine! Apply what you've learnt to prepare each piece *without rushing* – this can make your preparation more effective and meaningful! Before you start

playing, remember to count one bar aloud, so that you both know when to start! Let's make some music together! (Original Level 1, Unit 2, p. 28).

The size of the *secondo* part has also been changed into the same font size as the *primo* part to enhance visual accessibility, as suggested, thereby allowing the *secondo* player to read the music with greater ease. The text explaining the authors' initials ('EP\*') to indicate which pieces I composed for the book has been shortened to fit within the page and the number of reflective questions has also been reduced; three questions appear, as opposed to the original seven questions stated below:

1. How did we/I feel about this performance?
2. What makes us/me feel this way?
3. How did our collaboration change this time, compared to Unit 1?
4. Did we meet any challenges? If so, how did we overcome these?
5. What was the best aspect of this performance?
6. How collaborative did I/we feel during playing? In which ways?
7. What do we want to achieve in our next duets?

Specifically, questions 1 and 2 (original numbering) were removed, as similar questions were asked in the preceding *Performing at sight* activity; similarly, the focus of questions 6 and 7 is also explored in the *Let's reflect!* boxes of the duet activity in further Units (e.g. Unit 4 and 6). In addition, the order of (original) questions 4 and 5 has been reversed to prioritise the positive reflections on the partners' collaboration (revised questions 2 and 3) and the phrase 'best aspects of this performance' has been adapted to 'best aspects of our playing' to make this question resonate with the learner on a more personal level. Finally, the *Let's reflect!* box has been moved to fit within the same page as the duets; however, it should be acknowledged that this may not be possible for Units with more or longer duets than this revised Unit. This also applies to the *Performing at sight* activity.

## Fun for two

Time for the exciting duets! These pieces are slightly longer, so you may need some extra time to observe them. This is absolutely fine! Repeat the steps you have learnt so far and prepare each duet *without rushing*. Remember to count one bar aloud, so that you both know when to start!

Let's make some music together!

It's nice to talk with your partner about the piece before you play. This way you can exchange interesting ideas!

**Hand position**  
Left hand: fifth finger on middle C  
Right hand: thumb on C above middle C

**Melody**  
Happily  
Kabalevsky, Op. 39, No. 1  
'Pieces for children'

**Theme and variation**  
Slowly  
EP\*

### Let's reflect!

- How did our collaboration change this time, compared to Unit 1?
- What were the best aspects of our playing?
- Did we meet any challenges? If so, how did we overcome these?

\* The letters 'EP' above some pieces in the 'Fun for two' activity are the initials of my name/surname. When you see them, you will now know that I have composed these duets for you and your partner. I hope you enjoy them!

**Congratulations!**

Well done for completing Unit 2!

Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.

### Unit 2

I learnt...

I improved...

I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...

What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...

Figure 10.5. Revised *Fun for two* and *Congratulations!*

For the *Congratulations!* page, no changes were made, except for the addition of a dashed frame around the reflective table.

## 10.5.4 Reflexive considerations

The reflexive considerations presented in this section relate to some opinions expressed by the respondents, as well as to my personal approach to reflexivity during this survey and analysis of feedback.

Questions exploring reviewers' perceptions towards aspects such as the author's voice, or the usefulness of particular elements of the material (for example the terminology section and the list of featured composers), as well as questions about whether they would recommend the books to colleagues and why, or how they thought that student-centred, independent learning and EDI are promoted through the books, link to my reflexivity as a researcher-creator. I envisaged that such questions would help me to become aware about how my intentions or my identity as the author are perceived by the respondents. More broadly, I sought to explore how other people perceive material that I have created, how these perceptions link to my own, and to realise how aligned these perceptions are, with an ultimate goal to



develop our common point of reference, namely the devised sight-reading material, to a greater extent.

One comment about the author's voice was particularly interesting, as they believed the learners may perceive it as 'Complicated. Confusing'. It would have been useful to have received further explanation about this comment, which contrasted with the rest of the received responses, in order to understand in more depth the elements that this respondent thought could create this impression to learners. Two respondents rated the terminology section as 'not at all useful' and 'only slightly useful' respectively. Reflecting on these responses, perhaps these reviewers had not considered the potential use of this section by learners who are working alone, or who need to remind themselves of the meaning of terminology without the presence of a teacher, such as during practice at home. Further to this, asking respondents why they thought the list of composers or the terminology had been included, how the learner might benefit from these, or how they could be utilised, may have been more useful alternative questions. Similarly, there was scope for more clarity in the question asking whether the reviewers felt that EDI is promoted through the material. Linking this question more explicitly to repertoire and the composers featured in the books would have provided more clarity about what EDI refers to in this context and could potentially have elicited more focused feedback.

Overall, this review process has demanded constant researcher reflexivity, due to the nature of this research project involving the critical appraisal of my material. I have strived to continuously overcome personal biases linked to my role as the creator of the reviewed material and my personal perspective towards it. Therefore, I made conscious effort to maintain a reflexive, quasi-outsider perspective towards the reviewers' perceptions of my material, in order to be able to interpret findings from their feedback objectively, rather than influenced by my personal background. I also aimed to maintain openness to critique by welcoming constructive criticism and by perceiving critical comments as potential for further development and continued growth, rather than as 'failures' or shortcomings. This reflexive approach has led to my understanding that the polyphony and diversity of opinions expressed from the reviewers may be mirrored by a larger community of music teachers, where different

backgrounds are highly likely to create different perceptions towards my material. Accepting that in addition to the availability of material, choice of resources is influenced by individuality of both teacher and the envisaged learner and acknowledging that what may work for someone may not work, or may work differently for someone else, has been another useful personal learning point for me as a researcher-creator. Finally, reflexivity has also enabled me to lower my resistance in recognising and accepting positive feedback and identified strengths, as affirmation of the effort put into creating the material.

## **10.6 Summary**

This chapter presents the findings from the final research project within this thesis, an evaluative survey which collected feedback on the devised sight-reading material. International and Greek piano teachers reviewed the two created books (in English or translated in Greek by the author) sharing their perceptions of the musical content, the progression of the material, as well as aspects relating to visual presentation and writing style. Pedagogical parameters and underpinnings of the material were also appraised, and suggestions for further developments were provided. Commercial and pedagogical aspects, as well as personal reflexive considerations were also discussed, including a revised 'Unit' demonstrating how I would utilise the received feedback in future revisions of the material. The final chapter, Chapter 11, summarises the research addressing the research questions and findings, and details a devised model for curriculum design; the thesis concludes by identifying its originality, implications, limitations, as well as potential for further research, dissemination and impact.

## **CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the research, questions and outcomes (section 11.1), by analysing the model for curriculum design that has been devised as a result (section 11.2), and by highlighting parameters such as the originality and educational impact of the research (section 11.3), and implications for the sight-reading material, the research context, and the wider domain (sections 11.4-11.4.3). Limitations are also acknowledged (section 11.5), as well as potential for further research, dissemination, and impact (section 11.6).

### **11.1 Research summary, research questions and outcomes**

This research has explored sight-reading in the context of Greek Conservatoire music education, resulting in the creation of the first resources for sight-reading to be developed for the Greek context, focusing on the piano. The purpose of the research has been to create educational material for sight-reading, in order to support the development of sight-reading skills of piano learners in Greece, considering the absence of relevant material in my home country for all instruments, including the piano. The insufficiencies identified through examination of the formal operational regulations of Conservatoire music education (Chapter 1), where no references are made to sight-reading except for relevant assessment in the advanced levels of piano studies, and the complete lack of a sight-reading curriculum, made the need for relevant support even more pertinent. Previous personal experience as a music learner in this context, as a postgraduate student in the UK and as a piano teacher and researcher in both contexts – including previous personal (MA) research focusing on pianists – highlighted the necessity for further research to gain deeper insights on the topic, in order to support teachers and learners in this context through an informed and systematic framework for developing sight-reading skills in a continuum across all levels, setting the foundations from the early levels upwards.

The primary aim of the research, to create sight-reading material to support piano teachers and learners in Greece in developing sight-reading skills from the first

levels of piano studies, led to an overarching research question (Research question 1), exploring what a sight-reading resource would need to contain in order to provide this support; four further research questions were generated by considering the pedagogical underpinnings and aims of the thesis:

**Research question 1 (overarching aim):**

What would a resource need to contain, in order to support beginner piano learners in developing sight-reading skills in the Greek Conservatoire context?

**Research question 2:**

How is sight-reading presented in the piano syllabi of international examination boards, and how is progression developed within the first grades?

**Research question 3:**

How do instrumental teachers perceive sight-reading in the Greek Conservatoire context, beyond piano teachers? (Study 1)

**Research question 4:**

What are the processes involved in creating sight-reading material, from the perspective of expert authors of existing sight-reading publications? (Study 2)

**Research question 5:**

How would piano teachers evaluate sight-reading material, the creation of which has been informed by literature and by the findings of the previous research questions? (Study 3)

The pedagogical output of the research comprises two sight-reading books for beginner piano learners, devised in Greek and in English, which encapsulate the combined findings and insights gained from the various steps of the research and from existing research and music pedagogy literature. The devised material was informed by pedagogical consideration of the research context (Chapter 1), an in-depth literature review (Chapter 2), obtaining and analysing the views of conservatoire instrumental teachers on sight-reading (Chapter 5), reviewing sight-reading publications and consulting expert international creators of sight-reading material (Chapter 6), and a comparative analysis of the piano sight-reading requirements of specific examination boards (Chapter 7). The creation of these books, detailed and

presented in Chapters 8 and 9, with teachers' evaluation of the material appraised in Chapter 10, has been imperative for initiating change in sight-reading pedagogy in the Greek context, and provides an informed framework for producing further sight-reading resources in Greece. As a further result, a model for curriculum design has been developed through the different stages of the thesis and research, which is analysed in section 11.2; prior to this, the individual research questions are addressed.

### **11.1.1 Research question 1**

The overarching aim of the research was to explore what a resource would need to contain in order to support beginner piano learners in developing sight-reading skills in the Greek Conservatoire context. Considering the absence of sight-reading resources in the Greek context, the creation of relevant material appears vital to support piano learners and teachers in Greece, within as well as outside Conservatoire music education, such as in private lessons. In addition, considering the absence of published research concerning the processes involved in the production of music education resources, and specifically sight-reading resources, this research and the steps taken to create this material could provide an informed framework supporting educators and/or composers – in Greece and beyond – who may be interested in developing resources for sight-reading or other musical material for educational purposes.

For the exploration of this research question, sight-reading research and music pedagogy literature were examined (Chapter 2), and further informative insights have been acquired from the three research studies of the thesis (Chapters 5, 6 and 10); awareness has also been gained through the review of published sight-reading material (Chapter 6) and through appraisal of the piano syllabi of international music examination boards (Chapter 7), alongside considerations relating to the research context (Chapter 1). The main output from this overarching question has been the two sight-reading resources for piano beginner learners in Greek Conservatoires, presented (Appendix 6), analysed (Chapters 8 and 9) and appraised by piano teachers (Chapter 10), within this thesis. The pedagogical considerations which emerged in relation to research question 1 concern themes discussed in previous chapters, such

as the early development of sight-reading skills (see also sections 2.3.1, 5.5.4, 8.3.1 and 11.1.1.1), the progression of the material (see also: sections 6.6.1, 8.5 and 11.1.2, Research question 2), the development of various musical skills (section 2.4), the acquisition of supporting strategies (sections 2.4 and 5.4.3.3) and self-regulation (section 11.1.1.2).

#### **11.1.1.1 Facilitating an early development of sight-reading skills**

Particularly in relation to the early development of sight-reading skills, this research is in agreement with pedagogical literature supporting this concept (Arthur et al., 2020; Spanswick, 2014; Kopiez & Lee, 2008). The Greek Conservatoire instrumental teachers of Study 1 shared the same notion, that developing sight-reading skills from the beginner levels of instrumental studies could facilitate the integration of training and further development of relevant skills within the subsequent levels (Chapter 5). As teachers proposed, the introduction of sight-reading exams in the earlier levels would enable monitoring the development of sight-reading skills across the different levels of Conservatoire instrumental studies. Similarly, many of the reviewed sight-reading publications are addressed to piano beginners and the early levels/grades of piano learning, including published material by the interviewed authors. Therefore, it is envisaged that the devised sight-reading material would enable the underpinning of sight-reading skills from beginner levels upwards, setting the foundations for gradual embedment of relevant practices within higher levels of piano studies, which is currently unsupported. Particularly for the Greek Conservatoire context, where the inclusion of sight-reading assessment only in the advanced piano levels suggests that sight-reading skills are perceived as equivalent to the learners' overall playing skills, the creation of sight-reading resources for earlier levels is even more pertinent. Considering also the broader lack of available sight-reading resources for learners in Greece, the devised material will serve the wider purpose of supporting others at an early level, for example learners/teachers within private lessons or in other music education settings beyond the Conservatoires.

### **11.1.1.2 Self-regulation**

Within the devised sight-reading resources there has been explicit focus on developing learners' reflective skills systematically, through reflective questions after each activity; this is a unique characteristic of such material (unobserved in other sight-reading publications), inviting the learner to engage in metacognitive processes. Self-regulation in learning will also be facilitated by reinforcing the conscious application of the proposed sight-reading strategies. The concept of self-regulation has been explored through research in music education contexts, alongside the effect of self-regulation on musical development (Cheng & Southcott, 2022; Philippe et al., 2020; McPherson et al., 2018; Miksza et al., 2018; Pike, 2017; Varela et al., 2016; Evans, 2015; Leon-Guererro, 2008). Self-regulation practices have also been associated with motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation (Schatt, 2023; Woody, 2021; Pike, 2017). Self-regulation is inextricably connected to conscious and deliberate use of strategies, appropriate planning, and self-reflection, aiming to further development; therefore, motivation, reflection, and self-regulation appear to be co-dependent (McPherson et al., 2018; Miksza et al., 2018; Pike, 2017; Leon-Guererro, 2008). For young learners in particular, the development of self-regulation needs to be supported with relevant strategies, and the role of the teacher is important in focusing on the development of such self-regulatory strategies of learning, instead of only the outcome of the performance (Philippe et al., 2020; McPherson & Renwick, 2011).

Self-reflection and self-regulatory processes are also proposed in the context of sight-reading skills development (Fisher, 2010; Harris & Crozier, 2002; McPherson, 1994). McPherson (1994) has perceived self-regulatory approaches as a trait of skilled sight-readers, exhibiting the ability to observe meaningfully the music in order to collect information to inform their performance at sight, the ability to identify challenging sections and practise them silently to find ways of overcoming potential difficulties, the ability to remain focused while continuing to observe their playing, and the ability to self-evaluate their performance during and after the sight-reading process. Establishing self-evaluation processes for sight-reading is also suggested, by reflecting on performance, addressing issues and challenges, but also identifying

strong points in order to avoid focusing only on the negatives and leading to potential discouragement (Harris & Crozier, 2002).

In the devised resources for this thesis, the inclusion of self-reflective questions (sections 8.4 and 9.4.1) was positively perceived by piano teachers, who identified the potential of the reflective questions to initiate further discussion between the teacher and the learner; it was also noted that the concept of reflection might be new to some learners (see also: sections 10.4.3.2 and 10.4.7.3). As such considerations regarding self-regulation, motivation, and reflection, are primarily linked to the process of teaching and the interactions between the teacher and the learner, the devised material has been unique in transferring them to the context of educational material and resources. The created resources facilitate the development of sight-reading skills from a perspective which explicitly promotes self-regulatory learning, conscious application of strategies, engagement in reflective practices, and progress through a sense of achievement. The pedagogical value of this approach may find relevance in further contexts relating to the music curriculum, for the piano and for other instruments, in Greece and beyond, encouraging the embedment of the above considerations more widely within the construction of music syllabi and in the development of further educational resources, as well as in pedagogical practice through the teacher adopting the use of these strategies more generally in other areas of their work with learners.

### **11.1.2 Research question 2**

Research question 2 sought to explore sight-reading within the piano syllabi of international exam boards, and the development of the progression of the musical elements within the first grades. The necessity for a methodical approach through systematic sight-reading training, with gradual upgrading of the level of difficulty, and appropriately aligned with learners' overall musical skills has been highlighted by literature (Spanswick, 2014; Zhukov, 2014a, 2014b; Macmillan, 2010; Mainz & Hambrick, 2010; Kopiez & Lee, 2008; Lehmann & McArthur, 2002; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996, 1993) and supported by the interviewed authors of sight-reading



publications (Chapter 6), who shared their processes for developing progression within their resources.

Valuable insights were also gained from the systematically structured and detailed curricula of the examined boards (Chapter 7), raising my awareness towards parameters which informed my endeavour in establishing my own new curriculum; the observed variations of approaches and discrepancies between the different boards were also illuminating. As envisaged, this enhanced my understanding of practical aspects relating to the upgrading of relevant requirements. Following the Study 2 authors' advice to not limit myself within the exam boards' parameters, I was encouraged to go beyond these and establish my own systematic progression within the developed curriculum, focusing on the Greek context and considering the pedagogical aims and needs of learners and teachers within this context. As suggested through piano teachers' review of the devised books (Chapter 10), the progression of the material was viewed as appropriate overall, irrespective of any differences between the teachers in terms of cultural backgrounds or teaching contexts.

This structured approach towards progression could provide the potential for expansion for further instruments and the creation of sight-reading resources beyond the piano, as occurs in the exam boards and in the material of some of the interviewed authors who have also produced resources for other instruments. This, in turn, could contribute to a holistic, overarching sight-reading curriculum, supporting the development of relevant skills across all Western-classical instruments in Greek Conservatoires.

### **11.1.3 Research question 3**

Research question 3 explored Greek Conservatoire instrumental teachers' (beyond piano teachers) perceptions of sight-reading. This revealed a lack of relevant training in the participants' experiences as learners, as well as different levels of understanding of the formal regulations for Greek Conservatoire sight-reading. This may suggest that similar discrepancies might be evident in their interpretation of the regulations, as well as in their teaching practices. The instrumental teachers claimed to rely on their own initiative, informed by their experiences, and emphasised the need for support

in relation to sight-reading, calling for changes in the curriculum, methodology and the provision of resources. The creation of the present material may address such needs for change, by initiating the development of sight-reading resources, starting from the piano, with potential for expansion to further instruments. In addition, the progression of the material in these two beginner levels and in the envisaged two further levels (detailed in Chapter 8), could contribute to establishing the foundations for the development of a systematic sight-reading curriculum cross all levels of study, not only for the piano but for further instruments as well. These educational implications are further discussed in section 11.4.

#### **11.1.4 Research questions 4 and 5**

This section addresses Research questions 4 and 5, exploring authors' experiences in creating sight-reading material (Research question 4) and piano teachers' evaluation of the devised sight-reading books (Research question 5).

Adding to the observations from the review of published sight-reading material (section 6.2), the authors' creative experiences provided further insights towards the inclusion of elements in their publications which contribute to a structured approach and to learners' motivation and engagement with the material. The review and the authors' interviews highlighted the importance of a gradual, comprehensively structured and achievable progression of the material, and the need for a systematic approach to the development of sight-reading skills. Further considerations concerned the use of a casual writing style and friendly tone (including humour), visual elements (such as a book character companion or ratings of performance through emojis) and collaborative opportunities (such as through duets).

These insights have been considered alongside my personal pedagogical considerations and principles. I strove to approach sight-reading in a supportive way, considering that it is often regarded as a challenging or less-enjoyable area of piano studies. Therefore, I established a gradual and logical progression of the material in order to make the activities feel achievable and thereby facilitating the learners' sense of accomplishment. I also designed different types of activities, some of which might be perceived as games by the learners, such as the observation and the rhythmic

activity, including contexts for collaboration and enjoyment, such as the duets. The illustration of the Bee could make the material appealing to learners, as well as the certificate of completion at the end of the books, particularly for younger beginners. The written language of the books, through the activity instructions, the author's voice and the prompts of the Bee also sought to provide encouragement in a positive tone, which would affirm the learners' efforts and give them confidence to continue working towards developing their sight-reading skills. These elements were generally perceived positively by the reviewers, who felt that overall the material provides encouragement in a friendly and supportive manner, includes elements for enjoyment and creates a sense of achievement and.

The approach towards the musical material selection, beyond the music I composed or adapted from existing compositions for the purposes of the sight-reading activities, included music of cultural relevance (section 8.3.5) as well as from under-represented composers, which derived from my awareness of EDI considerations (section 8.3.6). This has been an original contribution of the devised sight-reading resources, as such elements were not observed in the review of sight-reading publications nor highlighted in the authors' interviews, although the value of including cultural references was recognised by some authors (section 6.5.2.4). My pedagogical approach of promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), was acknowledged in the piano teachers' survey responses (section 10.4.7.3). According to these, the musical material of the created resources can be utilised by piano teachers and learners both in Greece and outside and can find relevance not only within the Greek context, but also in other cultural contexts, educational settings and music education systems. The same applies for the overall progression of the material, which was perceived as appropriate and systematic from piano teachers within and outside the Greek context. The piano teachers also appreciated the inclusion of the duets, suggesting that this element of the books also supports further skills by providing opportunities for learners to benefit from collaborative (ensemble) playing, which may not as frequently be feasible/available for piano learners as for other (such as orchestral) instruments, as a focus on solo performance may be prioritised.

From an educational perspective, the empathetic, supportive, motivational, and informed way of approaching the development of sight-reading skills proposed through the devised material and curriculum could also find applicability and relevance to other aspects of music teaching, by promoting the acquisition of appropriate learning strategies, self-regulation and by facilitating skills development through reflection on the learning process and experiences. The importance of the research-informed pedagogical underpinnings of the material was also valued by the piano teachers, pertaining to the promotion of student-centred learning, the acquisition of strategies and engagement into (self-) reflective practices which facilitate self-regulatory learning. This approach could potentially act as a model for producing resources for sight-reading, as there is a notable lack of published research on how to produce relevant resources and curricula; this could also find more application to the development of music education resources in general, as well as material for other musical skills, from a pedagogical perspective.

#### **11.1.5 Considerations beyond the research questions**

This section addressed further considerations extending beyond the research questions, concerning the use of technology and EDI. Firstly, research and literature have identified benefits from the use of technology in educational settings, as well as in the context of sight-reading through digital and online apps (Pierce et al., 2021; Zhe, 2021; Bovin, 2018). Despite potential benefits relating to learners' interest and motivation, it can be argued that exclusive reliance on digital material, such as sight-reading apps, may not be appropriate for or applicable to every context. For the Greek context in particular, use of online apps and digital material are largely dependent on the infrastructure of each region, while the extent to which their use would be effective would also depend upon practical parameters. Such parameters relate particularly to accessibility, for example in terms of Internet access (Kokkinidis, 2022) and digital devices availability, cost, and the language barrier, amongst others.

For beginner learners, further parameters for consideration would concern their ability to use an app effectively, for example without using the same sight-reading parameters every time; challenges arising from careless use – for example as

a meaningless game rather than a purposeful sight-reading activity – as well as questions relating to self-evaluation and reflection. Therefore, although digital apps may be appealing to learners, exclusive use of such resources does not appear to be possible or desirable within the Greek context. Therefore, not only for Greek Conservatoire music education, but also in relation to other music education settings, it could be argued that printed resources cannot be replaced by apps or digital material, which may work more appropriately as complementary material to printed sight-reading books. The responses of the piano teachers who participated in the evaluative survey review of the devised sight-reading material suggest that printed resources are still relevant and perceived as useful, as according to their responses only one teacher expressed preference for a digital version of the material only (e-book), while 18 participants preferred a printed format, either exclusively (7 reviewers) or combined with an e-book version (11 reviewers).

Secondly, the employed approach towards the selection of repertoire from an EDI-promoting perspective, particularly in relation to under-represented composers, such as women composers and composers of colour, is envisaged to initiate discussion within the lesson, between the teacher and the learner, but also amongst colleagues. This may also function as a starting point for individual as well as collective reflection on established repertoire, repertoire choices, and selection criteria. Thinking about aspects of inclusion in music choices could be facilitated, as well as in relation to aspects beyond repertoire. The absence of revisions or updates in the piano syllabus, as well as the syllabus for other instruments, in the Greek Conservatoire context since the Royal Decree of 1957, supports further the value of the devised material, by opening a broader discussion to further repertoire concerns, such as the omission/exclusion of contemporary repertoire composed after 1957.

Finally, despite the increased interest of research in EDI and repertoire choices in recent years (Bernard & Talbot, 2023; Abbazio et al., 2022; Griffiths, 2020; Hess, 2019; Lam, 2018) and exam boards' adaptations to include relevant repertoire possibilities in performance examinations, such as those of the ABRSM detailed in Chapter 8, this remains an under-researched area in the Greek context, and, unfortunately, potentially also an aspect which is not yet emerging as of wide concern

in relation to instrumental studies. Therefore, it is hoped that the devised material would draw attention to such concerns and attract music teachers' interest in challenging established and traditional repertoire by exploring further music and composers, from an EDI perspective.

## **11.2 Discussion of the curriculum development process**

The different stages of the thesis and research led to a curriculum development process and thereby to a model for curriculum design as a result, which forms one of the principal contributions of this research. Through the process of creating the sight-reading resources, particularly through the stages of preparing and mapping out the underpinning principles, progression and contents, but also through the stages which came after the completion of the resources, a four-step process of curriculum design was developed. These steps include the processes of research, consultation, design, and evaluation, analysed in more depth in the subsequent sections (sections 11.2.1-11.2.4, respectively).

### **11.2.1 Step 1: Research**

The first step of this devised model for curriculum design comprises thorough and comprehensive research. The purpose of this step is to acquire an in-depth understanding of the topic of interest, which will inform and contribute to the curriculum development by providing the basis upon which its foundations will be established. In this thesis, parameters linked to sight-reading skills and pedagogy have been the main focus of the 'research' step, which has taken place in three levels, which may/may not follow this order; it is also possible that they may unfold simultaneously:

- (1) studying literature sources
- (2) exploring the context
- (3) examining what already exists in similar contexts elsewhere.

The first level of 'research' focuses on extensive studying of literature sources, in order to acquire an in-depth, holistic understanding and informative knowledge towards the topic. In the present thesis, this process has included (a) research findings

on sight-reading from the fields of music education and music psychology, and (b) pedagogical recommendations offered by music pedagogy sources, in order to explore research on the topic of sight-reading from a range of perspectives. On one hand, music psychology research approaches sight-reading by focusing on aspects such as the eye function, the cognitive mechanisms involved in the development of relevant skills and traits of expert/non-expert sight-readers, amongst other aspects. On the other hand, music education sources seem to focus more on pedagogical aspects, including sight-reading strategies, challenges and approaches, amongst others; the same applies to music pedagogy (pedagogy books, professional magazines, etc.), which provide recommendations for teaching practices and approaches – based on intuition, traditional approaches or on research findings, to a greater or lesser extent.

After a comprehensive understanding of existing literature has been achieved, the step of ‘research’ includes the exploration of the research context. As previously, the purpose is to understand deeply the circumstances and underlying framework which concerns the intended curriculum, including formal and legislation documents (if applicable), the wider music education system, as well as strengths and potential inefficiencies. Extending the research beyond the existing framework, into the community of active practitioners within the specific context is likely to deepen understanding even further, through insights and input gained by those who are immediately involved in the educational process. In the present research, this took place initially through a detailed examination of formal legislation documents concerning the operation of Greek Conservatoires and policies relevant to sight-reading, from 1942 onwards (Chapter 1, section 1.3.3). Further to this, the views and experiences of active practitioners in this context, namely Conservatoire instrumental teachers (beyond the piano), were explored to gain insights about how they experience sight-reading teaching and learning, their approaches to sight-reading, how they feel about the existing framework and the lack of support and resources, as well as potential suggestions for change.

Moving beyond the specific context by examining relevant approaches in similar contexts elsewhere concludes the ‘research’ step of the devised model of curriculum design. The purpose of this level of ‘research’ is to gain awareness of

existing approaches towards the topic of interest beyond the examined context, by coming into contact with and exploring relevant approaches, and/or established frameworks, systems and curricula which may have been developed in other countries or regions. A critical approach towards established systems/curricula could enable understanding of their underlying principles and philosophies, as well as of parameters which may/may not be of relevance or applicable to the specific context. In the present thesis, this was undertaken by examining existing sight-reading publications from 1950 to date (section 6.2), and by exploring sight-reading specifications and marking criteria through a comparative analysis of piano syllabi from internationally established music examination boards (Chapter 7).

Overall, the 'research' step of this process of curriculum development aims at the acquisition of an in-depth, detailed, comprehensive and holistic understanding of the topic from multiple perspectives, in order to provide a robust and well-informed basis for the development of the curriculum foundations.

### **11.2.2 Step 2: Consult**

The second step of the proposed process for curriculum design includes consultation from experts in the field. In this thesis, the experts were international authors of widely-used sight-reading publications, consulted through a robust interviewing and analytic process in order to gain insights towards their creative experiences and processes involved in developing their resources. As detailed in Chapter 6, the authors reflected on their experiences, and through their reflections also shared pieces of advice and parameters to consider in the process of creating this type of educational material. The input and consultation from the experts provided illuminating insights for the process of devising my own material and the aligned curriculum and, therefore, has been an invaluable step of this process.

It may be useful to acknowledge that parts of the 'research' step may be perceived to some extent as overlapping with the consultation process; for example, the music pedagogy literature proposing specific sight-reading strategies, the approaches of existing sight-reading publications and the curricula/piano syllabi of examination boards. In addition, the Study 1 interviews or informal conversations with



colleagues (piano/instrumental teachers) might be perceived as consultation on a secondary level. These sources indeed provided useful points of awareness for the process of developing my curriculum; however, 'consultation' in this step refers predominantly to the process of dialogue with the experts in the domain of creating sight-reading material.

### **11.2.3 Step 3: Design**

In this devised model for curriculum development, designing the curriculum and corresponding materials forms the third step of this process, encompassing the insights and understanding gained by the previous steps of 'research' and 'consult'. These may be revisited and reconsidered, and the parameters of 'design' may be adapted through a process of continuous reflection on own/personal understanding, values and principles, amongst others.

In this thesis, the process of designing the curriculum began by establishing the underlying principles. This included making decisions such as determining the pedagogical underpinnings of the curriculum, the starting point and the structure of the subsequent levels, the goals and corresponding musical elements to be featured within each level, the marking or achievement criteria, and deciding on a mode of evaluation (in this case, the reflective questions). Linked to this, further decisions were made about the corresponding sight-reading material in relation to this curriculum, concerning aspects such as the range of musical material, the types of activities which would contribute to the envisaged goals and underpinning pedagogical approaches.

Overall, the 'design' step of the curriculum has required much experimentation, brainstorming, thinking in great levels of detail, meticulous planning and note-taking. It has been a long process of planning, of generating ideas which were constantly re-evaluated through reflection, resulting on their affirmation, adaptation or rejection. The sources and conclusions arrived at from the previous steps, of 'research' and 'consult', were revisited during the process of design and informed/guided the decisions made for the devised curriculum. The actual process of putting onto paper the envisaged structure and further specifications of the

curriculum concluded this process of design, alongside its embodiment through the devised sight-reading resources.

#### **11.2.4 Step 4: Evaluate**

The final step of the devised model for curriculum design includes the evaluation of the curriculum, after completing the design process. This involves collecting feedback from professionals or members of the community it concerns (music teachers/learners) who could appraise its parameters and contents in an unbiased, honest and progress-seeking manner.

In this thesis, the step of evaluating the curriculum was undertaken through piano teachers' reviews of the corresponding sight-reading resources, which reflect the specifications, underpinnings and progression of the curriculum. Both Greek and non-Greek reviewers were included in the survey, to acquire an understanding of how the material/proposed curriculum is perceived by professionals both within the specific context it addresses (i.e. Greek Conservatoires) and outside. Their feedback was anonymous, to encourage honesty and objectivity. Pilot-testing with teachers and learners in piano lessons would have been preferable but this was not possible due to the Covid-19 restrictions at the time. However, the reviews were positive overall, with constructive comments and valuable suggestions for further developments.

Therefore, the process of evaluation is critical in realising strengths and weaknesses, and in improving the curriculum. This process necessitates for the creator of the curriculum to be open and accepting of critique, which can originate from their aspiration to strengthen and improve the curriculum further. Equally, when thinking about individuals/groups who could undertake the evaluation, the importance of receiving truthful, constructive and informative feedback should be acknowledged in advance, in order to benefit the most from this final step of the process.

### **11.3 Originality and educational impact**

The originality of the research and of the produced sight-reading resources are strongly connected to the research context, and lead to implications further acknowledged within this and the subsequent sections of this Chapter.

The purpose and focus of the research strongly underpinned originality as they led to the production of original educational material/sight-reading resources for a context where there is no relevant material to support the development of sight-reading skills, nor a sight-reading curriculum. The Greek versions of the two books were recently utilised by one of the piano teachers/reviewers in a Conservatoire in Athens, receiving positive comments by the Conservatoire Head, who praised the originality of the material in filling the gap in relevant resources and expressed the intention to utilise it more extensively in the Conservatoire in the future, for the purposes of sight-reading training of piano learners.

The robust creative and theoretical framework underpinning the material led to an informed set of creative principles, which facilitates a systematic approach towards the acquisition of sight-reading skills as a continuum across all levels of piano studies, with relevance to other instruments as well. Although this may not be new for music education systems such as in the UK, where sight-reading may be trained and assessed in all levels, this is radical for the context of Greek Conservatoires, where sight-reading is still perceived as relevant only for the advanced levels of study.

The devised material has thereby initiated change in terms of approaching sight-reading, for the piano as well as for further instruments, by placing emphasis on the importance of sight-reading skills while promoting the development of further musical skills at the same time. It has also opened a discussion about teachers' experiences with sight-reading, including their experiences as learners, attitudes, perceptions, methodologies, and approaches, as well as identified the need for support on this rather neglected and intuition-based area of music education in Greece.

In addition, the musical material in the books is unique in relation to other similar publications, as it is strongly underpinned by pedagogical considerations linking to self-efficacy, self-regulation, reflective practices, motivation, and learning independence. Unlike many sight-reading resources, a greater variety of activities is included, such as sight-reading duets, the exploration of the keyboard, and the observation activity. Similarly, the musical material of the two books moves beyond devised melodies/pieces reflecting the musical requirements usually found in sight-

reading publications, by also including adapted versions or arrangements of existing compositions, as well as musical content of cultural relevance and music by under-represented composers.

Cultural elements and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) considerations are of particular originality, as such elements appear not to have been previously considered in the context of sight-reading. This could provide a starting point for raising awareness in the Greek context and for encouraging thinking about critical issues which are currently pertinent in the field of Music Education on an international level, concerning repertoire choices, inclusivity and the expansion of music curricula beyond the established/traditional repertoire.

Finally, the output of this thesis has developed an original framework for producing sight-reading resources, by proposing a model for curriculum design (section 11.2), addressing a relevant gap in literature. This model may find relatability and relevance to the production of further music education material, as well as to wider contexts beyond the Greek Conservatoires, with potential to inform future practices of educational material design and curriculum development.

## **11.4 Implications**

Considering the research findings in the output of the thesis, the following implications have been identified concerning the sight-reading material (section 11.4.1), the research context (section 11.4.2) and the wider domain (section 11.4.3).

### **11.4.1 Implications for the material**

The creation of the two sight-reading books is envisaged to act as a starting point for further development of the resources, by expanding the material into a published, progressive sight-reading book series across all levels of piano studies. In addition to incorporating reviewers' suggestions for the current levels, the foundations to expand beyond the current levels have been set through the envisaged progression for Level 2 and Level 3 (as outlined in Chapter 8), aiming towards the gradual development of relevant material for intermediate and advanced piano learners.

For these levels, considerations about balance of content would need to be made, considering the advancement of learners' overall music skills. For example, the rhythmic activity would feature more complex rhythms, potentially also requiring the execution of different rhythms from both hands simultaneously; the keyboard exploration could contain more sophisticated sequences of different positions on the keyboard, including chords and inversions; the observation activity could be adapted to promote inner hearing more explicitly, by encouraging the verbalisation of the music or even by requiring to identify a recorded melody/or a melody played by the teacher amongst different written versions. There would also be more emphasis (i.e. more material) on the *Melodies on the spot* and the *Performing at sight* activity than the previous activities, and the musical material would progress accordingly; this also applies to the duets, which would also include accompanying activities for the learner. Considering the positive reviews for the duets, there is also potential for developing supplementary resources which would focus on duet material for sight-reading. This possibility could be explored for both the earlier and the more advanced levels, considering that the volume (and length) of the musical material, and therefore of the books, would increase as the material becomes more advanced.

Thinking further ahead, another aspiration is to explore the potential of developing this series for further instruments beyond the piano, utilising the curriculum design model presented earlier in this chapter. This would contribute to providing support for teachers and learners of other instruments, through systematic resources and a progressive curriculum across different levels in this educational context. This process could also involve co-constructing material collaboratively with teachers of other instruments, who could provide instrument-specific insights. This would also broaden the circle of awareness and understanding of the benefits of sight-reading, the development and dissemination of sight-reading strategies and the exchange of knowledge and practices, by including further instruments, teachers, and learners.

The expansion to further levels and instruments could deepen teachers' and learners' understanding of the co-dependent relationship between general music skills and sight-reading skills, and the mutual benefits of the development of one to

the development of the other. The proposed strategies are applicable to any musical context beyond sight-reading, including the practice of solo repertoire and playing with others, and further skills are forged, beyond the musical skills, such as self-reflection, critical thinking, self-regulation and independent learning. Including such elements within educational material for further levels and instruments could contribute to the development of positive habits towards music learning more broadly.

Finally, the material could also evolve further, when potential developments of infrastructure (Internet reliance and digital accessibility) would allow for the more stable integration of technology in the Greek context; the production of the current material in the format of e-books will also be considered.

#### **11.4.2 Implications for the research context**

Implications for the research context have been identified in relation to music teachers, pupils, and the curriculum of the Greek Conservatoires. The proposed progression of the material is aligned with the acquisition of beginner learners' instrumental (piano) skills and the activities support further musical skills. A holistic approach is proposed, recognising the position of sight-reading alongside general music skills, across and contributing to their continuous advancement. Thus, sight-reading skills development may be viewed as a continuum by teachers, who could continue to facilitate these skills in subsequent levels, at least by applying the strategies proposed in the material.

This approach is also envisaged to facilitate teachers' (and learners') understanding of the power of embedding sight-reading skills in music learning early on, subsequently integrating sight-reading within the curriculum across all levels. This could also afford potential to cover more (and more diverse) repertoire, to facilitate positive attitudes towards sight-reading, and to utilise these skills in further contexts, for example by including more ensemble and collaborative activities (such as duets and accompanying) within and beyond the lesson. Exploring sight-reading skills within these contexts would also be valuable, whether it is facilitated as a formal, structured

process, or as just as an expectation for learners to play at sight any music that they come into contact with.

Change could also be initiated in relation to institutional practices, by encouraging the development of a sight-reading curriculum within the curriculum of the institution. It is acknowledged that the focus on one Greek Conservatoire could not lead to generalised assumptions for further institutions; however, insights collected through this research and from personal discussions with colleagues (piano and other instrumental teachers) suggest that there may be discrepancies relating to individual (informal) Greek Conservatoire policies, depending on the region, historical reputation, and institutional status, amongst other factors. Depending on how accepting and interested institutions might be in embracing sight-reading, there could be scope to develop a sight-reading curriculum across Conservatoires in Greece.

Linked to the above, another aspiration of the researcher is to encourage other music teachers to explore possibilities of improving inefficiencies they may experience, independently within their lessons and teaching practices. Whether by developing their own systematic approaches or producing their own teaching materials, either formally through publications or informally for the purposes of the lesson or personal use, it is hoped that the devised resources from this research could encourage teachers to overcome potential hesitance and to take initiative in addressing inefficiencies of the music education system through their practice. Finally, the thesis findings and the produced material could be utilised in initiating opportunities for sight-reading training for piano teachers within the specific Conservatoire, or in other Conservatoires in Greece, and/or in educational settings beyond this country.

### **11.4.3 Implications for the wider domain**

In relation to implications for the wider domain, the devised material proposes a structured and progressive curriculum, as well as a model for curriculum development (section 11.2), informed by several sources: research and pedagogical literature, piano syllabi of established international music examination boards, a wide range of piano sight-reading resources, and from the experiences of experts in the field, namely the

creators/authors of widely recognised sight-reading material publications. The processes leading to the devised resources could be informative to others who may seek to produce sight-reading material, as there is a lack of published research on how to produce relevant resources. The same applies to curriculum development, as the creative framework could be utilised as a model within this context and beyond.

In addition, the pedagogical considerations underpinning the resources approached sight-reading from a student-centred, facilitative, and empathetic perspective, transferring such parameters (which are usually associated with the teaching process and the interactions between the teacher and the learner), to be included within and promoted through the creation of educational resources. Consideration of such pedagogical parameters in the process of developing music education resources and curricula could contribute to the development of learners' ability for self-regulatory learning, while facilitating motivation, enjoyment, self-efficacy and, ultimately, autonomous learning.

Finally, the inclusion of culturally relevant material, as well as of music by under-represented composers, has opened up discussion of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) to the topic of sight-reading resources and curricula. Although in the recent years, adaptations have been made in the syllabi of exam boards, such as the ABRSM, to widen repertoire choices in performance examinations to include more music from under-represented groups of composers, this has yet to be applied to sight-reading and its supporting resources; this also applies to the inclusion of repertoire of cultural relevance, as detailed in Chapter 8. The inclusion of such material in the devised sight-reading resources is another contribution to the domain, both in for the Greek context and beyond.

## **11.5 Limitations**

The limitations of the research concern primarily the sample size in Studies 1 and 2, the testing of the material as an implication of the Covid-19 pandemic, and challenges relating to working across different languages.



Study 1 included instrumental teachers of Western/classical instruments who were actively teaching in the Conservatoire when the research was undertaken. As explained in Chapter 5, piano teachers were not included in the research, as the study aimed to build on findings from my previous MA research with pianists. I aimed to acquire a broader informed understanding within the Greek Conservatoire context by exploring similar aspects in relation to different instruments, thereby potentially also gaining insights which could inform the approach for the piano. It is acknowledged that the focus on the specific Conservatoire did not enable a larger sample of instrumental teachers; all teachers who expressed willingness to participate were included in the research.

Similar limitations occurred in relation to the number of authors of sight-reading publications in Study 2. It is acknowledged that there are additional creators of such material on an international level, although not in great numbers. The invitation for participation in the research was communicated to a greater number of authors; however, some did not respond or were unavailable at the time, such as the participant A2's co-author. Nevertheless, the experience of the four authors who shared their reflections in Study 2 was valuable, as their publications are widely used on an international level; the illuminating insights from their reflections have informed the creation of my material.

Another limitation of the research concerned the evaluation of the devised material (Chapter 10). As an implication of Covid-19 restrictions, the pilot-testing of the two sight-reading books with beginner piano learners in the Conservatoire was not feasible at the time; restrictions led to a pause in the operation of Conservatoires in Greece (spring 2020), and then teaching took place exclusively online (autumn 2020-spring 2021), which required me to adapt the research project for the testing of the material planned originally. Relevant adaptations included evaluating the material by collecting feedback on the two books from piano teachers in Greece and in other countries through a survey review (Study 3); this also revealed aspects of relevance and relatability of the material to music contexts beyond the Greek music education system. In addition, I have used the material in my own teaching since the pandemic, particularly exploring elements which make this material unique, such as the keyboard

topography activities and the ensemble skills from the duets. However, these insights are not documented within the thesis, as the material was tried only with some private beginner pupils (as I was not teaching any beginner pupils in the Conservatoire at the time); I also did not want to put pressure on two young pupils to share their impressions on the activities, due to my dual role as their teacher and as the creator of the material. The choice of not detailing insights from my own trial of the material also intends to avoid risking potential personal bias by sharing my own opinion towards the material which I created; relying on the objective opinions from other piano teachers was considered preferable.

Some final limitations of the research concern challenges relating to working across different languages. Study 1 included Greek participants, resulting in interview transcripts which needed to be translated into English prior to the analysis; the same applied for the regulation documents of Greek Conservatoires. In addition, the evaluative survey (Study 3) required producing two versions of the survey questions and resulted in data sets in two different languages (in English and in Greek) from Greek and non-Greek reviewers, which were also translated in advance of the analysis. Similarly, the two devised resources needed to be developed both in English and in Greek, in order to enable reviewers' clear understanding of the material they were invited to appraise. In addition to the greater volume of work as a result from working across different languages, such limitations also connect to the translation considerations detailed in Chapter 4.

## **11.6 Further research, dissemination, and impact**

The research impact could also be understood in relation to the dissemination of the research findings and the material, and the potential for further research, to realise how change can be facilitated and to what extent the implications may have been achieved.

Relating to sight-reading approaches and training provision within the specific Conservatoire, the embedding of sight-reading skills structure has already been initiated, through my initiative to provide sight-reading training for advanced learners,

as explained in Chapter 1. Encouraging the piano teachers in the Conservatoire to use the material in their lessons, as flexibly as needed, could lead to insights from teachers and learners, concerning its use on an institutional level. This could contribute to a more holistic change of policy within the Conservatoire relating to sight-reading training across all levels of study and/or for further instruments, by raising awareness of the importance of sight-reading skills alongside the overall music skills development.

Dissemination of the material as published resources in Greece could contribute to raising awareness of sight-reading's value and of approaches to facilitating relevant skill development, more broadly, in Conservatoires and other music education settings throughout the country. The material may be of interest to piano teachers beyond this Conservatoire, in further music institutions, music schools and for those who teach privately. Informing the Conservatoires in Greece about this research and the material, particularly once it becomes available in published format, could facilitate change in further institutions, emphasising the benefits of embedding sight-reading skills within the curriculum, from early levels upwards. Considering the willingness of the previously-mentioned Conservatoire in Athens to utilise the resources more systematically, it is envisaged that the devised resources will be of interest to further music institutions in this context. This could also lead to valuable conversations about the assessment of sight-reading in Conservatoires in Greece and support relevant correspondence between work in the lesson and assessment requirements and criteria.

The research and the devised material, as well as the proposed model for curriculum design, could contribute to further knowledge exchange. In addition to the dissemination of findings through publication in music education journals and in further sources of music pedagogy literature, the research could also lead to the provision of training for piano teachers and learners. The resources could be utilised by the researcher to provide sight-reading training for piano learners and teachers through seminars and workshops, either independently, or within institutions (Conservatoires, music schools, university music departments, for students who study music/music education). Connections with the Greek Society for Music Education

(EEME – GSME) are also envisaged, as well as exchange of knowledge through platforms, such as a professional website of the researcher, and/or music education forums.

Further research on the wider use of the material could provide insights relating to changes in approaches to sight-reading, teaching practices and institutional policies. On the level of this Conservatoire, inviting all piano teachers to use the material in their lessons could lead to further feedback prior to formal publication of the resources, the reporting of changes perceived by the teachers and the learners as a result of using the material, as well as potential impact on the overall music learning within this specific institution. In addition, informing all Conservatoires and music institutions in Greece, such as music schools, about the material could facilitate change more broadly. Change, i.e. impact, could be evaluated by exploring if and how other institutions use the material; how teachers and learners feel about using it; what are some of the perceived benefits gained from its use; what impact does using the material have on the pedagogical practices and processes within the piano lesson; how might the material contribute to wider consideration of self-regulation, reflection, and motivation; how might the material and its use influence changes at an institutional level.

Potential impact of the material on wellbeing could also be explored: how would learners feel about playing at sight after building sight-reading strategies through the material? What might potential effects be on learners' levels of anxiety in the context of sight-reading assessments? How might sight-reading feel in other contexts, for example within an ensemble, or in chamber music activities? Exploring sight-reading in the context of ensembles could be illuminating, to understand how sight-reading training might be promoted in this context. Finally, exploring considerations of cultural elements and EDI in relation to sight-reading efficacy could also be warranted, as well as further research on the cultural impact of the material, validating the inclusion of cultural repertoire, and encouraging teachers, institutions and policy makers to think more broadly about repertoire options and informed choices.

## **11.7 Conclusion**

This research has explored sight-reading in the context of Greek Conservatoire music education, leading to the creation of the first sight-reading resources in Greece, focusing on the piano. Starting from the beginner levels, this research supports piano teachers and learners by providing resources and a progressive curriculum for developing sight-reading in a continuum, facilitating skills development from early levels upwards; a model for curriculum design has also been developed as a result. By considering the context, the insights collected through the different steps of the research, and the pedagogical underpinnings of the devised resources, this research constitutes a meaningful springboard for initiating change in pedagogical practices, curriculum, and resource development, as well as institutional policies. It is envisaged that the research and the pedagogical output of the thesis will draw pedagogical attention to this rather neglected area of music education in the Greek Conservatoire context, while providing support to music teachers and learners within and beyond the Conservatoires, finding relevance in further contexts and cultures, in Greece and beyond.

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## **APPENDIX 1: Sight-reading within the Greek Conservatoire operating regulations**

A translation of any statements regarding sight-reading, as encountered within the various official documents of conservatoire operating regulations is presented in more detail below.

### **AP.1.1 According to the Royal Decree 1957/229, s. 3:**

#### PIANO:

‘General modules. The modules which piano students should attend during their studies are:

1. Theory, three levels – Solfège, three levels.
2. Harmony, three levels – Solfège, two levels.
3. Chamber Music (three years of study).
4. History of Music (two years of study).
5. Choir (two years of study).
- 6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced Level of study).**
7. Musical forms and Analysis (one year of study).

Students are also obliged to teach practically for two years, starting from the second year of Advanced study, within the Conservatoire.’ (para. 91, p.1744).

#### ORGAN:

‘General modules. The modules which organ pupils are obliged to attend during their studies, are:

1. Harmony, three levels – Solfège, two levels.
2. Counterpoint (two years of study)
3. Music History (two years of study)
4. Musical forms and Analysis (one year of study)
5. Choir (two years of study)
- 6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced level of study)**

Students are also obliged to provide practical teaching for two years, starting from the second year of the Advanced level of study’ (para. 100, p.1745).

#### HARP:

'General modules. Same as the piano, with the addition of orchestra participation and piano skills to an intermediate level' (para. 112, p.1746).

#### VIOLIN:

'General modules.

1. Theory, three levels – Solfège, three levels.
2. Harmony, three levels – Solfège, two levels.
3. Chamber Music (three years of study).
4. History of Music (two years of study).
5. Piano (skills to an intermediate level).
- 6. Sight-reading (from the second year of the Advanced level of study).**
7. Orchestra
8. Musical forms and Analysis (one year of study).
9. Also, starting from the second year of Advanced level of study and for two years, practical teaching within the Conservatoire.'

(para. 122, p.1747).

#### VIOLA:

'General modules. Same as the Violin' (para. 133, p.1747).

#### VIOLONCELLO:

'General Modules. Same as the Violin studies' (para. 142, p.1748).

#### DOUBLE BASS

'General Modules. Same as the Violin' (para. 151, p.1749).

#### FLUTE:

'General modules:

1. Theory, three levels – Solfège, three levels.
2. Harmony, three levels – Solfège, two levels.
3. History of Music.
4. Piano.
- 5. Sight-reading.**
6. Transposition
7. Wind ensemble exercises
8. Orchestra'

(para. 160, p.1749).

#### OBOE:

'Advanced levels. Three years of study.

1. Method: [...]



2. Études: [...]
3. Concertos: [...]
4. Pieces: [...]
- 5. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition.**
6. Practice on the English horn.
7. Orchestral exercises on classic and more recent works.'

(para. 168, p.1750).

'General Modules. Same as the Flute' (para. 169, p.1750).

#### CLARINET:

'Advanced levels. Three years of study.

1. Exercises (daily): [...]
2. Études: [...]
3. Sonatas: [...]
4. Concertos: [...]
5. Fantasiestücke: Schumann
6. Grand duo concertant: Weber, and equivalent works of Greek composers
7. Practice on Clarinet in E flat and Bass Clarinet
8. Practice on Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass Saxophones.
- 9. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition.'**

(para. 177, p.1750).

'General Modules: Same as the Flute' (para. 178, p.1750).

#### BASSOON:

'Advanced levels. Three years of study.

1. Scales and technical exercises.
2. Études: [...]
3. Sonatas: [...]
4. Concertos: [...]
5. Practice on the Contrabassoon.
- 6. Exercises in sight-reading and transposition.**
7. Orchestral exercises: Gumbert.'

(para. 186, p.1751).

'General Modules: Same as the flute' (para. 187, p.1751).

#### HORN:

'Intermediate levels. Two years of study.

1. Continuation of technical exercises.
2. Transposition exercises: [...]

4. [*sic.*] Études: [...]
5. Études with piano accompaniment: [...]
6. Sonatas: [...]
7. Concertos: [...]
8. **Exercises in sight-reading and transposition.'**

(para. 194, p.1751).

'Advanced levels. Three years of study.

1. Études: [...]
2. [Concert studies: [...]
3. Sonatas: [...]
4. Concertos: [...]
5. **Exercises in sight-reading and transposition.**

[...]

(para. 196, p.1751).

'General Modules: Same as the flute' (para. 197, p.1751).

#### TRUMPET:

'Intermediate levels. Two years of study.

1. Methods: [...]
2. Études: [...]
3. Technical exercises
4. Transposition training
5. **Exercises in sight-reading and transposition.'**

(para. 203, pp.1751-1752).

'Advanced levels. Three years of study.

1. Technical exercises of mechanism
2. Technical exercises of tonguing
3. Études: [...]
4. Transposition etudes
5. Études for B♭ trumpet
6. Concertos: [...]
7. Pieces: [...]
8. **Études for sight-reading and transposition for orchestra.**

[...]

(para. 205, p.1752).

'General Modules: Same as the flute' (para. 206, p.1752).

#### TROMBONE:

'General Modules: Same as the flute.' (para. 215, p.1752).

### TUBA:

'Intermediate levels. Two years of study.

1. Method: [...]
2. Exercises on Contrabass Tuba
3. **Sight-reading** (para. 221, p.1753).

'General Modules: Same as the flute' (para. 224, p.1753).

### PERCUSSION:

'General modules:

1. Theory of Music
  2. **Sight-reading**
  3. Ensemble exercises with strings or wind instruments
  4. Orchestra
- (para. 227, p.1753).

## **AP.1.2 According to the Ministerial Decision 1987/500, s. 8:**

### GUITAR:

'Junior Beginner levels. Two years of study.

1. Methods: [...]
  2. Études: [...]
  3. Pieces: [...]
  4. Scales: [...]
  5. **PRIMA VISTA** performance on guitar of the current Solfège exercises in the treble clef'
- (para. 3, p. 4980).

'Senior Beginner levels. Two years of study.

1. Methods: [...]
  2. Études: [...]
  3. Pieces: [...]
  4. Scales: [...]
  5. **Sight-performance** on the guitar of the current Solfège exercises in the treble and bass clefs '
- (para. 5, p. 4980).

'Intermediate levels. Three years of study.

1. Methods: [...]

2. Études: [...]
3. Scales: [...]
4. Pieces: [...]
5. **Sight-performance** on the guitar of the highest level Solfège exercises in all clefs'

(para. 7, p. 4980).

'General modules: The modules which guitar students are obliged to attend during their studies, are:

1. Theory, three levels.
2. Harmony, three levels.
3. Solfège, five levels.
4. Chamber music (Two years of study).
5. History of music (Two years of study).
6. Musical forms and Analysis one year.
7. Practical teaching (on a Junior level pupil, from students on the second year of the Advanced level of studies)'

(para. 10, p.4980).

### **AP.1.3 According to the Ministerial Decision 2007/1913, s. 2:**

#### SAXOPHONE:

'General modules. The modules which students should attend during their studies, are:

1. Theory of music three (3) levels - Solfège three (3) levels
2. Harmony, three (3) levels – Solfège two (2) levels
3. History of Music two (2) levels
4. Musical forms and Analysis one (1) level
5. Piano (skills to the second year of the Senior Beginner level).
6. **Sight-reading one (1) level**
7. Chamber music two (2) levels
8. Transposition of wind instruments one (1) year
9. Practical teaching one (1) year'

(para.3, p. 27205)

## **APPENDIX 2: Participant consent forms and information sheets**

This appendix contains the consent forms and the information sheets for eliciting informed consent from the participants of Studies 1, 2 and 3. These concerned:

- (a) Study 1, the Head of the Conservatoire, where the research was undertaken, and the participant instrumental teachers,
- (b) Study 2, the authors of sight-reading publications who were interviewed,
- (c) Study 3, the piano teachers who provided reviews of the devised resources through the evaluative survey (the Greek participants signed the consent forms both in the English and in a translated version).

The [consent forms and the information sheets](#) can be accessed online.

## APPENDIX 3: Study 1, Interview Questions

### Provision in the Greek Conservatoire operating regulations

- Are you aware of what is stated in the operating regulations for the music conservatories, regarding sight-reading (SR) teaching?
- What is your opinion about it?

[In the relevant regulations for all instruments, sight-reading is mentioned as a compulsory module of study: *'Sight-reading [prima vista] – starting from the second year of the advanced level of study'* → piano & strings, for wind instruments only *'sight-reading'* is stated, nothing further]

- What is your opinion about the above-mentioned regulation? Do you feel that it provides enough guidance as to what you should teach and how?

### Practical approach towards SR teaching

- How do think your students are learning to sight-read?
- Do you think that SR can be taught?
- Do you think that SR *should* be taught? Why?
- Do you teach SR to your pupils?

If **YES**:

- In which level do you begin teaching your pupils SR?
- How do you teach SR? (e.g. Is it a different part of your teaching, or do you incorporate it into your 'normal' lesson?)
- Which are some of your relevant strategies?
- Which of the above strategies and/or resources do you think are most important/helpful?
- What resources do you use?
- Are there any specific criteria in the selection of strategies on each occasion? Or do you use the same strategies every time and for every student?
- Have you observed any difficulties for your pupils? Any examples?
- How effective do you find these strategies?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your strategies?

If **Not**:

- Why not?

- How are students prepared for their SR exams?

### **Views on the importance of SR teaching**

- How did you learn to sight-read?
- Are there any possible benefits from SR teaching for the students?  
If yes, any examples?  
If not, why not?
- What might be some possible benefits for the teacher?

### **Ensemble activities**

- What is your opinion about students' participation in chamber music and accompanying activities?
- Do your students participate in such activities?
- Do you encourage your students' participation in such activities? Why/ Why not?
- Have you observed any elements from your students' participation to such activities?

### **Final Questions / Suggestions**

- How do you monitor your students' progress regarding their SR skills?
- Are there any elements that you think would be helpful for your SR teaching, if stated in the regulations or if more relevant information was provided?
- Are you familiar with any other methods of how SR is taught elsewhere? (incl. internationally)?
- If yes, how have you become aware of these?
- If you were offered the opportunity to change or improve anything in the current regulations about SR teaching and examinations, even at the level of the conservatory, what would you change?

## **APPENDIX 4: Study 2, Interview Questions**

### **A. General creative aspects**

- How did your interest in sight-reading (SR) begin and how did you get into writing SR material?
- When you start writing/putting together a new SR book, what are some key parameters which you take into consideration from the very beginning?
- To what extent has your experience (as a music learner/teacher/other) influenced your SR material creation? How is this reflected in your publications?
- Do you write for exam board specimen or actual SR tests as well as produce your own material?
- If so, are there differences in terms of how this affects your approach to producing SR books?

### **B. Musical content: tasks, structure & progression**

- How do you decide which musical elements to include in each level?
- Do you align your material towards any specific exam board?
- Which are some other elements which you have included within your books, additional to SR pieces (e.g. rhythmic exercises, composition tasks, duets, advice for the pupil)?
- What do you consider to be the value of each of these?
- What are processes or principles which influence your decisions to include or not to include certain material or complementary tasks?
- What is your process of structuring and developing the progress of material within each grade book? / Which parameters do you take into consideration to structure the material progressively within each grade?
- How do you plan/structure the overall changes from one grade book to the next, besides upgrading the level of musical material?

### **C. Composing SR material**

- When composing SR material, what principles underpin your creative process?
- Do you have any particular compositional considerations when approaching different styles/genres?
- Is there testing of the material with any participants before it is published? If so, what is the process of testing?



## **D. Cultural relevance**

- Towards which cultural contexts would you say that your publications are addressed?
- Are there any (examples of) cultural references in your material? (e.g. familiar tunes, traditional/folk elements, world music references)
- If yes, what do you perceive as the value of this? To what extent do you consider these relatable or transferrable to other cultural contexts?
- If not, do you think there would be any potential value in including SR material with cultural relevance?

## **E. Material & Teachers**

- Are any instructions/guidance to the teachers provided within your SR books on how to utilise your material effectively?
- Are there any specific elements which might make piano teachers find your material friendly to use?
- In which ways could your material be utilised to help teachers promote further musical skills, besides the building of SR skills?

## **F. Material & Learners**

- Is learners' previous musical knowledge reinforced through the SR book content? If yes, in which ways?
- Are there ways in which students' independent learning is promoted? How?
- Have any elements been incorporated to make your books more appealing to the students? (e.g. Animations/'heroes' talking to the pupil, etc.)
- If yes, how do these change/evolve through the levels?
- Are there any elements in your material which might make SR tasks less intimidating and potentially more enjoyable for learners?

## **G. Duets**

- Have you incorporated elements of duets (e.g. with teacher)?
- What is your opinion about the use of duets in SR tasks?

## **H. Evaluation/assessment aspects**

- How is SR performance evaluation invited through your material? Who is invited to evaluate SR performance?

- Why have you decided on these specific modes of evaluation?

### **I. Publishers**

- What level of control does the publisher have over the creative process of your material? Is there a specific publisher set of parameters? (publisher input & control on layout, cover design, presentation inside, content, etc.)
- Are there any potential constraints/creative limitations you are creating within related to the publisher?
- To what extent are the final decisions regarding the final outcome, the result of creator's choice?
- If publisher limitations were not a concern, would there be any changes you would have made to your material?

### **J. Overall reflection on experience**

- What have been some significant difficulties you encountered throughout the process of creating your material?
- Which was your favourite moment/stage of your SR material creation?
- What is the most important parameter when creating SR material?
- What are your views on apps? Is there still a place for the written SR book?
- What advice would you have for me, creating piano SR material for the Greek context?

## APPENDIX 5: Study 3, Survey questions

### Section 1. Review of sight-reading books

This form is intended to collect anonymous feedback on my sight-reading books, by the reviewers to whom they were sent earlier in June. Please complete the following questions honestly, reflecting your genuine opinions on the aspects examined. Completion of this questionnaire is likely to take up to one hour, depending on individual responses.

IMPORTANT: It is recommended that you fill in this questionnaire in one session. If you decide to submit partially-filled versions of the questionnaire, and return later to edit your response and complete all questions, you will need to save (e.g. on an empty Word document) the "edit your response" link that appears on your screen after submitting your answers. You will be able to return to your form only through this link - you will not be able to do so otherwise.

Thank you in advance for your time and input!

The present research has obtained ethical approval from the University of York Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee (AHEC), and complies with the University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act (2018).

I have read and understood the information shared in the Consent Form and Information Sheet for this research.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

## Section 2. General information

### 2.1. Gender\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

### 2.2. Age\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	18-25
<input type="checkbox"/>	25-35
<input type="checkbox"/>	35-45
<input type="checkbox"/>	45+
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say

2.3. Music Education Qualification(s): Please state your qualification which you consider that best supports your piano teaching.\*

Short-answer text

---

2.4. Years of piano teaching experience:\*

Short-answer text

---

2.5. In which context(s) are you currently teaching music?\*

Please feel free to mention as many contexts or roles you are currently having as a music teacher (including multiple institutions, studio/private lessons, online teaching, etc.)

Long-answer text

---

2.6. My piano lessons are...\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	One-to-one lessons
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group lessons

<input type="checkbox"/>	Both
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

2.7. Which book are you providing a review for?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Preparatory book (move to section 3)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Level 1 book (move to section 3)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Both books (move to section 4)

### Section 3. Reason(s) for choosing to review this book

3.1. What made you choose to review this specific book?\*

Please provide a short answer briefly stating what made you select to review this specific book (e.g. looked more appealing, time limitations, no specific reason, etc.)

Short-answer text

---

### Section 4. Appropriateness & purpose (A)

4.1. For which of the following groups do you believe that the book(s) would be appropriate?\*

Please tick as many boxes as you like. [multiple checkboxes]

<input type="checkbox"/>	Young children
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children of any age
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adolescent learners
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adult learners (beginners)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties/Special Education Needs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learners who study/learn music independently
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learners who study/learn music with a teacher
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

4.2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful does this material feel to support sight-reading skills development in your lessons?\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful						Very useful

4.3. On a scale of 1-5, how much do you feel that the book(s) support the embedment and integration of sight-reading from the early levels of piano learning?\*

1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Sufficiently, 4=Quite a bit, 5=Very much

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all						Very much

4.4. Would you recommend the book(s) to colleagues?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	No (move to section 6)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maybe (move to next question)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes (move to next question)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Definitely (move to next question)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other... (move to section 6)

## Section 5. Appropriateness & purpose (B)

5.1. If so, why would you recommend them?

Short-answer text

---

## Section 6. Introduction sections

The following questions relate to the Introduction sections at the beginning of each book ("A welcome note", "Getting to know the book activities", "The achievement criteria", "A note to the teacher").

6.1. In a few words, how do you think your pupils might perceive the introduction "A welcome note" to the learner?\*

Please feel free to respond with key words or short phrases.

Long-answer text

---

6.2. In a few words, what was your initial impression of the book from reading the introduction "A note to the teacher"?\*

Please feel free to respond with key words or short phrases to describe your impression.

Long-answer text

---

6.3. Please tick the boxes which would best describe your opinions on the "Getting to know the book activities" section.\*

You may select as many boxes as you feel are true. [multiple checkboxes]

<input type="checkbox"/>	Explanations are clear and sufficient.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explanations are quite clear, but could benefit from further information.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explanations are not very clear; further information is necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The teacher and the learner can clearly understand the purpose of each activity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The teacher and the learner may understand the purpose of each activity to some extent.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The teacher may understand the purpose of each activity, but the learner may not.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The purpose of each activity is not clear, either to the learner or to the teacher.
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is a variety of different types of activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The types of activities are limited.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities look useful and link clearly to sight-reading skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities look useful, but it is not clear how they link to sight-reading skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities do not look very useful, although they may link to some sight-reading skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities look slightly useful, and there seems to be some link to sight-reading skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities do not look useful, and they do not seem to link to sight-reading skills.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Some activities may benefit further musical skills, in addition to sight-reading.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities do not seem to benefit any other musical skills, other than sight-reading.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The activities do not seem to benefit any musical skills, including sight-reading.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

6.4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful did you find the questions in the table of "The Achievement Criteria"?\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very useful

6.5. How do you feel about the use of reflective questions ("Achievement criteria") to evaluate performance instead of a scale of marks?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer the reflective questions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer marks.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Either of the two is fine.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer having both questions and marks.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't think evaluation is necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

6.6. Do you have any further thoughts or recommendations related to the evaluation?  
If not, you may leave this blank.

Short-answer text

---

6.7. Would you like to make any further comments or suggestions regarding any of the introduction sections of the books?

Please feel free to use section headings or page numbers, if needed. If there is nothing to add, you may leave this blank.



## Section 7. Musical elements per Unit

The questions in this section are about the table of Musical elements per Unit, presented after "A note to the Teacher", before Unit 1.

7.1. Usefulness: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the table of "Musical Elements per Unit":\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful						Very useful

7.2. Progression of elements: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the progression of musical elements per Unit:\*

1=Not at all appropriate & completely unachievable, 2=Slightly appropriate/achievable, 3=Mostly appropriate & achievable, 4=Appropriate & achievable, 5=Very appropriate & highly achievable

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all appropriate & completely unachievable						Very appropriate & highly achievable

7.3. Please state here any further thoughts or comments on the table of "Musical elements per Unit".

Feel free to use key words/phrases. If there are no other thoughts/comments, please leave blank.

Long-answer text

---

## Section 8. Presentation & layout

The next questions focus on aspects related to the visual presentation and the layout of the book(s).

8.1. Please briefly describe your first impression of the presentation and layout of the book(s).\*

You may use key words/phrases, if you prefer.

Long-answer text

---

8.2. Level of Professionalism: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the visual presentation and layout of the book(s):\*

1=Not at all professional, 2=Slightly professional, 3=Sufficiently professional, 4=Of good professional standard, 5=Highly professional

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all professional						Highly professional

8.3. Page layout: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the visual appearance (layout) of pages:\*

1=Not at all balanced, 2=Mostly unbalanced, 3=Slightly balanced, 4=Mostly balanced, 5=Well-balanced

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all balanced						Well-balanced

8.4. Please give an example of a page which felt well-balanced, or particularly appealing visually (please state the book and page number).\*

Short-answer text

---

8.5. Please give an example of a page which might have felt overwhelming, or less visually appealing (please state the book and page number).\*

Long-answer text

---

8.6. Font size: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the font size:\*

1=Not at all appropriate/unreadable, 2=Mostly inappropriate/unreadable, 3=Sometimes appropriate/readable, 4=Mostly appropriate/readable, 5=Very appropriate/readable

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all appropriate/ unreadable						Very appropriate/ readable

8.7. Text formatting: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the formatting of the text (titles, headings, italicised, underlined, bold words):\*

1=Not at all appropriate, 2=Mostly inappropriate, 3=Sometimes appropriate, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Very appropriate

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all appropriate						Very appropriate

8.8. Duet layout: On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the overall layout of the duets (score size, readability):\*

1=Very small & hard to read, 2=Quite small & rather hard to read, 3=small, but readable overall, 4=appropriate & readable, 5=very appropriate & easy to read.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very small & hard to read						Very appropriate & easy to read

8.9. If you have identified any potential errors or other mistakes related to the written text, please signpost these below:

If not, please leave blank. Please, exclude any formatting inconsistencies of the notebook icon in the "Congratulations!" page at the end of some Units.

Long-answer text

---

8.10. Do you have any suggestions for improvement or comments related to the formatting of the text (written information in the books)? You may refer to specific page numbers, Units or activities, if you wish.

Long-answer text

---

## Section 9. Written instructions

The following questions are about the written instructions in the book activities (you will be asked to provide any feedback on the instructions given by the Bee at a later point).

9.1. The written instructions of the book activities were clear.\*

1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Most times, 5=Always

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never						Always

9.2. The written instructions of the activities were informative/helpful.\*

1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Most times, 5=Always

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never						Always

9.3. The pupil would understand what they need to do, after reading the activity instructions.\*

1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Most times, 5=Always

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never						Always

9.4. Please give an example where instructions felt particularly effective and very briefly explain why (please state the book, activity and page number).\*

Long-answer text

---

9.5. Please give an example where you feel that the instructions could be improved (please state the book, activity and page number). If you wish, you may provide relevant suggestions.\*

Long-answer text

---

## Section 10. Music content

The questions in this section examine aspects related to the music content of the book and the different activities.

10.1. Please tick the boxes which you feel best describe the progression of the book.\*

Please tick as many boxes as you feel are true. [multiple checkboxes]

<input type="checkbox"/>	The book has a good and appropriate overall progression.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The book has a quite good overall progression, with places where it could be improved.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The progression in the book does not make sense.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Within each Unit, the activities progress logically.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Within each Unit, the progression of the activities is quite logical, but there are sections where it can be developed better.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Within each Unit, the progression of the activities sometimes does not make sense.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Within each Unit, the progression of the activities never makes sense.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

10.2. Please give an example of a Unit where you felt that the progression of the material was appropriate and effective (please state the book and Unit number).\*

Short-answer text

---

10.3. Please give an example of a Unit where you felt that the progression of the material can be improved further (please state the book and Unit number).\*

Long-answer text

---

## Section 11. Building on Rhythm

The questions below are about the rhythmic activities of the books, entitled "Building on rhythm".

11.1. The number of the rhythmic examples in each Unit was:\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Just about right.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too many / fewer are needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too few / more are needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

11.2. How important do you think rhythm is for sight-reading?\*

Please briefly explain your opinion in one or two sentences.

Long-answer text

---

11.3. In which ways do you think the "Building on Rhythm" activity might affect sight-reading effectiveness?\*

Feel free to type key-phrases instead of full sentences, if you prefer.

Long-answer text

---

## Section 12. Exploring the keyboard (A)

The questions of this section are about the "Exploring the keyboard" activity.

12.1. Have you understood the purpose of this activity in relation to the development of sight-reading skills?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, I have understood the purpose of this activity. (move to next question)
<input type="checkbox"/>	I think I have understood the purpose of this activity. (move to next question)
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am not sure I have understood the purpose of this activity. (move to next question)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, I haven't understood the purpose of this activity. (move to section 13)

## Section 13. Exploring the keyboard (B)

13.1. How do you think the "Exploring the Keyboard" activity is linked to sight-reading skills? (please provide one or two sentences).

Long-answer text

---

## Section 14. Let's Observe!

The following questions refer to the "Let's Observe!" activity of spotting the difference.

14.1. On a scale of 1 to 5, I think the observation activities were:

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful						Very useful

14.2. The number of examples (3 pairs) in this activity was:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Just about right.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too many.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too few.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

14.3. How does this activity link to the development of sight-reading skills?\*

Please feel free to type key-phrases instead of full sentences, if you prefer.

Long-answer text

---

14.4. Any further thoughts or suggestions for improvement?

If not, please leave blank.

Long-answer text

---

## Section 15. Melodies on the spot

These questions examine the "Melodies on the spot" activities.

15.1. The number of melodies in this activity was:\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Just about right.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too many / fewer are needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too few / more are needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

15.2. On a scale of 1 to 6, the finger numbers for the starting note of each hand were:\*

1=Not at all helpful, 2=Slightly helpful, 3=Neither helpful, nor unhelpful, 4=Mostly helpful, 5=Very helpful, 6=Necessary

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Not at all helpful							Necessary

15.3. The finger numbers were:\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Sufficient.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Less (sic.) were needed in each melody.
<input type="checkbox"/>	More were needed in each melody.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

15.4. On a scale of 1 to 5, the musical elements in each melody were:\*

1=Completely unbalanced, 2=Mostly unbalanced, 3=Slightly balanced, 4=Mostly balanced, 5=Well-balanced

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely unbalanced						Well-balanced

15.5. Any further thoughts or suggestions?

If not, please leave blank.

Long-answer text

---

## Section 16. Performing at sight

The following questions refer to the "Performing at sight" activity, where existing music is presented to play at sight. There is also one question about the list of featured composers at the end of the books.

16.1. I believe that different musical eras were:\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficiently represented
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sufficiently represented
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

16.2. I believe that different composers (male, female, composers of colour) were:\*



<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficiently represented
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sufficiently represented
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

16.3. How do you feel about the inclusion of familiar pieces (e.g. children's tunes) and traditional tunes in this activity?\*

You may also refer to potential benefits of these on pupils' sight-reading, if you think there are any.

Long-answer text

---

16.4. Could this book/section of the book be used as a handbook or method book?\*(such as by approaching pieces through sight-reading first, and then working on them as repertoire pieces)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maybe.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

## Section 17. Fun for two

The questions below are about the duets activities ("Fun for two").

17.1. On a scale of 1 to 5, the duets were:\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very useful

17.2. On a scale of 1 to 4, I found the duet presentation (size, layout):\*

1= Not at all appropriate, nor readable, 2=Slightly appropriate, sometimes readable, 3=Quite appropriate, readable overall, 4= Very appropriate, clearly readable

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Not at all appropriate,  
nor readable

--	--	--	--

Very appropriate,  
clearly readable

17.3. The length of the duets was:\*

Please tick as many boxes as you like. [multiple checkboxes]

<input type="checkbox"/>	Short.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too long.
<input type="checkbox"/>	About right.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flexible enough.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not flexible enough.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not very appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mostly about right, sometimes felt too long.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mostly about right, sometimes felt too short.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Varied (in a positive way).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Varied (in a negative way).

17.4. Please briefly present your impression/thoughts on the teacher's part in the duets:\*

Long-answer text

---

17.5. On a scale of 1 to 6, the level of difficulty in the teacher's part was:\*

1=Too difficult, 2=Difficult, 3=Sometimes challenging, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Appropriate, 6=Very appropriate

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Too difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very appropriate

17.6. Please briefly present your impression/thoughts on the learner's part in the duets:\*

Long-answer text

---

17.7. On a scale of 1 to 6, the level of difficulty in the learner's part was:\*

1=Too difficult, 2=Difficult, 3=Sometimes challenging, 4=Mostly appropriate, 5=Appropriate, 6=Very appropriate

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Too difficult							Very appropriate

17.8. Do you perceive any value in these duets, in addition to sight-reading?

If yes, please briefly specify. If not, please leave blank.

Long-answer text

---

17.9. Do you have any suggestions or further thoughts on the duets?

If not, please leave blank.

Long-answer text

---

## Section 18. Let's reflect!

The following questions are about the reflective boxes of questions after each activity.

18.1. The number of reflective questions was:\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	About right.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too many – fewer are needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too few – more are needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

18.2. On a scale of 1 to 5, I found the reflective questions for pupil's learning:\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful						Very useful

18.3. Could the reflective questions act as initiators of collaborative discussion?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes.
--------------------------	------

<input type="checkbox"/>	Maybe.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

18.4. Do you have any suggestions for improvement or further thoughts on the "Let's reflect" questions?

Long-answer text

---

### Section 19. The Bee, the terminology section & the certificate

These questions are about the Bee character, the section where the book terminology is explained, and the completion Certificate.

19.1. What is your impression of the Bee character?\*

Please feel free to use key words/phrases.

Short-answer text

---

19.2. In your opinion, how might the Bee be received by learners?\*

Please provide key phrases, or one or two sentences.

Long-answer text

---

19.3. Are there any age groups or learning circumstances for which the Bee may not be appropriate? If so, please specify; otherwise, leave blank.

Short-answer text

---

19.4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful were the Bee's questions?\*

1=Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very useful

19.5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how helpful were the Bee's instructions?\*

1=Not at all helpful, 2=Only slightly helpful, 3=Neither helpful, nor unhelpful, 4=Mostly helpful, 5=Very helpful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful						Very useful

19.6. Is there something that you felt at any particular point that the Bee should have asked? If so, what?

You may use page numbers to specify, if you wish. If not, you may leave this blank.

Long-answer text

---

19.7. Any other thoughts, suggestions or comments on the Bee?

If not, please leave blank.

Long-answer text

---

19.8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful is the terminology section at the end of the book?\*

1= Not at all useful, 2=Only slightly useful, 3=Useful, 4=Quite useful, 5=Very useful

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all useful						Very useful

19.9. Is the list of featured composers at the end of the book, useful to include?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, leave it in.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, remove from final version.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral, either way is fine.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

19.10. Is the completion certificate at the end of the book, useful to include?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, leave it in.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, remove from final version.

<input type="checkbox"/>	It makes no difference, either way is fine.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

19.11. What potential effect might the certificate have on the pupil?

You may use key words/phrases to respond; otherwise, please leave blank.

Short-answer text

---

## Section 20. Final Questions (A)

The following questions examine some more general aspects related to the use and pedagogical value of this book, amongst others.

20.1. How do you envisage that you would use the book in your teaching?\*

Please tick as many boxes as you wish. [multiple checkboxes]

<input type="checkbox"/>	In specific sight-reading activities in a separate part of the lesson.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In sight-reading activities which then evolve into repertoire practice.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In combination with a method book or repertoire pieces.
<input type="checkbox"/>	As a method book itself.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In one-to-one lessons.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In group lessons.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

20.2. Do you feel that independent and student-centred learning are promoted in the book(s)?\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maybe.

## Section 21. Final Questions (B)

21.1. Please briefly state elements which promote independent and student-centred learning in the book(s).\*

You may refer to specific examples, Units, pages or activities, if you wish to do so.

## Section 22. Final Questions (C)

22.1. The overall length of the book(s) is:\*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Too short.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Too long.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

22.2. Is there any particular music style that you felt is missing, which would be recommended to include?

Short-answer text

---

If yes, please specify briefly. If not, you may leave this blank.

22.3. How does the author's voice come across to you, as the teacher?

Please explain briefly, using key words/phrases.

Short-answer text

---

22.4. How might the author's voice come across to the pupil?\*

Please explain briefly, using key words/phrases.

Short-answer text

---

22.5. Do you feel that the book(s) respects inclusion, equality and diversity?\*

(such as gender identity, cultural background, nationality, religious beliefs, specific learning difficulties, people with disabilities, from minorities, etc.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maybe.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

22.6. If the book(s) were now available to buy, which would you consider an appropriate price for each book?

Short-answer text

---

22.7. How would you prefer getting access to the book?

<input type="checkbox"/>	In print (paper form).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital version (e-book).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Both in print or digitally.
<input type="checkbox"/>	None.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other...

22.8. What is your overall impression towards the book(s)?\*

Short-answer text

---

22.9. Any final thoughts or comments on the development of this material as a teaching resource?

Long-answer text

---

**Section 23. Thank you very much for your time and feedback!**

Eleni Perisynaki



## **APPENDIX 6: The devised piano sight-reading material**

This appendix contains the sight-reading resources which have been devised for the purposes of the present thesis:

**Book 1:** 'My first steps in the world of sight-reading: Preparatory level, for piano beginners'

**Book 2:** 'My first steps in the world of sight-reading: Level 1, for beginner pianists'.

The books are presented in the version in which they were sent to the piano teachers for appraisal. Greek piano teachers received Greek versions of the books, translated by the author. The [Greek versions of the created books, as well as a digital version of the books in English](#) can be accessed online.

The above link also leads to the revised version of Unit 2, Level 1 (detailed in section 10.5.3.1), which was created as an example of how I would apply reviewers' feedback to further develop the resources in the future.

In the following pages, the two books are presented, containing the original page numbers for each book, i.e. the numbering which would appear if the books were printed documents, as they include blank pages in order for the layout to appear as in a printed book when viewed with the 'two pages' function of a PDF viewer.

ELENI PERISYNAKI

My first steps in the world of  
sight-reading

*Preparatory level  
for piano beginners*



## A WELCOME NOTE

Dear learner,

*Welcome to the world of sight-reading!*

As you might already know, sight-reading is a skill that we use very often in our musical experiences. When playing a new piece for the first time, from your solo repertoire, or with someone else, or in an ensemble, you will find that you often need to play the music in front of you on the spot, as well as you can – that’s when you are sight-reading! Good sight-reading skills are also useful when learning a new piece: they can speed up the first steps of your practice, as they enable you to play the music in front of you as accurately as you can since your very first approach. Think about it – isn’t this cool?

**You can become an effective sight-reader** by gradually building this musical skill! There are various strategies to help you develop your sight-reading from your very first piano lessons, or when working on your own. That’s what this book is for – I think you’ll find it useful.

So, if you are a beginner in your first stages of piano learning, this book is for you.

*Let the journey begin – I hope you enjoy it!*

Eleni

Please read the following pages for useful information about how to use the different types of activities in this book. You will also find some reflective questions to help you think about how well you did in each activity (the ‘achievement criteria’).

## **GETTING TO KNOW THE BOOK ACTIVITIES**

Before we start, let's get to know the hero of this book, Bee, and the book activities. Bee loves music and will be your musical friend throughout this book. In every activity, Bee will be asking questions or giving you tips and sight-reading strategies to help you build your sight-reading skills.



Hello! Welcome to the world of sight-reading!

I am Bee, I love music and I'm so glad to be your musical companion! We will see each other very often in this book. When we meet, I will ask questions to help you think about your playing. I may also give some useful tips and reminders, to help you develop your sight-reading skills further.

I'm looking forward to our musical journey together! Enjoy!

Now, let's have a look at the book activities. This book has eight Units. In Units 1-7 you will find the different types of activities to strengthen all the areas used while reading at sight. Unit 8 summarises the sight-reading strategies you learnt, through some final activities from the following list.

### ★ *'Building on Rhythm'*

Rhythm is key to any music playing, including sight-reading. These activities aim to help you develop your rhythmic skills and *sense of pulse*. This means that you will need to *feel the beat steadily* while playing the different rhythms. The rhythmic elements of this activity are found in any music piece, so this also benefits your general piano playing. You will notice that there is no pitch to the notes here; this is so that you can focus your full attention on rhythm. You can play the passages however you prefer! You may want to clap or tap the rhythm, to press one key with one finger, to sing rhythmic syllables, or in any other way. Feel free to experiment!

### ★ *'Let's reflect!'*

These sections are presented after each activity and invite you to reflect on your performance; in other words, to think carefully about your playing. You can use all, or some of the questions, to help you to think critically about your playing. For example, you may think about what went well, what could be improved, and ways to improve

in the future. Try not to give a one-word answer about your performance, by saying that it was 'good', 'alright' or 'not so good'. Instead, evaluate your playing in more detail, thinking about how you can do better next time – it's like you are becoming the teacher! These sections may also be an opportunity to discuss your thoughts with your teacher. Don't hesitate to ask them to help you with this activity, while you become more familiar with it.

★ 'Exploring the Keyboard'

As the name suggests, this activity invites you to *explore* your instrument. The goal is to familiarise yourself with the *keyboard topography* of the piano – this simply means getting to know the piano keyboard as well as possible. This way, finding the right keys for the notes on the score will be easier when playing at sight, even without needing to look at your hands!

★ 'Let's observe!'

This activity strengthens your *observation skills*. You will observe pairs of short melodies to spot the difference between them, either in pitch, rhythm, or other elements, such as dynamics or articulation. You can also find similarities and discover rhythmic or melodic patterns. Try to spend around half a minute looking at each pair, but **it's more helpful not to rush!** *Careful observation can lead to more effective sight-reading*, so aim to observe the music *meaningfully*, rather than quickly.

★ 'Melodies on the spot'

Time to start playing at sight! Here you'll find the music from the 'Let's observe' section and some new melodies. The skills you practised in the previous activities are all useful here. First, *observe* each melody carefully, and *try to think how it may sound (mentally rehearse)*. You can also practise its rhythm in your head or tap it out loud if you want and find where your hands need to be on the keyboard. Then, try to play the music as accurately as you can, with a *steady beat*. Luckily, it is not the end of the sight-reading world if you play a wrong note! Of course, the more accurately you play the more effective your sight-reading will be. So, in case of a mistake, just ignore it: try to move on without stopping or repeating to get it right. The priority is to *keep the pulse going, while focusing on what comes next*.

★ *'Performing at sight'*

Here you will sight-read pieces of existing music, from classical piano repertoire and Greek tunes – you might already have heard some of them. Prepare each piece for about a minute, using the approaches mentioned above. This is an opportunity to not only practise sight-reading skills, but also to learn more about different composers, styles, and musical eras.

★ *'Fun for two'*

This activity is for fun! You and your teacher or partner can enjoy making music by sight-reading duets. Playing with someone else is a great way to sight-read: it develops your ensemble skills, while having fun being creative together! Here, you will also find some duets that I have composed for you and your partner. You (the *primo* player) may need to move to a slightly different area of the keyboard, further to the right towards the higher notes of the keyboard, so that you can sit comfortably together – the *secondo* player will be positioned on your left. Also, note that the other part may have faster-moving notes, so it is important to listen and keep a steady beat while playing. Prepare your part carefully before playing. The *secondo* player of the duets may want to use the pedal as they see fit, to show the character of the music.

★ *'Terminology and List of featured composers'*

At the end of the book, you can find an explanation of all terms used in the activities, in case you need to remind yourself of these at any point, particularly when working alone. There is also a list of the different composers, whose pieces are featured in the *'Performing at sight'* and the *'Fun for two'* activities. If you are particularly interested in specific composers, you could search for further information to learn more about their lives, background, works and musical eras – this could be useful not only when playing at sight, but also when working on new repertoire.

## **THE ACHIEVEMENT CRITERIA**

Estimating how well you have done in an activity will help you find ways to improve further. In this book, there are no marks for the activities. Instead, I invite you to ask yourself reflective questions, such as those in the following table. This will help you to self-evaluate what you achieved well, and which areas need to be the focus of your future practice. You can discuss these with your teacher as well.

<b>Table of Reflective Questions on Achievement</b>	
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How effectively did I use my preparation time? * What did I do during preparation? * Which elements did I observe? * Is there anything I didn't notice? * What did I mentally rehearse during preparation? * How did this help my sight-reading playing? * What do I need to observe more closely next time?</li> </ul>
<b>Performance (general)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How do I feel about my performance? * What makes me feel this way? * Did the piece make sense to me?</li> </ul>
<b>Flow</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How fluent was my playing? * Did I play with a steady pulse? * Was I comfortable with the tempo I chose? * Were there any places where I needed to stop or slow down, and why? * Or any places where I felt relaxed?</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Did I play the rhythm/note values accurately? * How did I feel about the different rhythms in the piece? * Is there anything I could have played more accurately? * Were there any rhythms I was unsure about?</li> </ul>
<b>Pitch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How accurately did I play the notes? * How easily did I find the notes in this hand position? * Were there any notes that I was unsure about?</li> </ul>
<b>Musical elements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How musically did I play? * Which musical elements did I do well? * Is there anything I could have achieved better? * Were there any elements that I forgot to do? * How did my playing show the character of the piece?</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Are there any places I found difficult? * What was challenging about them? * What did I do about them? * How can I overcome these in the future?</li> </ul>
<b>Other positives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* What am I most happy about? * What did I achieve best in my playing? * How much did I enjoy my performance?</li> </ul>
<b>Improved areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How have I improved since the last time? * What areas did I achieve better this time? * Why do I think this is? * How do I feel about this improvement?</li> </ul>
<b>Future goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Which are my next sight-reading goals? * Where should I focus on in my next practice? * How can improve further? * What else do I want to achieve?</li> </ul>



## ***A NOTE TO THE TEACHER***

Dear colleague,

Thank you for considering this book as a resource for teaching sight-reading.

This book (Preparatory level) is part of the series '*My first steps in the world of sight-reading*'. The material is designed for beginner learners in the first year of piano study, with the intention to nurture and facilitate the development of sight-reading skills from the earliest stages of music learning.

With an early start, learners can enjoy the benefits of effective sight-reading skills in their general music studies in later years, from practising new repertoire, to participating in ensembles, chamber music and accompanying activities. The strategies developed in the early stages of learning are envisaged to continue being practised throughout their studies to improve these skills further, thus also developing skills to support learners' confidence and competence in assessed sight-reading contexts; for example, within Conservatoire sight-reading exams or graded performance exams at any level.

Acknowledging the various elements and potential challenges to be considered in each lesson, please feel free to use this book as flexibly as needed. The musical material of each Unit may be distributed across two or more lessons, depending on learners' individual needs and the overall pacing of each lesson. I encourage you to combine elements from the different activities in each session, to form a well-rounded sight-reading engagement.

My very best wishes for a creative and enjoyable journey in the world of sight-reading,

Eleni Perisyaki

The design of the material and activities of this book series has been informed by existing research on sight-reading in the fields of music education and music psychology, as well as by personal research on international publications and aspects of sight-reading teaching within Greek conservatoire education, as part of my PhD at the University of York (UK).

## PREPARATORY LEVEL – MUSICAL ELEMENTS PER UNIT

<p><b>UNIT 1</b> Page 9</p>	<p><math>\frac{2}{4}</math>, minim, crotchet Single note for each hand (middle C). Hand position: Thumbs sharing middle C.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 2</b> Page 16</p>	<p>New elements: <math>\frac{4}{4}</math>, <i>mf</i>, semibreve New notes per hand: D (RH), B (LH). Notes of the same value per bar, crotchets in pairs of repeated notes.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 3</b> Page 23</p>	<p>New elements: <i>f</i> Different values per bar. Combination of previous elements, crotchet pairs with different notes.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 4</b> Page 30</p>	<p>New elements: <math>\frac{3}{4}</math>, <i>p</i> New notes per hand: E (RH), A (LH). Combination of previous elements.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 5</b> Page 39</p>	<p>New elements: crotchet rest New notes per hand: F (RH), G (LH). Combination of previous elements.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 6</b> Page 48</p>	<p>New elements: semibreve rest New notes per hand: G (RH), F (LH). Combination of previous elements.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 7</b> Page 57</p>	<p>New elements: minim rest Combination of previous elements.</p>
<p><b>UNIT 8</b> Page 65</p>	<p>Recapitulation / Overview, elements from all Units.</p>
<p>Page 73</p>	<p>Terminology &amp; List of featured composers</p>

Table terminology:

LH = Left Hand / RH = Right Hand

# UNIT 1

New elements:  
 $\frac{2}{4}$ , middle C, minim, crotchet

Welcome to the first Unit of this book!

In each Unit, you can see the new elements that you will be sight-reading next to the title, on the right-hand side of the page.

In this Unit, your hands will be sharing middle C. To do this, you will need to place both thumbs on middle C on the keyboard. There are finger numbers to help you to place your fingers on the right piano keys. Number one (1) is used for your thumb.



Hello! Welcome to the first Unit activities!  
I'm so excited to start!



## Building on Rhythm

Try to play the rhythms below as well as you can! As you see, there is no clef at the beginning of each stave. This means that the note values is what matters – that's why all of the notes are written on the same line of the stave. You may want to clap or tap your hands, stamp your feet, use a percussion instrument, or play a note with one finger on the piano keyboard. You can even find your own way – feel free to experiment!

First, look at the time signature and ask yourself the following questions:

What does  $\frac{2}{4}$  mean? Which note values can you see? How many beats do you need to count for each note? Then, think about a *slow and steady pulse*, such as a clock ticking. This will help you to feel comfortable while playing. Before starting, count one or two bars aloud or in your head, to help you feel the beat.

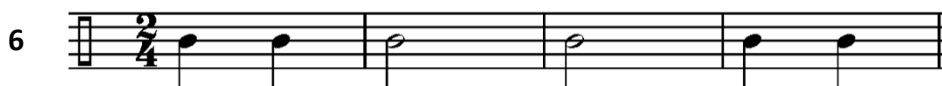
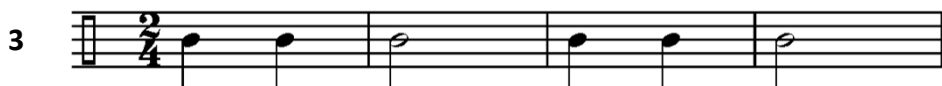
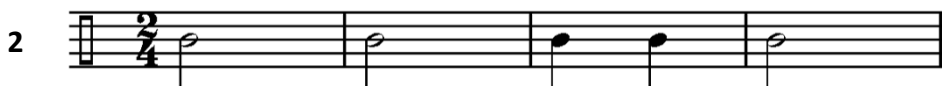
Let's try out your first rhythms at sight!



How many beats  
does a crotchet have?



How many beats  
does a minim have?



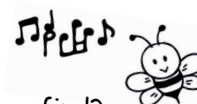
**Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I do in each rhythm?
- \* How steadily did I feel the pulse?
- \* Are there any rhythms I was unsure about?

**Exploring the Keyboard**

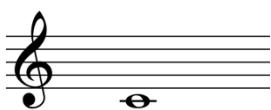
Notice where middle C is located on the keyboard. Can you find every C note on the piano?  
You can press the keys with any finger you like. Try this for both hands.

Let the keyboard exploration begin!



How many C notes did you find?  
How would you describe their sound?

Right hand



Left hand



**Let's reflect!**

- \* How easily did I find the key?
- \* Could I find all C notes on the keyboard?

## Let's Observe!


In this activity, you will need to observe each pair of melodies closely. They may seem identical, but they're not! One difference is hiding in each pair. Can you spot it? Pay your full attention to find it. When you do, think about how the sound would change in each pair.


Let's start observing!




Look at each pair for about **half a minute** *as closely as you can*.  
Each difference may be hiding in rhythm, pitch, or in any other musical element! *Good luck!*


### Pair 1 – Right hand

A 

B 

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A 

B 

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A 

B 

### Let's reflect!

- \* How easily did I find each difference?
- \* Where was the difference in each pair, in pitch or rhythm?

## Melodies on the spot

Now that you have warmed up through the rhythms, keyboard exploration and observation activities, let's start playing at sight! These are some simple melodies for you to sight-read. Before you play each melody, practise all the different steps you did before for *one minute* in total: first, look at the time signature, the notes and values; then, try out the rhythm thinking a slow and steady pulse; finally, try to imagine how each melody may sound. You observed some of the following melodies in the previous activity (Right hand: 1 and 2, Left hand: 3 and 4, Hands together: 1). You may start with these ones if you prefer.

Enjoy your first melodies on the spot!

Before you start, remember to count one bar in to start feeling the pulse.



#### Right hand

1

2

3

4

#### Left hand

1

2

3

4

**Hands together**

1

2

3

4

***Let's reflect!***

- \* Was one minute enough to prepare each melody?
- \* How comfortable was I with the speed that I played in?
- \* How accurately did I play the rhythm of each melody?
- \* Did I meet any difficulties?

## Fun for two

These duet pieces are for fun! You can sight-read these with your teacher or with a more musically experienced friend. The upper stave is for you; the lower stave is for your partner. For both duets, you will need to move both thumbs onto the C above middle C. *Your partner* will need to play both hands one octave lower than written on the score. You may also want to move your seating position up to the right, so that you can sit and play comfortably together. Note that the other part has faster-moving notes, so it is important to listen and keep a steady beat while playing.

Let's sight-read some duets!



Once you've prepared each piece for about a minute, count one bar aloud so that you both know when to start!

### *Let's C!*

**Happily**

**EP\***



Duets are a great way to practise sight-reading, while having fun with someone else!

### *A happy ending!*

**Lightly**

**EP**

\* Sometimes, you will see the letters 'EP' in the 'Fun for two' activity. These are my initials, to show which duets I have composed for you and your partner to sight-read together. I hope you enjoy them!

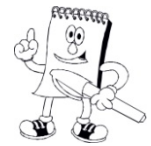


***Let's reflect!***

- \* How did I feel when sight-reading with someone else?
  - \* What did I do during preparation time?
  - \* What challenges did we/I have?
- \* What did we/I enjoy most in our/my playing?

***Congratulations!***

***You have completed the first Unit of this book!***



**How was your experience with sight-reading in this Unit?**

**Unit 1**

***I learnt...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***


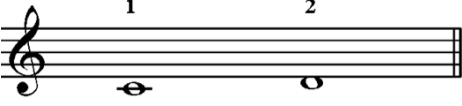
***What I aim to improve  
in my next practice  
is...***

# UNIT 2

New elements:  
D (RH), B (LH), semibreve  
 $\frac{4}{4}$ , *mf*

Welcome to the second Unit of this book!

In this Unit you will be playing two notes in each hand. Use your thumb (1) and index finger (2) to play each note, as the finger numbers show for each hand:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Left hand</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Right hand</div>		
			
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Middle C</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">B</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Middle C</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">D</div>

## Building on Rhythm

Play the following rhythms as accurately as you can. Notice the new time signature in this Unit:  $\frac{4}{4}$ . There are some  $\frac{2}{4}$  rhythms too, so make sure to pay attention to each time signature before you start. Remember to think a *steady slow pulse* at first, so that you can play comfortably and without stopping. You can also try to *practise* each rhythm *in your head*, before you start to play. Finally, don't forget to count one bar in, to get used to the beat.

Let's see how it goes!



Which new note value can you see in the rhythms of this activity?



Why are there no semibreves in the first three rhythms?

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	



Try to count the beats of longer notes *patiently*, without rushing. Keeping a steady beat is key in sight-reading.

6 

7 

8 

**Let's reflect!**

- \* What did I do before I played each rhythm?
- \* Which rhythms did I play the best?
- \* Were there any rhythms that I found difficult?

**Exploring the Keyboard**

You will now explore two more notes on the keyboard: B below middle C, and D above middle C. Can you find all the D notes on the keyboard? Can you do the same for all the B notes? You may want to keep using one finger to press each key or try using different fingers.

Let's explore the Bs and Ds!

Right hand 

Left hand 



Look at the two new notes on the staff. How do they look? What could be a good trick to remember each one, so that you don't mix them up when you play?

**Let's reflect!**

- \* Where is D placed on the keyboard?
- \* Where is B placed on the keyboard?
- \* How easy was it to find each key?

## Let's Observe!

Try to find one difference in each pair of melodies. Observe each pair *closely* for about *half a minute*. Remember, the difference might be hiding anywhere! How would each melody sound?

Let's spot the difference!

You will play some of these melodies in the next activity.  
So, try to *imagine* how each one may sound to help you play them later. What does *mf* mean?



### Pair 1 – Right hand

A Musical notation for Pair 1, Right hand, Melody A. Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Dynamic: *mf*.

B Musical notation for Pair 1, Right hand, Melody B. Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. Notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Dynamic: *mf*.

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A Musical notation for Pair 2, Left hand, Melody A. Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Notes: G3 (half), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (half). Dynamic: *mf*.

B Musical notation for Pair 2, Left hand, Melody B. Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Notes: G3 (half), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (half). Dynamic: *mf*.

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A Musical notation for Pair 3, Hands together, Melody A. Grand staff, 4/4 time signature. Treble clef notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Bass clef notes: G3 (half), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamic: *mf*.

B Musical notation for Pair 3, Hands together, Melody B. Grand staff, 4/4 time signature. Treble clef notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Bass clef notes: G3 (half), A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). Dynamic: *mf*.

### Let's reflect!

- \* Where was the difference in each pair this time?
- \* Was half a minute enough time to observe each pair?
- \* Were there any differences that were easier or harder to spot than others?

## Melodies on the spot

It's time to sight-read some melodies again! Repeat the different steps to help you play at sight: try out the *rhythm*, *observe* the new notes and the musical elements of each melody for about a minute, and try to hear the music in your head. Also, think a steady pulse, so that you feel comfortable as you play. From the following melodies, the ones you observed in the previous activity are: right hand melody 1, and melody number 3 from the left hand and hands together.

Let's play some melodies on the spot!



Don't forget to look at the time signature, so that you count the right number of beats per bar!

### Right hand

1 

2 

3 

4 

### Left hand

1 

2 *mf*

3 *mf*

4 *mf*

**Hands together**

1 *mf*

2 *mf*

3 *mf*

4 *mf*

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How well did I play the notes each melody?
- \* How did I do in counting the different note values?
- \* How was the sound when I played *mf*?

## Fun for two

It's time to sight-read some duets again! To play both of these duets, you will need to move both thumbs onto the next (higher) C, so that you are comfortably playing together. Your partner will not need to move this time. Spend some time practising the different steps to prepare for one minute, to help you sight-read your part as well as you can. If you want to, you can play your part on your own once, to get an idea of the music before you play together. Finally, remember to count one bar aloud, so that you both know when to start.

Let's have some fun for two!



Look at the title of each piece.  
What does it bring to mind? How could you show this through your playing?

### *Royal dance*

Proudly

EP



You may need some more time to observe this piece, as it is slightly longer. This is absolutely fine! Take your time to prepare it without rushing.

### *Green bicycle*

Carefreely

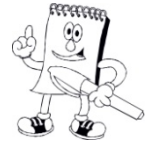
EP

***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How did we/I feel about my/our playing?
- ★ How did the preparation minute feel this time?
- ★ How did the title information help my sight-reading?
- ★ What do we/I want to improve in the next duets?

***Congratulations!***

***Well done for completing Unit 2!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading so far.**

**Unit 2**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
next is...***



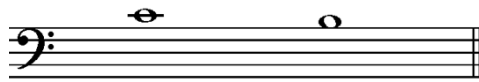
# UNIT 3

New elements:  
*f*

Welcome to Unit 3!

In this Unit you will be playing the same notes as the previous Unit. Below you can see which finger to use for each note in each hand:

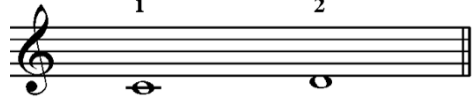
Left hand



1 2

Middle C B

Right hand

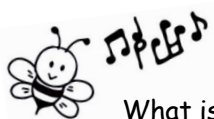
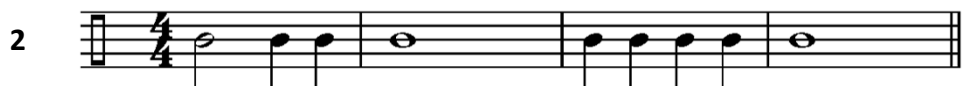


Middle C D

## Building on Rhythm

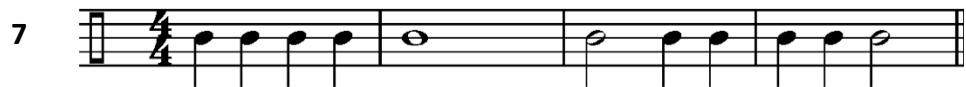
In the following rhythms, play the different values you have practised so far as well as you can. Notice that there are various values in each bar this time. As before, look at the time signature to help you count correctly and think a *steady slow pulse* to play in, so that you can keep playing without needing to stop or slow down. Try to *imagine* how each rhythm will sound before you play.

Remember to count one bar in, at a steady pace, and then start!



What is different between rhythms 4 and 5?





***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How did I prepare each rhythm?
- ★ Were there any rhythms where I needed to stop or slow down?
- ★ If so, why do I think that is?

**Exploring the Keyboard**

Look at each example carefully. Can you find each note on the keyboard? This time, there are also examples which present the notes on the staff as you would play them with both hands.

You can do this as slowly or as fast as you like, using one or different fingers for each note.

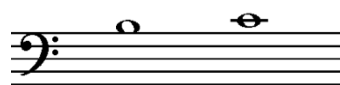
You can also sing each note as you play, or even name it, if you want to.

Let's explore further!

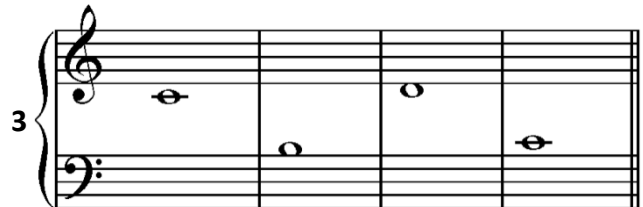
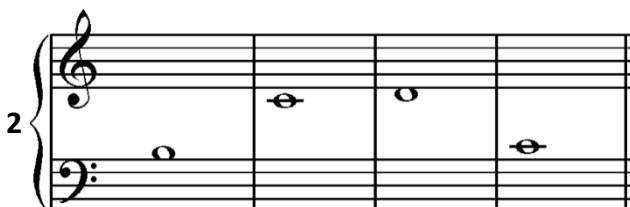
**Right hand**



**Left hand**



**Hands together**



***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How do I feel about finding each note on the keyboard?
- ★ How well did I name/sing the notes I played?

## Let's Observe!

Look at each pair for about *half a minute*, to find the difference between the two melodies. As before, this may be hiding in any musical element, so don't forget to pay attention to details, too.

Let's see which differences you'll find!

### Pair 1 – Right hand

A 

B 

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A 

B 



How will each of the next melodies sound?

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A 

B 



2 *mf*

1

3 *f*

2

4 *mf*

2

**Hands together**

1 *f*

2

2 *f*

2

3 *f*

2

4 *mf*

2

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How well did I play the notes and values in each melody?
- ★ Were there any places I stopped or slowed down?
- ★ What did I do to play *f*?

## Fun for two

Try to play these duets at sight as well as you can. You will need to place both thumbs on the next (higher) C, for both pieces. Look at each duet carefully for a minute, to observe the notes, values and dynamics that you will need to play. You can also practise the rhythm silently, so that you feel confident with counting when you play with your partner.

Once you've counted one bar in, let's enjoy the music!



Titles can help us understand the *character* of the music. Think about how each piece may sound before you play.

### *An impatient giant*

With some sadness

EP

Musical score for 'An impatient giant' in 4/4 time. The piece consists of two systems. The first system has a treble clef staff with a dynamic marking of *f* and a bass clef staff. The second system has a bass clef staff with a dynamic marking of *f*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### *Dinner time*

With excitement

EP

Musical score for 'Dinner time' in 4/4 time. The piece consists of two systems. The first system has a treble clef staff with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a bass clef staff. The second system has a bass clef staff with a dynamic marking of *mf*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### **Let's reflect!**

- ★ How did we/I do in these duets?
- ★ How similar was the music I imagined to the music I played?
- ★ Which challenges did we meet?

# ***Congratulations!***

***You have now completed Unit 3!***



**What do you think about your experience with sight-reading so far?**

## **Unit 3**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
next is...***

# UNIT 4

New elements:  
E (RH), A (LH),  $\frac{3}{4}$ , *p*

Welcome to Unit 4!

In this Unit you will be sight-reading some new notes. There is one new note in each hand: A for your left hand and E for your right hand. You will use your third finger (3) for these notes, as shown below:

Left hand

1 2 3

Middle C B A

Right hand

1 2 3

Middle C D E

## Building on Rhythm

In the rhythms of this Unit you will practise sight-reading a new time signature:  $\frac{3}{4}$ . How will you count  $\frac{3}{4}$ ? As always, think a *steady slow pulse* to get the feeling of the beat and try to *hear* each rhythm *in your head* before you play. You may feel that you want to count in two bars instead of one this time, to get used to the new time signature – just make sure to count patiently, without speeding up.

Let's sight-read some  $\frac{3}{4}$  rhythms!



Which note values are used in these rhythms?

Is there a value you know, that you don't see here?

1

2

3

4

5



6 

7 

8 

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I do with these rhythms?
- \* How confident am I with playing  $\frac{3}{4}$ ?
- \* Were there any rhythms I could have played better?

### Exploring the Keyboard

Let's explore the new notes on the keyboard. In example 1, explore A and E separately, using the same, or any finger if you want. Then in examples 2 and 3, try to find all the different notes on the piano keys. As before, you can use the same, or different fingers for each note, if you want to practise this hand position. Can you also sing or name the notes?

Let's explore the As and Es!

**Right hand**                      **Left hand**

1 

**Hands together**

2 

3 



Look at the two new notes.  
If you feel that they look alike, how could you remember each one, so that you can tell them apart?

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How many As and Es did I find?
- \* Were there any confusing notes?
- \* Which notes were the easiest to find?

## Let's Observe!

Spend about *half a minute* on each pair of melodies looking for one difference between them. As you know by now, the difference might be anywhere, so make sure that you observe carefully.


Then, think about how each melody may sound, as you will play some of them in the next activity.


Let's become sight-reading detectives once again!



Some differences might take a bit longer to spot than others. Don't worry! Continue to look for them, I'm sure you'll find them!

### Pair 1 – Right hand

A 

B 

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A 

B 

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A   
*f*

B   
*p*

### Let's reflect!

- ★ Was half a minute enough time to observe each pair?
- ★ Which pair was the easiest to spot the difference in?
- ★ What kind of differences did I find this time?

## Melodies on the spot

In the following melodies, you will practise sight-reading the different musical elements of this Unit: two new notes (E and A),  $\frac{3}{4}$  time signature and *p* dynamic. Remember to pay attention to these elements while you are observing and preparing each melody in your head. As before, you may use the finger numbers to help you find the starting note of each hand. The first melody of each section (right hand, left hand, hands together) is the one you observed in previously.

Here you go!

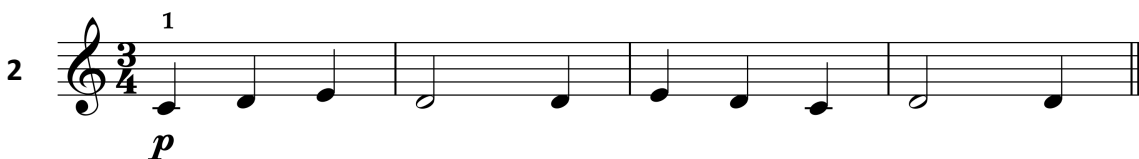


Make sure that you count in a bar before you start, to get the feeling of  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

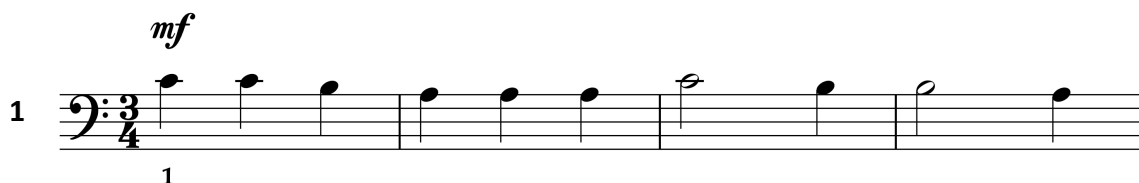


What does *p* mean? How will you make a *p* sound?

### Right hand



### Left hand



2 *p*

3 *p*

**Hands together**

1 *p*

2 *f*

3 *p*

4 *f*

***Let's reflect!***

- \* How did I do in each melody?
- \* Were there any places where I felt unsure? Why was that?
- \* How did the sound change in the different dynamics?

## Performing at sight

This is a new activity! So far, you have practised key skills that we use when playing at sight. In this activity, you will develop these skills further. Continue to do all the preparation steps you have learnt. For one minute, observe the time signature, notes and values, and practise the rhythm silently. Then, try to imagine the music, the dynamics and the character. Finally, keep in mind that **the goal is to keep the pulse going** when playing at sight. Even if you make a mistake, just keep playing, as if nothing happened! A slow speed will help you to feel more confident as you play.

Let's play some more pieces at sight!



Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina was a Renaissance composer from Italy.

This motet is one of his most well-known sacred music works,  
and it was originally written for four voices.

### *Dies Sanctificatus*

Kindly

Palestrina, Motet No. 1  
'Motecta festorum', Book I

A musical score for a piano accompaniment of 'Dies Sanctificatus'. It features a grand staff with a treble and bass clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The melody is simple, with a few notes in the treble and bass staves. A '2' is written above the first measure and below the second measure. The piece ends with a double bar line.



This is a traditional tune that young ladies sing  
to the bride-to-be on her wedding day. Can you show the  
joy of this occasion through your playing?

### *Wedding preparation song*

With joy

Greek folk song of Epirus

A musical score for a piano accompaniment of a Greek folk song. It features a grand staff with a treble and bass clef, a 3/4 time signature, and a piano (p) dynamic. The melody is simple, with a few notes in the treble and bass staves. A '2' is written above the second measure and a '3' is written below the first measure. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### ***Let's reflect!***

- \* How did I do with the notes and values?
- \* How did I show the character of each piece?
- \* Were there any places that I found easy or more difficult?

## Fun for two

In this Unit, there are three duets to play with your partner. This time, they are also of different lengths. Keep using your sight-reading skills and strategies to prepare each piece as well as you can, to play with your partner. Along with the rhythms and notes, pay attention to the dynamics, the title and the character of each duet. These will help you to play more musically. For the two duets on this page, you will need to move both thumbs on the next C (one octave higher).

Don't forget to count a bar in, to show the playing speed (tempo) and when to start!



Remember that, when playing with someone else, it is necessary to keep playing, even if you make a mistake. Why do you think this is important? Talk about this with your partner.

### *Things got serious*

Heavily

EP

Musical score for 'Things got serious' in 3/4 time, marked *f* (forte). The score consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a '2' above the first bar and a bass clef staff with a '3' above the first bar. The second system has a bass clef staff with a '5' above the first bar and a bass clef staff with a '4' below the first bar. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### *Where is the ring?*

Sweetly

Greek children's song

Musical score for 'Where is the ring?' in 3/4 time, marked *p* (piano). The score consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a '2' above the first bar and a bass clef staff with a '1' below the first bar. The second system has a bass clef staff with a '2' above the first bar and a bass clef staff with a '1' below the first bar. The piece ends with a double bar line.

For this third duet, you will need to place both thumbs two octaves higher (two Cs higher). You will also need to move your seat to the right, so that you are sitting comfortably. You and your partner may want to play through your parts separately first, to get an idea of the music before you play together. If you do, listen to the other part carefully, to understand what your partner will be playing in the duet and get used to the rhythms. The secondo player may use the pedal as they feel, to show the dreamy character of the music.



In this duet, you will be practising a new sight-reading skill: **looking ahead**. As there are two lines of music this time, you will need to look further ahead, over your partner's music, when the line changes. The goal is to keep playing, without stopping. So, practise looking from the top to the bottom line of your part a few times, before you start to play.

*Water in the moonlight\**

Like a dream

Greene-Wiggins  
(no Opus/catalogue number)

Thomas (Tom) Greene-Wiggins, was an African-American pianist and composer. He was born blind, but he loved composing and playing the piano from a very young age, and he was named a piano prodigy. Amazing!



\* This piece has been adapted for the purposes of this book. Original composition is in B flat major.

***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How did we/I feel about our collaboration this time?
  - ★ What did I do in the one-minute preparation?
- ★ How did I do in looking ahead, over my partner's music?
- ★ Did we/I meet any challenges? If so, what did we/I do?
  - ★ What did we/I enjoy most?

***Congratulations!***

***Now that you completed Unit 4, you are halfway through the book!***



**What do you think about your experience with sight-reading so far?**

**Unit 4**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
next is...***



# UNIT 5

New elements:  
F (RH), G (LH), crotchet rest

Welcome to Unit 5!

In this Unit you will be sight-reading two more notes: F for your right hand, and G for your left hand. For both of these notes, you will need to use your fourth finger (4). Here are all the notes and finger numbers for each hand.

**Left hand**

1 2 3 4

Middle C B A G

**Right hand**

1 2 3 4

Middle C D E F

## Building on Rhythm

In this Unit, there is a new rhythmic element: the crotchet rest. What is the rest and what do we need to do when we see one? How will you 'play' a rest in this activity?

Before you start, don't forget to look at the time signature of each rhythm, as not all of them are the same. Then, practise each rhythm *silently*, thinking a *steady slow pulse*, so that you can play any rests in time.

Let's count one bar in and start to play some rhythms with rests!



How many beats does a crotchet rest have?  
What will you show the rests in each rhythm?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

6 

7 

8 

**Let's reflect!**

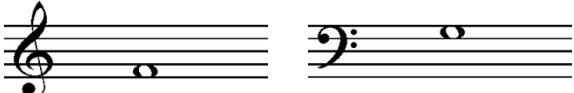
- ★ How well did I play the crotchet rests?
- ★ What did I need to be careful with, when I played these rhythms?
- ★ Which rhythm did I play best?

## Exploring the Keyboard

Let's explore the new notes of this Unit on the piano keyboard. In the first example (1), you can explore each note separately on the keyboard. Use any finger you want to find every F and every G note on the piano keys. Then, in examples 2 and 3, practise finding different notes on the piano. Again, you may sing or name each note you play.

Let's explore some more notes!

**Right hand**      **Left hand**

1 



Where are F and G on the keyboard?

**Hands together**

2 



Which note are you playing with the fourth finger of each hand?

3 

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How easily did I find each note?
- ★ Did I name/sing all notes correctly?
- ★ Were there any difficult notes to find?

## Let's Observe!

It's time to practise your observation again! Let's see which difference you'll spot in each pair, after looking at it for about *half a minute*. Also think about the difference it makes in the sound.

Let's observe some more melodies!



This time there are more things to observe. This means that your observation skills are getting stronger!

### Pair 1 – Right hand

A   
B

Two musical staves, A and B, in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. Both staves contain a sequence of notes: a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4.

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A   
B

Two musical staves, A and B, in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. Both staves contain a sequence of notes: a half note G2, a quarter rest, a quarter note A2, a half note B2, a quarter note C3, a quarter note D3, a quarter note E3, a quarter note F3, a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, a quarter note B3, and a half note C4.

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A   
B

Two musical systems, A and B, in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 4/4 time signature. Both systems include a dynamic marking of *mf*. System A shows a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. System B shows a different melody in the right hand and a different bass line in the left hand.

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I do in spotting these differences?
- \* How do I feel about my observation skills so far?
- \* Did I also think about the sound of each melody?

**Melodies on the spot**

Let's move on to some melodies! There are more elements to observe now, such as two new notes and rests. In the one minute that you prepare each melody, try to also pay attention to the dynamics (*mf, f, p*) to play more musically. As always, it is helpful to practise the rhythm in a slow and steady speed, and to try to hear each melody in your head before you play. From the melodies below, you observed the first (1) melody for your right hand, the second (2) for your left hand and the fourth one (4) for hands together in the previous activity, if you want to start with those.

Let's play some Gs, Fs and crotchet rests!



Don't forget to count the rest beats carefully as you play, without rushing.

**Right hand**

3  
1 *mf*

2 *p*

1  
3 *mf*

**Left hand**

If you happen to play a wrong note, don't worry! It's not the end of the world! Just keep playing, as if nothing happened!



*f*

1

*p*

2

1

*mf*

3

4

Hands together

1

*mf*

2

3

2

*p*

*f*

4

3

3

*mf*

3

3

4

*f*

3

1

5

*f*

1

4

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do I feel about the new notes?
- ★ How did I do in counting the crotchet rests?
- ★ What did I do to play musically?
- ★ Did I make any mistakes? What did I do then?

## Performing at sight

Let's play some more pieces at sight. While you are preparing each piece for about *a minute*, this time also look for *patterns*. A pattern is something that is repeated. In music, this can be in the *melody*, with repeated notes or similar note movements (melodic patterns), or in the *rhythm*, with repetition of the same note values or rests (rhythmic patterns).

Do your best!



Can you find any rhythmic or melodic patterns in these pieces?

### *Song of the lemons*

Bouncing

Greek folk song of East Thrace

A musical score for a piano piece in 4/4 time. The piece is marked *mf*. The melody is in the right hand, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass line is in the left hand, starting with a quarter note G3, followed by a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The score is divided into four measures. A '2' is written above the second measure of the melody, and a '4' is written below the first measure of the bass line.

In Greece, the Carnival is a celebration of fun. People dress in funny costumes, sing, dance and tease each other with practical jokes. This might be useful to keep in mind while you're playing.

### *Wood for the Carnival*

Jokingly

Greek folk song of Epirus

A musical score for a piano piece in 4/4 time. The piece is marked *f*. The melody is in the right hand, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass line is in the left hand, starting with a quarter note G3, followed by a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The score is divided into four measures. A '1' is written above the second measure of the melody, and a '4' is written below the first measure of the bass line.

### ***Let's reflect!***

- \* How did I prepare each piece?
- \* Which challenges did I meet?
- \* What did I do best in these pieces?
- \* What do I want to improve next?

## Fun for two

Here are some more duets to sight-read. Spend some time preparing your part before you play together. For longer duets, you may need more than a minute to prepare – this is absolutely fine! While observing the different elements, also think about the character of the music and how you can show it through your playing. As before, you can try your part alone first, or listen to your partner's part before you play together, if you want.

For all duets, place both thumbs on the next C on the keyboard (one octave higher).

Have fun!



Can you find any rhythmic or melodic patterns in these pieces?

### *Lullaby* Peacefully

EP

A piano score for a lullaby in 4/4 time, marked 'p' (piano). The score consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system shows a simple melody in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The second system features more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, with fingerings indicated by numbers 1-5.



This melody may sound familiar. Do you recognise it?  
When you play it, notice any changes there might be  
between the score and the tune you know.

### *Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman* Skipping

W. A. Mozart, K. 265/300e

A piano score for 'Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman' in 2/4 time, marked 'p' (piano). The score consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system shows a simple melody in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The second system features more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, with fingerings indicated by numbers 1-5.

\* This piece has been adapted for the purposes of this book. Original composition in C major, starting on C.



Don't forget to spend some time to practise looking ahead,  
at the second line of your part. Which hand plays in each line?

*To a closed casement\**  
Slowly and expressively

Dett, no. 5  
'Tropic Winter'



Now that you played this duet once, where do you think the main melody is?  
Who played it? Talk about it with your partner. If you want to, you can try the  
duet again, thinking about what you would do or change, for a good balance  
between the melody and the accompaniment.

### **Let's reflect!**

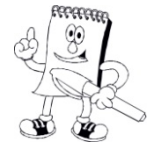
- \* How do I feel about our/my performance in each duet?
  - \* Which duet did we/I enjoy the most? Why?
  - \* What could we/I have done better?
  - \* If any mistakes happened, what did I do?
- \* What did we/I do to balance the melody and the accompaniment?

\* This piece has been adapted for the purposes of this unit. Original includes quavers (instead of crotchets).



# ***Congratulations!***

***Well done for completing Unit 5!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading so far.**

## **Unit 5**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
next is...***

# UNIT 6

New elements:  
G (RH), F (LH), semibreve rest

Welcome to Unit 6 of this book!

In this Unit there are two more notes to sight-read, one for each hand. You will need to use your fifth (5) finger to play G with your right hand and F with your left hand. Let's see all the notes that you will be playing:

**Left hand**

1 2 3 4 5

Middle C B A G F

**Right hand**

1 2 3 4 5

Middle C D E F G

## Building on Rhythm

In the rhythms of this Unit, you will also find the semibreve rest.

How many beats does the semibreve rest have? As always, you can practise each rhythm *silently* before playing it, to get an idea of what it sounds. Then, try to play each rhythm in a *steady pace without rushing*, so that you count all beats of the semibreve rests correctly.

Remember to count a bar in according to the time signature, to start feeling the pulse.

Let's play some rhythms with semibreve rests!



Try not to speed up when counting the semibreve rests. All beats need to be equal in length.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4



In  $\frac{2}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$ , semibreve rests are often used to show that there is a whole-bar rest.

This means that you will need to count as the time signature shows - not four beats.

5

6

7

8

### Let's reflect!

- \* How well did I play the semibreve rests?
- \* What did I need to be careful with, when I played these rhythms?
- \* Which rhythm did I play best? Why?

## Exploring the Keyboard

Let's explore the new notes on the piano keys. In the first example (1), you can explore the new notes separately on the keyboard, as you did in Unit 5. You may use any finger you like for each note. In examples 2 and 3, practise finding different notes you've played so far.

Let's explore once again!

Right hand

Left hand

1

If you place both thumbs on middle C, which note are you playing with the fifth finger of each hand?

Hands together

2

3

### Let's reflect!

- \* How was finding the notes F and G this time?
- \* How did I do in finding all the different notes for each hand?
- \* Was I unsure about any notes?

## Let's Observe!

Continue to build your observation skills by looking closely at the following pairs of melodies. You will need to observe each pair for *half a minute*, but make sure not to rush, as some differences are trickier to spot.

Let's observe these new melodies!



Remember to look at all the elements that you have practised sight-reading so far: note values, rests, notes and dynamics - the difference might be hiding anywhere!

### Pair 1 – Right hand

A

B

### Pair 2 – Left hand

A

B

### Pair 3 – Hands together

A

B

### Let's reflect!

- \* Which was the easiest difference to spot? Why?
- \* Which was the most challenging difference to spot? Why?

## Melodies on the spot

In the following melodies, you will practise sight-reading the elements of this Unit: note F for your left hand, G for your right hand, and semibreve rests. While preparing each melody for about a minute, make sure that you think about the different note values, rests and dynamics. After you've practised each rhythm silently, try to imagine how each melody may sound. Also, look at notes of each example carefully: are there any notes or fingers that you will not need to play? You observed the first melody of each of the following sections, in the previous activity.

Let's play some new notes and rests!



Take your time counting the rest beats, without rushing.  
Look at the time signature before you start, so that you count any whole-bar rests correctly.

#### Right hand

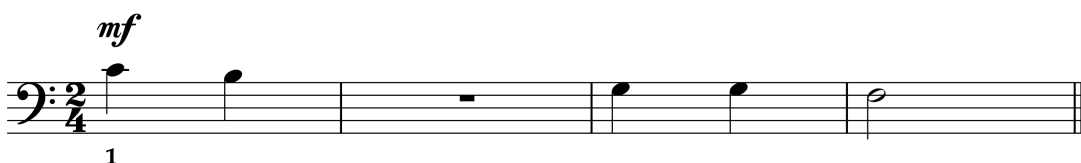
1 

2 

3 

4 

#### Left hand

1 

2 *f*

3 *mf*

4 *p*

5

Hands together

1 *mf*

2 *f*

3 *p*

4 *mf*

5 *p*

4

### Let's reflect!

- \* How did I do with the new notes in these melodies?
- \* How well did I count the semibreve rests and the whole-bar rests?
  - \* Which melody did I find more difficult?
  - \* Which one did I play most musically?

## Performing at sight

Try to sight-read the following pieces as well as you can. While preparing each piece, also look at the title and other information on the score, to show the character of the music. During your one-minute preparation, repeat the useful steps: practise the rhythm in your head, think about the notes, rests and dynamics, and try to imagine the sound of the music. Finally, make sure that you choose a comfortable speed, so that you can play with a steady pulse and with flow.

I hope you enjoy these!



Henry Purcell was a well-known English composer in the Baroque period. His work 'Rigaudon' or 'Rigodoon' is a dance, composed for the keyboard.

### *Rigaudon*

With flow

Purcell, Z. 653

4

mf

1

The musical score for 'Rigaudon' is written for a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 4/4 time. The piece is marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'With flow'. The first measure of the treble staff contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass staff has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by quarter notes G3, A3, and B3 in the subsequent measures. A first ending bracket is shown below the first measure of the bass staff.



Francis Johnson had interest in composing different styles of dances, perhaps inspired by his Caribbean roots. 'A collection of new Cotillions' has 12 dances for the piano, many of which have people's names in their title - so does this one.

### *Ford*

With a mood for dance

Johnson, no. 7  
'A collection of new Cotillions'


3

p

1

The musical score for 'Ford' is written for a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 4/4 time. The piece is marked 'p' (piano) and 'With a mood for dance'. The first measure of the treble staff contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass staff has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by quarter notes G3, A3, and B3 in the subsequent measures. A first ending bracket is shown below the first measure of the bass staff.

\* Both pieces have been adapted: *Rigaudon* originally in C major starting from C; *Ford* originally in D major.

This song is accompanied by Cretan lyra,  a traditional instrument with strings, played with a bow.

**Dryland water**

**Brightly**

**Greek folk song of Crete**

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I spend the preparation time?
- \* Which challenges did I meet?
- \* What did I achieve best?
- \* What do I need to improve next?

**Fun for two**

Time for some duet sight-reading! Observe your part carefully for about a minute and try to play as musically as you can. To prepare each duet, practise the different strategies you have learnt so far. For both duets, you will need to move both thumbs on the next C – don't forget to adjust your sitting position. When you're ready, count one bar aloud to get the pulse going and start together.

Have fun sight-reading together!

**Skipping happily**

**Lightly**

**EP**





What is a 'march' in real life? How would you describe its character? Think about how you could show this through your playing.

**Marching tune**

**Rhythmically**

**EP**

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do we/I feel about our collaboration in these duets?
  - ★ Which duet did we/I enjoy the most? Why?
- ★ Were there any places where we/I needed to stop or slow down?
  - ★ How did we/I overcome any challenges?
  - ★ What have we/I improved since our last duets?

# ***Congratulations!***

***Unit 6 is now complete! This is a huge achievement!***



Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading so far.

## **Unit 6**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
next is...***



6 

7 

8 

***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How well did I play the minim rests?
- ★ How did I do in counting the different rests and note values?
- ★ Which rhythm am I most happy with? Why?

**Exploring the Keyboard**

Let's explore the five notes in each hand further, on the keyboard. First, there are two examples for each hand, so that you can practise finding the notes separately. Then, there are two more examples, where you will need to use both.


Let's explore all the notes!


**Right hand**

1 

2 

**Left hand**

1 

2 

**Hands together**

1 

2 

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I do in finding the different notes?
- \* Were there any notes I wasn't sure about?
- \* How comfortable do I feel finding the notes on the keyboard?

**Let's Observe!**

You may have found out by now how helpful good observation skills are when playing at sight.

Try to find one difference in each pair of melodies after you have looked at them for *half a minute*.

Let's start whenever you are ready!

**Pair 1 – Right hand**

A 

B 

**Pair 2 – Left hand**

A 

B 

**Pair 3 – Hands together**

A 

B 

### Let's reflect!

- \* How did you do in spotting each difference this time?
- \* How does the music change in each pair of melodies?

## Melodies on the spot

This is the final 'Melodies on the spot' activity in this book. Before playing at sight, practise the different skills and strategies you learnt in the previous Units. As always, spend about a minute preparing each melody. This time there are also some minim rests. If you want, you may start with the ones you observed in the previous activity (below: right hand melody 1, left hand number 1, hands together number 2).

Let's play some new notes and rests!



Make sure that you count the rest beats as you would for a note: steadily and without rushing or slowing down.

### Right hand

1 *p*

2 *mf*

3 *f*

4 *mf*

### Left hand

1 *f*

*p*

2

3

*mf*

3

5

*f*

4

3

**Hands together**

1

*p*

4

2

*mf*

4

3

*f*

3

4

*f*

*p*

5

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do I feel about sight-reading minim rests?
- ★ What did I focus on during my preparation?
- ★ Were there any places I found challenging?

## Performing at sight

Try to play the following pieces at sight, after you have prepared each one in your head for one minute. What do you think of them, at first glance? What tips or advice would you give yourself before playing?

Good luck!

What's your first impression of these pieces? Are there any places which look more challenging? Questions like this can help you decide where you need to focus on during your preparation.



### *People, praise*

Calmly

Byzantine chant



Classical composer Joseph Haydn was named 'the Father of the Symphony'.

He wrote 104 symphonies in total - isn't this impressive? There weren't any printers or computers back in the 1700s, so this must have been such hard work!

When playing this piece, imagine how it would sound by an orchestra. It's also a good idea to listen to the piece later, to hear its original version and get inspired.

### *Surprise symphony\**

Not very fast

Haydn, no. 94

2<sup>nd</sup> movement: Andante

### **Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I do in each piece?
- \* How similar was the music I played to what I had imagined?
- \* In which ways did my preparation help my sight-reading?

\* The time signature has been adapted for the purposes of this Unit. Original is in  $\frac{2}{4}$ , with quavers.



## Fun for two

Here are some more duets! Prepare your part as you would if it was a solo piece to sight-read. You know the different preparation steps to help you sight-read by now, so go through these for about a minute for each duet. As before, place both thumbs on the next C for both duets.

Once you think of a comfortable speed to play, count a bar in and off you go!

### *A bagful of sweets*

Joyfully

EP

Musical score for 'A bagful of sweets' in 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems. The first system has a treble clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a bass clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system has a treble clef staff with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a bass clef staff with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1, 3, 5, and 2. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### *The happy drum*

In a walking pace

EP

Musical score for 'The happy drum' in 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems. The first system has a treble clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a bass clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system has a treble clef staff with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a bass clef staff with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1, 3, 5, and 2. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### ***Let's reflect!***

- \* How well did I feel that I had prepared each piece, before I played?
- \* How steady was the pulse in each duet?
- \* Did we/I meet any difficulties? If so, what did we/I do?

## ***Congratulations!***

***You have successfully completed unit 7! One more Unit to go, in this book!***



**What do you think about your experience with sight-reading so far?**

### **Unit 7**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
next is...***

Congratulations for reaching Unit 8, the final Unit of this book!

I'm sure you have become a great beginner sight-reader and that your sight-reading skills have developed impressively by now! In this Unit, you will apply the different skills and strategies for a final time in this book, and you will reflect on your overall experience with sight-reading so far. These step-by-step activities will help you to prepare the two final pieces in 'Performing at sight' and 'Fun for two', so that you can play them at sight as well as you can.

I hope you've enjoyed this journey in the world of sight-reading!



Congratulations!

You've made it to the final Unit of this book!

## Building on Rhythm

The following rhythms are from the two final pieces. In other words, this is what we would hear if pitch disappeared from each melody. Now you can focus only on the rhythm of each piece that you will sight-read later. For each piece, the rhythms appear twice (A, B). The first time, you need to focus only on the values and rests. The second time, try to show the dynamics as well – why not? 😊

Enjoy the final rhythms in this book!

Whistling for the weekend

A1

A2

*f*





In the next piece, the duet, there are two lines of rhythms, one for each line of your duet part. After you've played each one separately, try to play them one after the other, without stopping.

Prelude

A1

A2

B1 

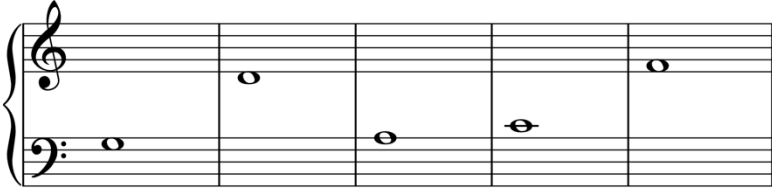
B2 

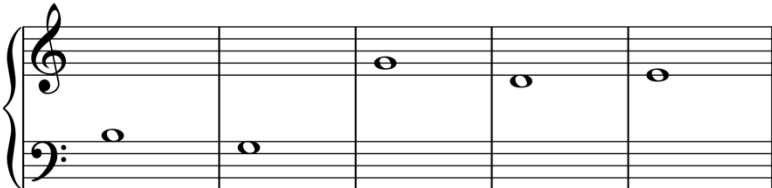
***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How did I do with the different note values and rests?
- ★ How did I show the different dynamics?
- ★ How confident do I feel with each rhythm?
- ★ What will I need to pay attention to later, when I play the pieces?

**Exploring the Keyboard**

Let's explore the keyboard for a final time. You may practise finding the notes however you like!

1 

2 

***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How easily did I find the key for each note?
- ★ Were there any notes I was unsure about?
- ★ Which notes am I most confident with?

**Let's Observe!**

Instead of an observation activity, in this Unit there is a list of questions to ask yourself during preparation. There is often not enough time to think about *all* of these questions, but it is helpful to know what is useful to think about. Use this list for the final pieces, and you may keep it for future practice. This time, prepare each piece for about *a minute*.

Let's observe the final pieces!

## LIST OF PREPARATION QUESTIONS

### Title/Subtitle:

Look at the title and subtitle of the piece. What pictures do they create in your imagination? What do you think the character of the piece will be like?

### Time signature/Values:

Let's observe the time signature and clap a bar. Which note values are you likely to find in this piece? Are there any rests? If so, how will you count them?

### Hand position:

Which is the highest and lowest note for each hand? Find them in the score and on the keyboard. Which note will each finger play? Are there any notes that you will not be playing?

### Dynamics:

Let's look at the dynamics. How (loud) does the piece begin and how does it end? Can you describe the sound in this piece?

### Patterns:

Let's observe the two hands. Can you find any rhythmic or melodic patterns? Which similarities and/or differences can you spot between the two hands?

### Inner hearing:

Try to hear the melody in your head. Imagine you are singing it, silently. How might it sound?

### Other observations:

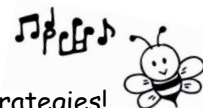
Which other elements can you observe? Are there any places which seem more difficult? What makes them feel like that? Are there any line changes? If so, remember to practise looking ahead at the next line.

## Performing at sight

In this final 'Performing at sight' activity of this book you will play one of my own compositions, 'Whistling for the weekend'. It is a simple melody, which I like to whistle when I'm feeling cheerful, or usually just before the weekend!

Before playing the music, take about *one minute* to prepare the piece with questions from the list above.

Enjoy the music!



Well done for developing so many sight-reading strategies!  
Have fun sight-reading the final pieces!

*Whistling for the weekend*

Cheerfully

EP

1

4

***Let's reflect!***

***on the final 'Performing at sight' piece***

- ★ How do I feel about my playing?
- ★ What did I observe during the one-minute preparation?
  - ★ Did I meet any difficulties? If so, which?
- ★ How similar was the music I imagined to the music I played?
  - ★ What did I enjoy most in my performance?

**Fun for two**

This is the final duet of this book! I hope you have enjoyed sight-reading with someone else in the 'Fun for two' duet activities!

This piece is by Cécile Chaminade, a French composer and pianist. She started composing when she was a child, and she wrote many pieces for the piano. This duet is from an album of twelve short pieces for piano solo, dedicated to young pianists.

For this duet, you will need to place both thumbs on the C one octave higher than middle C. To prepare your part, use questions from the list in the 'Let's observe' activity. Remember to practise looking ahead at the second line, so that you can keep playing without stopping.

Finally, notice that in this duet, your partner's music begins with a rest. So, don't be surprised that you will start playing first!

Have fun sight-reading the final duet of this book!

*Prelude*  
Peacefully

Chaminade, Op.123, No. 1  
'Album des enfants', Series I

2

*p*

4

1

*p*

4

2

1

2

5

*mf*

2

4

1

*mf*

3

1

5

***Let's reflect!***

***on the final duet***

- ★ How do I feel about my/our duet performance?
  - ★ How well did I do when the line changed?
  - ★ What did we/I like the most in this piece?
    - ★ Were there any challenging parts?
- ★ How do I feel about playing with someone else?

# ***Congratulations!***

***Well done for completing the entire book!***

***I hope you've enjoyed your journey through the world of sight-reading!***



**Let's reflect on your overall experience with sight-reading in this book.**

## **In this book**

***I learnt these strategies...***

***I strengthened these skills...***

***I overcame these weaknesses...***

***I enjoyed very much / I achieved well...***

***I aim to improve in the future...***







# *CERTIFICATE*

*of Award*

*Congratulations to*

---

*(name)*

*for your consistent work towards developing your  
sight-reading skills.*

*You have become a great beginner sight-reader!*

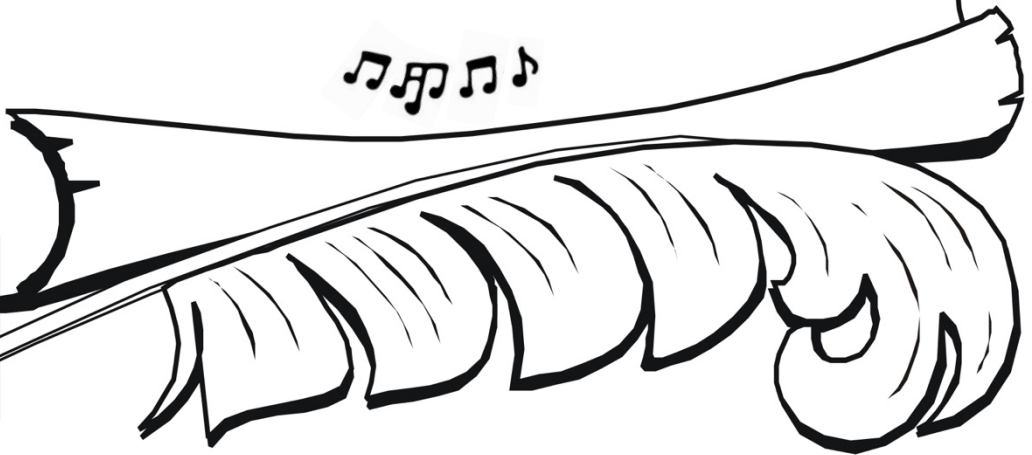
You are now ready to continue your journey in the world of sight-reading  
through the next book of this series.

---

*(signature)*

---

*(date)*





# Terminology & List of featured composers

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$\frac{2}{4}$ : This time signature indicates that there are two (2) crotchet beats (4) in each bar.

$\frac{3}{4}$ : This time signature indicates that there are three (3) crotchet beats (4) in each bar.

$\frac{4}{4}$ : This time signature indicates that there are four (upper 4) crotchet beats (lower 4) in each bar.

**Accompaniment:** A part of music which supports (accompanies) the main melody.

**Bar:** A unit containing the number of beats indicated by the time signature, separated on the staff by vertical bar lines. Also known as 'measure'.

**Baroque:** A period or musical era of Western music, roughly between 1600 and 1750.

**Classical (period):** A period or musical era, roughly between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Crotchet:** The note which has a quarter of the value of the semibreve. In time signatures where the lower numeral is 4, a crotchet equals one beat. Also known as 'quarter-note'.

**Crotchet rest:** Absence of sound, equal to one crotchet beat.

**Duet:** A composition for two performers. A piano duet may be for two performers on one instrument, or on two instruments, one for each performer.

**Dynamics:** Markings which indicate the volume with which notes and sounds are expressed.

**Forte (*f*):** A dynamic marking meaning that the music is to be played with strong sound.

**Looking ahead:** The act of looking further down the score, ahead of the point being played.

**Lyra:** A pear-shaped traditional (folk) Greek instrument of Crete, the size of a violin. It has three strings and is played with a bow, held vertically – similarly to the cello – placed on the lap of the performer.

**March:** Music with strong repetitive rhythms, usually used to accompany military processions.

**Melody:** A tune, a line of musical sounds (pitch and rhythm) which are perceived as one unit.

**Mental practice:** The act of thinking and practising the sound of the music silently, in the mind or imagination. Also found in this book as 'imagining the music/the sound', 'hear the music in the head', or 'singing it silently'.

**Mezzo forte (*mf*):** A dynamic marking meaning that the music is to be played with moderately strong sound.

**Middle C:** The C nearest the middle of a piano or keyboard. It is written on the first ledger line below a treble clef staff.

**Minim:** This note is half the value of a semibreve and twice the value of a crotchet. In time signatures with one beat per crotchet (where the lower numeral is 4), a minim equals two beats. Also known as 'half-note'.

**Minim rest:** Absence of sound equal to the duration of a minim.

**Motet:** A musical form for different voices (polyphonic music), often written between 1220-1750.

**Musical era:** A period in music history.

**Octave:** The range between eight successive notes on an instrument, defined by the beginning and ending notes. When two notes are an octave apart, they have the same name, but are in a different register.

**Part:** The section on a music score with the music of one performer.

**Pattern:** Something that is repeated. In music, this can be in the *melody*, with repeated notes or similar note movements (melodic patterns), or in the *rhythm*, with repetition of the same note values or rests (rhythmic patterns).

**Piano ( *p* ):** A dynamic marking meaning that music is to be played with soft sound.

**Pitch:** The quality of a sound (musical note) which shows how high or low it is.

**Prelude:** A relatively short instrumental piece which precedes a longer piece, introducing the listener to the key and mood.

**Pulse:** The beat; a steady pace.

**Rest:** A sign indicating absence of sound. Every note value has a corresponding rest.

**Rhythm:** The way in which different note values are grouped together, in a sequence of strong or weak beats.

**Secondo:** The lower part in a duet. The higher part is called '*primo*'.

**Semibreve:** This note has double the value of the minim. In time signatures with one beat per crotchet (where the lower numeral is 4), a semibreve equals four beats. Also known as 'whole-note'.

**Semibreve rest:** Absence of sound equal to the beats of a semibreve.

**Sight-reading:** The act of playing music at first sight, as accurately as possible, and with musical details, without having practised it first.

**Staff:** The five-line and four-spaces notation system, on which music is written. Also known as 'staff'.

**Symphony:** A long musical composition written for orchestra, often presented as three or four individual 'movements', each with different character.

**Technique:** The different ways in which sound is produced on a musical instrument. For the piano, it relates to the way hands, fingers, arms, posture or the whole body are used to produce the desirable sound effect.

**Tempo:** The speed of the music.

**Time signature:** A sign usually placed at the beginning of a composition, after the clef and any key signature. It usually includes two numerals, one above the other: the lower shows the value which represents one beat; the upper numeral shows the number of beats in each bar.

## **List of featured composers:**

- Chaminade, Cécile (France, 1857-1944, Monaco). Unit 8.
- da Palestrina, Giovanni Perluigi (1525-1594, Italy). Unit 4.
- Dett, Robert Nathaniel (1882-1943, Canada). Unit 5.
- Greene-Wiggins, Thomas [Blind Tom] (1849-1908, USA). Unit 4.
- Haydn, Joseph (1732-1802, Austria). Unit 7.
- Johnson, Francis (Caribbean, 1792-1844, USA). Unit 6.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus (1756-1791, Austria). Unit 5.
- Purcell, Henry (1659-1695, England). Unit 6.

ELENI PERISYNAKI

My first steps in the world of  
sight-reading

*Level 1*

*for beginner pianists*



## A WELCOME NOTE

Dear learner,

*Welcome to the world of sight-reading!*

As you might already know, sight-reading is a skill that we use very often in our musical experiences. When playing a new piece for the first time, from your solo repertoire, or with someone else, or in an ensemble, you will find that you often need to play the music in front of you on the spot, as well as you can – that’s when you are sight-reading! Good sight-reading skills are also useful when learning a new piece: they can speed up the first steps of your practice, as they enable you to play the music in front of you as accurately as you can since your very first approach. Think about it – isn’t this cool?

**You can become an effective sight-reader** by gradually building this musical skill! There are various strategies to help you develop your sight-reading early on in your piano studies, or when working on your own. That’s what this book is for – I think you’ll find it useful.

So, if you are a beginner in your first stages of piano learning, this book is for you.

*Let the journey begin – I hope you enjoy it!*

Eleni

Please read the following pages for useful information about how to use the different types of activities in this book. You will also find some reflective questions to help you think about how well you did in each activity (the achievement criteria).



## **GETTING TO KNOW THE BOOK ACTIVITIES**

Before we start, let's get to know the hero of this book, Bee, and the book activities. Bee loves music and will be your musical friend throughout this book. In every activity, Bee will be asking questions or giving you tips and sight-reading strategies to help you build your sight-reading skills.



Hello! Welcome to the world of sight-reading!

I am Bee, I love music and I'm glad to be your musical companion!

In the activities, I will often ask questions to help you think about your playing. I may also give some useful tips and reminders, to help you develop your sight-reading skills further. I'm looking forward to our musical journey together! Enjoy!

Now, let's have a look at the book activities. This book has eight Units. In Units 1-7 you will find the different types of activities to strengthen all the areas used while reading at sight. Unit 8 summarises the sight-reading strategies you learnt, through some final activities from the following list.

### ★ *'Building on Rhythm'*

Rhythm is key to any music playing, including sight-reading. These activities aim to help you develop your rhythmic skills and *sense of pulse*. This means that you will need to *feel the beat steadily* while playing the different rhythms. The rhythmic elements of this activity are found in any music piece, so this also benefits your general piano playing. You will notice that there is no pitch to the notes here; this is so that you can focus your full attention on rhythm. You can play the passages however you prefer – you may want to clap or tap the rhythm, to press one key with one finger, to sing rhythmic syllables, or in any other way. Feel free to experiment!

### ★ *'Let's reflect!'*

These sections are presented after each activity and invite you to reflect on your performance; in other words, to think carefully about your playing. You can use all, or some of the questions provided, to help you to think critically about your playing. For example, you may think about what went well, what could be improved, and ways to improve in the future. Try not to give a one-word answer about your performance, by

saying that it was ‘good’, ‘alright’ or ‘not so good’. Instead, evaluate your playing in more detail, thinking about how you can do better next time – it’s like you are becoming the teacher! These sections may also be an opportunity to discuss your thoughts with your teacher. Don’t hesitate to ask them to help you with this activity, while you become more familiar with it.

★ ‘*Exploring the Keyboard*’

As the name suggests, this activity invites you to *explore* your instrument. The goal is to familiarise yourself with the *keyboard topography* of the piano – this simply means getting to know the piano keyboard as well as possible. This way, finding the right keys for the notes on the score will be easier when playing at sight, even without needing to look at your hands!

★ ‘*Let’s observe!*’

This activity strengthens your *observation skills*. You will observe pairs of short melodies to spot the difference between them, either in pitch, rhythm, or other elements, such as dynamics or articulation. You can also find similarities and discover rhythmic or melodic patterns. Try to spend around half a minute looking at each pair, but **it’s more helpful not to rush!** *Careful observation can lead to more effective sight-reading*, so aim to observe the music *meaningfully*, rather than quickly.

★ ‘*Melodies on the spot*’

Time to start playing at sight! Here you’ll find the music from the ‘*Let’s observe*’ section and some new melodies. The skills you practised in the previous activities are all useful here. First, *observe* each melody carefully, and *try to think how it may sound (mentally rehearse)*. You can also practise its rhythm in your head or tap it out loud if you want and find where your hands need to be on the keyboard. Then, try to play the music as accurately as you can, with a *steady beat*. Luckily, it is not the end of the sight-reading world if you play a wrong note! Of course, the more accurately you play the more effective your sight-reading will be. So, in case of a mistake, just ignore it: try to move on without stopping or repeating to get it right. The priority is to *keep the pulse going, while focusing on what comes next*.

★ *'Performing at sight'*

Here you will sight-read pieces of existing music, from classical piano repertoire and Greek tunes – you might already have heard some of them. Prepare each piece for about a minute, using the approaches mentioned above. This is an opportunity to not only practise sight-reading skills, but also to learn more about different composers, styles, and musical eras.

★ *'Fun for two'*

This activity is for fun! You and your teacher or partner can enjoy making music together by sight-reading duets. Playing with someone else is a great way to sight-read: it develops your ensemble skills, and you can have fun being creative together! Here, you will also find some duets that I have composed for you and your partner. You (the *primo* player) may need to move to a slightly different area of the keyboard, further to the right towards the higher notes of the keyboard, so that you can sit comfortably together – the *secondo* player will be positioned on your left. Also, note that the other part may have faster-moving notes, so it is important to listen and keep a steady beat while playing. Prepare your part carefully before playing. The *secondo* player of the duets may want to use the pedal as they see fit, to show the character of the music.

★ *'Terminology and List of featured composers'*

At the end of the book, you can find an explanation of all terms used in the activities, in case you need to remind yourself of these at any point, particularly when working alone. There is also a list of the different composers, whose pieces are featured in the *'Performing at sight'* and the *'Fun for two'* activities. If you are particularly interested in specific composers, you could search for further information to learn more about their lives, background, works and musical eras – this could be useful not only when playing at sight, but also when working on new repertoire.

## ***THE ACHIEVEMENT CRITERIA***

Estimating how well you have done in an activity will help you find ways to improve further. In this book, there are no marks for the activities. Instead, I invite you to ask yourself reflective questions, such as those in the following table. This will help you to self-evaluate what you achieved well, and which areas need to be the focus of your future practice. You can discuss these with your teacher as well.

<b>Table of Reflective Questions on Achievement</b>	
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How effectively did I use my preparation time? * What did I do during preparation? * Which elements did I observe? * Is there anything I didn't notice? * What did I mentally rehearse during preparation? * How did this help my sight-reading playing? * What do I need to observe more closely next time?</li> </ul>
<b>Performance (general)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How do I feel about my performance? * What makes me feel this way? * Did the piece make sense to me?</li> </ul>
<b>Flow</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How fluent was my playing? * Did I play with a steady pulse? * Was I comfortable with the tempo I chose? * Were there any places where I needed to stop or slow down, and why? * Or any places where I felt relaxed?</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Did I play the rhythm/note values accurately? * How did I feel about the different rhythms in the piece? * Is there anything I could have played more accurately? * Were there any rhythms I was unsure about?</li> </ul>
<b>Pitch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How accurately did I play the notes? * How easily did I find the notes in this hand position? * Were there any notes that I was unsure about?</li> </ul>
<b>Musical elements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How musically did I play? * Which musical elements did I do well? * Is there anything I could have achieved better? * Were there any elements that I forgot to do? * How did my playing show the character of the piece?</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Are there any places I found difficult? * What was challenging about them? * What did I do about them? * How can I overcome these in the future?</li> </ul>
<b>Other positives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* What am I most happy about? * What did I achieve best in my playing? * How much did I enjoy my performance?</li> </ul>
<b>Improved areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How have I improved since the last time? * What areas did I achieve better this time? * Why do I think this is? * How do I feel about this improvement?</li> </ul>
<b>Future goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Which are my next sight-reading goals? * Where should I focus on in my next practice? * How can improve further? * What else do I want to achieve?</li> </ul>

## ***A NOTE TO THE TEACHER***

Dear colleague,

Thank you for considering this book as a resource for teaching sight-reading.

This book (Level 1) is part of the series '*My first steps in the world of sight-reading*'. The material is designed for beginner learners in the first years of piano study, with the intention to nurture and facilitate the development of sight-reading skills from the early stages of music learning.

With an early start, learners can enjoy the benefits of effective sight-reading skills in their general music studies in later years, from practising new repertoire, to participating in ensembles, chamber music and accompanying activities. The strategies developed in the early stages of learning are envisaged to continue being practised throughout their studies in order to improve these skills further, thus also developing skills to support learners' confidence and competence in assessed sight-reading contexts; for example, within Conservatoire sight-reading exams or graded performance exams at any level.

Acknowledging the various elements and potential challenges to be considered in each lesson, please feel free to use this book as flexibly as needed. The musical material of each Unit may be distributed across two or more lessons, depending on learners' individual needs and the overall pacing of each lesson. I encourage you to combine elements from the different activities in each session, to form a well-rounded sight-reading engagement.

My very best wishes for a creative and enjoyable journey in the world of sight-reading,

Eleni Perisynaki

The design of the material and activities of this book series has been informed by existing research on sight-reading in the fields of music education and music psychology, as well as by personal research on international publications and aspects of sight-reading teaching within Greek conservatoire education, as part of my PhD at the University of York (UK).

**LEVEL 1 – MUSICAL ELEMENTS PER UNIT**

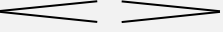

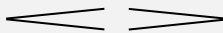
<b>UNIT 1</b> Page 9	New elements: <b>C</b> , <i>legato</i> Thumbs sharing middle C, <i>mf, f, p</i> Rests: semibreve, crotchet.
<b>UNIT 2</b> Page 19	New elements:  New hand position: RH thumb on C <sub>5</sub> , LH 5 <sup>th</sup> finger on C <sub>3</sub> <b>2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, mf, p, f</b> Rests: semibreve to crotchet.
<b>UNIT 3</b> Page 29	New elements: <i>staccato</i> , dotted minim and rest Same hand position as up to Unit 2. <b>2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, mf, p, f</b>  Rests: semibreve to crotchet.
<b>UNIT 4</b> Page 39	New elements: quavers (pairs), accents. Various hand positions in C major. <b>2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, mf, p, f</b>  Rests: semibreve to crotchet, and dotted minim.
<b>UNIT 5</b> Page 49	New element: G major. New hand position: various G major hand positions. Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 6</b> Page 60	New element: F major. New hand position: various F major hand positions. Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 7</b> Page 70	New elements: Natural minors (A, D, E). Tied notes. Various hand positions. Combination of previous elements.
<b>UNIT 8</b> Page 80	Recapitulation / Overview, elements from all Units.
Page 89	Terminology & List of featured composers

Table terminology:

LH = Left Hand / RH = Right Hand

Hand position pitch indications: middle C = C<sub>4</sub>



# UNIT 1

New elements:  
*C, legato*

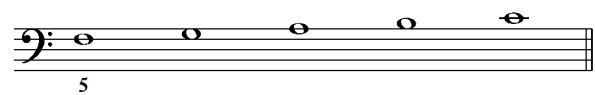
In this Unit, you will be playing in the following hand positions:

Right hand



Middle C

Left hand



F  
below middle C

## Building on Rhythm

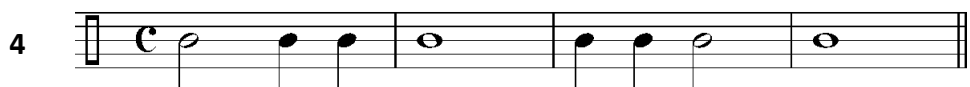
Try to play the following rhythms as well as you can!

You can do this in many different ways: by clapping or tapping your hands, by stamping your feet, with a percussion instrument, or by playing a note with one finger on the piano keyboard.

You can even combine different ways, or find your own, if you want – feel free to experiment!

Before starting, look at the time signature and start thinking a *steady slow pulse*. You can imagine a clock ticking and try the rhythm at this pace. First, try to play each rhythm *in your head*.

Once you feel ready, remember to count one bar in and give it a try!





7 

8 

9 

10 

***Let's reflect!***

- \* How accurately did I play each rhythm?
- \* How steady did the pulse feel?
- \* Are there any rhythms I was unsure about?

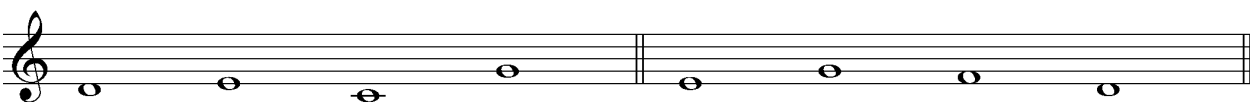
## Exploring the Keyboard


Find the notes of each example on the keyboard. Although the notes are written as semibreves, you don't *have to* count four beats for each note in this activity. You can count two beats, or even one beat for each note, for example, if you feel that you can find them easily!

Press the keys with any finger you like! If you place your thumb on middle C, you can also try playing each note with the finger already on each key. You can also sing the notes while you play, if you want to. Can you name each note you play?

Let the keyboard exploration begin!

**Right hand**

A 

B 

### Left hand

A

B

### Hands together

A

B

### Let's reflect!

- \* Could I name all notes in each hand?
- \* How easily did I find the key for each note?
- \* Were there any specific notes that I was unsure about?

### Let's Observe!

Look at the following pairs of melodies closely. They may seem identical, but they're not!

There is *one* difference in each pair. Your full *attention* and *observation* are required to find it, and some are more difficult to spot than others.

Can you find it? When you do, talk about it with your teacher.



Try to spend about **half a minute** on each pair. Observe *as closely as you can*, as each difference may be hiding in pitch, rhythm, or in any other musical element! Good luck!

Pair 1

A

*mf*

B

*mf*

Pair 2

A

*f*

B

Pair 3

A

B

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How easily did I find each difference?
- \* Was half a minute enough time to observe each pair?
- \* Were there any pairs I found it harder to spot the difference?

## Melodies on the spot

Now that you have warmed up your rhythmic, keyboard topography and observation skills, it's time to start playing at sight!

Try to play these simple melodies as well as you can. You have already observed some of them (number 1, 3 and 4) in the previous activity. Now you can apply your observations to your playing! Before starting, remember to practise for each melody what you've learnt so far. First, try out the *rhythm* with a steady pulse; then, *observe* closely the notes, values and any other elements that you will need to play; finally, *imagine* how this melody might sound like, in your head. Once you're ready, remember to *count a bar in*, in a comfortable speed. There is a finger number for the first note of each hand to help you start playing.

Off you go, to play your melodies on the spot!

1

*mf*

3

1

2

5

2

3

4

4

While preparing each melody, think about what the different symbols mean.

What is the meaning of the curved lines above the music? How would you achieve this sound? What do the symbols *p*, *f* and *mf* mean? How would you play the different dynamics? Such questions will also be helpful for the next activities.



4

*f*

1

5

*p*

3

6

*f*

2

7

*mf*

3

8

*p*

3

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How accurately did I play the rhythm and notes of each melody?
- \* How effectively did I perform the legato slurs and the different dynamics?
- \* Is there anything I didn't notice before I played?
- \* What would I change in my performance?

## Performing at sight

These are some classical repertoire and cultural pieces for you to play at sight. You may have already heard some of this music or be familiar with the different tunes in this activity. Remember to *prepare* each melody and *observe* it carefully for about half a minute, before playing it. Don't forget to also look at the *title* and other information about the *character* and *style* of each piece, to help you decide *how to play* it.

Finally, if you happen to play a wrong note, it's not the end of the sight-reading world! Try to ignore it and carry on playing as if nothing happened!

Enjoy the music!



**Useful tip 1:** The title and notes on the score can help you *imagine* what the piece should sound like.

**Useful tip 2:** In case of a mistake, the key is to *keep the pulse going, focusing on what comes next!*

### *Down to the seaside*

With excitement

Greek traditional song

Musical score for 'Down to the seaside'. It features a treble and bass clef with a common time signature (C). The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, all under a slur with a '2' above it. The bass clef accompaniment consists of quarter notes G2, A2, and B2. The dynamic marking 'mf' is present. The score ends with a double bar line.

### *Etude – Study\**

Moderato

Duvernoy, Op. 176, No. 3

Musical score for 'Etude – Study'. It features a treble and bass clef with a common time signature (C). The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, all under a slur with a '3' above it. The bass clef accompaniment consists of quarter notes G2, A2, and B2. The dynamic marking 'p' is present. The score ends with a double bar line.



The tempo marking *moderato* is used to show that a piece needs to be played in a moderate speed. This simply means, not too fast, not too slowly.

\* If you have not heard of the word etude or study before, discuss with your teacher what this means in music. You can also talk about other composers who have written etudes for the piano.

*Stay home, Hanulienka*  
In a walking pace

Bartók, SZ 42, No. 20  
'For children', Book II

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do I feel about my performance?
- ★ Did the tempo feel comfortable for me to play in?
  - ★ Are there any places I found difficult?
- ★ Which musical elements did I do particularly well?
- ★ What do I aim to achieve better in the future?

**Fun for two**

The following pieces are for you to sight-read with your teacher or with a partner, such as a more musically experienced friend! The upper stave is for you; the lower is for your duet partner.

This is a great opportunity to repeat the sight-reading strategies you've learnt so far and practise them while having fun! For these duets, you need to move both hands to the C above middle C.

Also, move your seating positions up to the right, so that you can play comfortably together.

You will also need to count a bar aloud, so that you both start at the same time!

Let's sight-read some duets!

*Morning Mood*

Peacefully

Grieg, Op. 46, No. 1  
'Peer Gynt Suite'



This tune might sound familiar. Even if you haven't heard it before, try to play as *musically* as you can! The more *you* enjoy the music, the more a listener will enjoy it, too!

### *A beautiful butterfly*

Lightly

Greek children's song

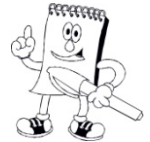
### ***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How did I feel when sight-reading with someone else?
  - ★ Did the piece make sense to me?
- ★ How did the title information help my sight-reading?
  - ★ What challenges did we/I have?
    - ★ What did we/I do best?
- ★ What did I enjoy most in our/my performance?



# ***Congratulations!***

***You have completed the first Unit of this book!***



**How was your experience with sight-reading in this Unit?**

## **Unit 1**

***I learnt...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
in my next practice  
is...***

# UNIT 2

New elements:  
Hand position

In this Unit, you will be playing in the following hand positions:

Right hand



C  
above  
middle C

Left hand



C  
below  
middle C

## Building on Rhythm

Play the following rhythms in any way you prefer. Notice that in this Unit various time signatures are used. So, make sure that you pay attention to each before you start! Remember to think a *steady slow pace* at first, to start feeling the pulse. While playing each rhythm *in your head*, don't forget to *count any rests* carefully.

When you are ready, count a bar in and let's go!

1

2

3

4

5

6

7 

8 

9 

10 

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How accurately did I play each rhythm?
- ★ How did I do in counting the rests?
- ★ Was there anything I found confusing?
- ★ How did I prepare for each example?

### Exploring the Keyboard


You will now practise finding some more notes on the keyboard. You can keep using one finger to press each key, or you can move your hands to the new hand position, as shown at the beginning of this Unit. Try to name each note you play in each hand.

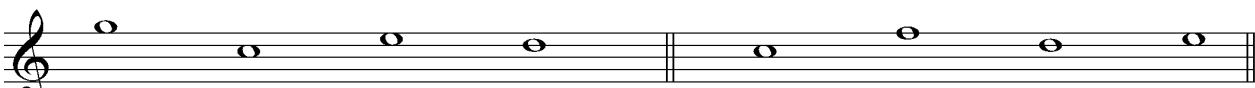
Let's start exploring some more!



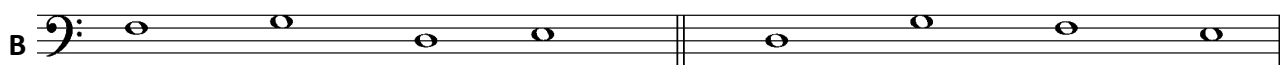
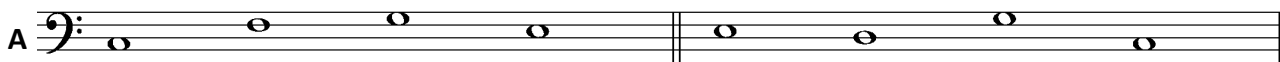
What similarities and differences can you find between the notes that each hand will play now, compared to the previous hand position? What about their sound?

**Right hand**

A 

B 

### Left hand



### Hands together



### Let's reflect!

- \* How easily did I find the key for each note?
- \* How did I do in recognising the notes in each hand?
- \* Were there any notes I was unsure about in the new hand position?

### Let's Observe!

Observe the following melodies closely for *half a minute*, to find *one* difference in each pair. Feel confident that you'll gradually start to find this easier, as you have already started to build your observation skills! Remember that the differences might be anywhere, so look carefully! When you find each, think about how the music would sound in each way.

Try to observe each pair *meaningfully*, as you will later play these melodies at sight, in the next activity!



Pair 1

A

mf

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 1. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *mf*. The treble staff contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4, then a whole rest. The bass staff contains a whole rest for the first two measures, followed by a half note G3, quarter notes F3 and E3, and a whole rest.

B

mf

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 1. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *mf*. The treble staff contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4, then a whole rest. The bass staff contains a whole rest for the first two measures, followed by a half note G3, quarter notes F3 and E3, and a whole rest.

Pair 2

A

mf

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 2. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is 2/4. The music is marked *mf*. The treble staff contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4, then a whole rest. The bass staff contains a whole rest for the first three measures, followed by a half note G3.

B

f

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 2. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is 2/4. The music is marked *f*. The treble staff contains a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4, then a whole rest. The bass staff contains a whole rest for the first three measures, followed by a half note G3.

Pair 3

A

p

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 3. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is common time (C). The music is marked *p*. The treble staff contains a whole rest for the first two measures, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, and B4, then a whole note C5. The bass staff contains a half note G3, followed by quarter notes F3 and E3, then a whole rest.

B

p

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 3. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The time signature is common time (C). The music is marked *p*. The treble staff contains a whole rest for the first two measures, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, and B4, then a whole note C5. The bass staff contains a half note G3, followed by quarter notes F3 and E3, then a whole rest.

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ Was half a minute enough time to observe each pair?
- ★ How easily did I find each difference?
- ★ Were there any pairs where it was harder to find the difference?

**Melodies on the spot**

Time to play at sight again! You have already spent some time preparing the first three melodies in the previous activity – now observe each of the other melodies for half a minute, too!

During this time, it is important to repeat the preparatory steps, to help you sight-read more effectively. Try out the *rhythm*, *observe closely* the new notes and musical elements, try to *hear each melody in your head* and think a *slow steady pulse* before you begin, so that you choose a comfortable speed to play in. The finger numbers will help you place your hands in the new hand position.

Here you go!

This time also look for *patterns*. These are similarities or repeated elements in the rhythm (rhythmic patterns) or in the pitch of a melody (melodic patterns). It is helpful to find any patterns beforehand, as sight-reading will become easier when you know what to expect!



1

2

3

4 *mf*

5 *p*

6 *f*

7 *f* *p*

8 *mf*

***Let's reflect!***

- \* How accurately did I play the notes of each melody in this hand position?
  - \* Were there any places that I found more challenging?
- \* Did I find any patterns? If so, how did it help my sight-reading?
  - \* How musically did I play each melody?
  - \* What could I have done better?

## Performing at sight

Now that you have practised a bit more the skills we need to use when we play at sight, let's try to play these pieces in the hand position of this Unit. While you are observing each piece, continue to look for patterns. Also, pay attention to the character and markings on the score that make it sound more musical. You can *make mental notes* about things you observe – this will help you to better remember what you need to do, when you play at sight.

Have fun!

Remember not to rush - choose a comfortable speed to be able to play with *flow!*



### *Unison melody no. 2*

Steadily

Bartók, Sz. 107, No. 2  
'Mikrokosmos I'

Musical score for 'Unison melody no. 2' by Bartók. It features a grand staff with a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The time signature is common time (C). The piece starts with a forte (f) dynamic. A first ending bracket (1) covers the first two measures of the treble staff. A second ending bracket (2) covers the last two measures of the bass staff. The piece ends with a double bar line.



What do markings  $\langle$  and  $\rangle$  mean?  
How will you use your technique to achieve this sound?

### *Etude – Study*

Singing

Lemoine, Op. 37, No. 3

Musical score for 'Etude – Study' by Lemoine. It features a grand staff with a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The time signature is 3/4. The piece starts with a piano (p) dynamic. A first ending bracket (3) covers the first two measures of the treble staff. A second ending bracket (5) covers the last two measures of the bass staff. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### *Light rhythmic song*

Not very fast

Schumann, Op. 68, No. 3  
'Album for the young'

Musical score for 'Light rhythmic song' by Schumann. It features a grand staff with a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The time signature is common time (C). The piece starts with a piano (p) dynamic. A first ending bracket (3) covers the first two measures of the treble staff. A second ending bracket (2) covers the last two measures of the bass staff. The piece ends with a double bar line.



### Let's reflect!

- \* How do I feel about my performance?
- \* How fluent was my playing?
- \* Which points from observation helped my sight-reading?
- \* Were there any places where I needed to stop or slow down? Why?
- \* What did I do then? What can I do in similar cases in the future?
- \* Which was the best aspect of my performance and why?

## Fun for two

It's time for the exciting duets! This time the music you will read at sight is in the new hand position of this Unit. However, for both of these duets, you will need to move both of your hands on the next (higher) C, so that you can feel comfortable while playing (left hand fifth finger on middle C, right hand thumb on C above middle C).

As these pieces are slightly longer, you might need some extra time to observe each. This is absolutely fine! Apply what you've learnt to prepare each piece *without rushing* – this can make your preparation more effective and meaningful!

Before you start playing, remember to count one bar aloud, so that you both know when to start!

Let's make some music together!



It's also nice to discuss each piece with your partner before you play it together. This way you can exchange interesting ideas!

### Melody

### Happily

Kabalevsky, Op. 39, No. 1  
'Pieces for children'

A musical score for a duet in C major, 2/4 time. The score is written for two staves. The top staff is for the right hand and the bottom staff is for the left hand. The piece begins with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The right hand plays a melody of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a bass line of eighth notes. There are several measures of rests for each hand. The score includes dynamic markings of mf and piano (p), and features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

## Theme and variation

Slowly

EP \*

The musical score is for a piano piece in 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system has a treble clef staff with notes and dynamics (f, p, mf) and a bass clef staff with notes and fingerings (1, 2). The second system has a bass clef staff with notes and dynamics (f, mf, mf) and a lower bass clef staff with notes and fingerings (5, 2, 2).

### Let's reflect!

- ★ How did we/I feel about this performance?
  - ★ What makes us/me feel this way?
- ★ How did our collaboration change this time, compared to Unit 1?
- ★ Did we meet any challenges? If so, how did we overcome these?
  - ★ What was the best aspect of this performance?
- ★ How collaborative did I/we feel during playing? In which ways?
  - ★ What do we want to achieve in our next duets?

\* In the 'Fun for two' activities you will sometimes see the letters 'EP' above some pieces. These are the initials of my name/surname, to show which duets I have composed in this book for you and your partner to sight-read together. I hope you enjoy them!

# ***Congratulations!***

***Well done for completing Unit 2!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.**

## **Unit 2**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***



***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...***

# UNIT 3

New elements:  
Dotted minim & rest,  
*staccato*

In this Unit, you will be playing in the same hand position as previously:

Right hand	Left hand
	

## Building on Rhythm

In this Unit, some new rhythmical elements are used: the *dotted minim* and the *dotted minim rest*.

How many beats does a *dotted minim* have? How many beats does a *dotted minim rest* have?

If you observe one of these in the following rhythms, it's useful to ask yourself this question while you *prepare* each rhythm *in your head*, to make sure that you count correctly.

Notice that there is also new articulation in some rhythms: *staccato*. What does *staccato* mean in music? How would you describe a *staccato* sound? Think about how you can show this while playing each rhythm. As always, think *a steady slow pulse* before you start, to help you play comfortably.

Good luck!



You may notice that there are **no** dotted minims or their rests in the first two rhythms. Why do you think that is?

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

7 

8 

9 

10 

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How accurately did I count each note value?
- ★ How did I do in counting the rests?
- ★ How effectively did I play the *staccato* rhythms?


## Exploring the Keyboard


You will now continue to practise finding the notes of this hand position on the keyboard. The more confident you become in finding the keys of these notes, the easier it will become to play them at sight!

If you want to, try to find each note without looking at your hands – this will be fun!

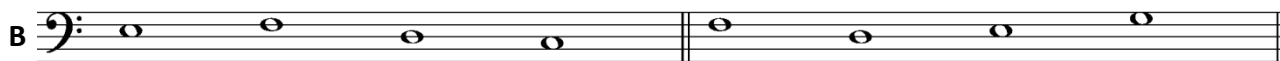
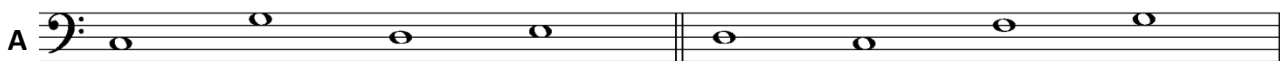
Let's go!

**Right hand**

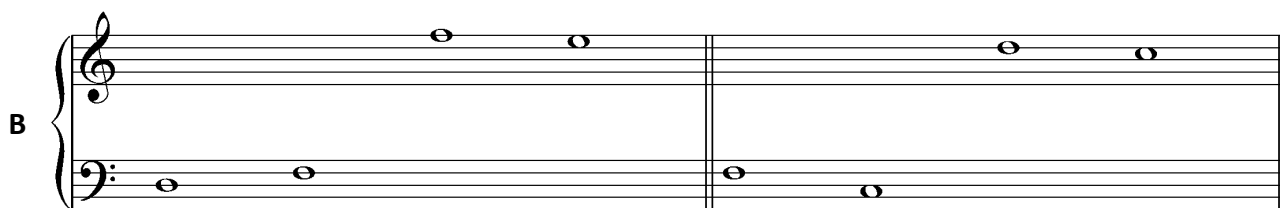
A 

B 

### Left hand



### Hands together



### *Let's reflect!*

- \* How easily did I find the key for each note this time?
- \* How confident do I feel in finding these notes on the keyboard?
- \* Are there notes that I sometimes need more time to find?
  - \* Which notes do I usually find most easily?

### **Let's Observe!**

This time, there are more elements to observe in each pair of melodies. This is good, as it will help to develop your observation skills even more! Remember that each difference might be hiding anywhere, so pay as close attention as you can!

Start observing whenever you are ready!



Some differences may create a different *character*.

Can you find any? How would you describe the character of the music each time?

Pair 1

A

B

Pair 2

A

B

Pair 3

A

B

### Let's reflect!

- \* How do I feel about my observation skills so far?
- \* Which differences were the easiest to find? Why?
- \* Which differences were less obvious? How did I do in spotting those?

## Melodies on the spot

Continue to prepare each melody carefully *in your head* before playing at sight. Remember to pay even more attention to the new elements of this unit: the dotted minim and its rest, and *staccato*, and count all beats for each note or rest *patiently*.

This time, the melodies from the observation are not the first ones – if you want to try these first, then look at melodies 2, 3 and 5.

Don't forget to think a *slow steady pulse*, to help you play all the elements as well as you can!

Enjoy your playing!



How would you use your hand and finger technique to achieve a *staccato* sound? Remember to have a loose arm while playing.

1

1

2

5

3

3



4

*p*

2

5

*mf*

1

6

*f*

3

7

*mf*

*f*

2

4

8

*p*

*mf*

*p*

3

5

***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How accurately did I play the rhythm and articulation of each melody?
- ★ How do I feel about my dynamics in each melody?
- ★ Which patterns did I find?
- ★ Which melody did I find most challenging? Why?
- ★ What am I most happy with in my playing?

## Performing at sight

Play each of the following pieces, after you have prepared it *in your head*. Remember to *note in your mind* elements you observe, to help you plan your performance. Also, continue to look for patterns in pitch, rhythm, or articulation in each hand or between the hands.

Finally, there are some interesting titles here: take this opportunity to get inspired for your performance at sight!

Let's enjoy the music!



The title or other information on a composition often gives hints about the character of the music!

### *Etude – Study*

Like an echo

Beyer, Op. 101, No. 20

A musical score for a piano piece in common time. The right hand starts with a quarter note (G4), followed by a dotted quarter note (A4), and then a half note (B4). The left hand has a quarter rest, followed by a dotted quarter note (G3), and then a half note (A3). A first fingering '1' is written above the first note in the right hand, and a '5' is written below the first note in the left hand. The dynamic marking 'mf' is placed in the right hand.

### *When the rain stops*

Hopping

Schmitt

A musical score for a piano piece in common time. The right hand has a triplet of quarter notes (G4, A4, B4). The left hand has a quarter rest, followed by a dotted quarter note (G3), and then a half note (A3). A first fingering '3' is written above the first note in the right hand, and a '3' is written below the first note in the left hand. The dynamic marking 'p' is placed in the right hand.

### *Lightly row*

With joy

European folk song

A musical score for a piano piece in common time. The right hand has a quarter note (G4), followed by a dotted quarter note (A4), and then a half note (B4). The left hand has a quarter rest, followed by a dotted quarter note (G3), and then a half note (A3). A first fingering '5' is written above the first note in the right hand, and a '5' is written below the first note in the left hand. The dynamic marking 'mf' is placed in the right hand, and 'f' is placed in the left hand.



Have you heard any of these pieces before?  
If you have, how was the experience of playing it at sight?

### Let's reflect!

- \* How would you rate my performance?
- \* How did I show the character of each piece?
- \* Which patterns did I observe during preparation?
- \* Which was my favourite piece to play? Why?
- \* What do I need to focus on, in the next units?

## Fun for two

The duets in this Unit are slightly different, so that you can experiment even more with your ensemble skills. You may find these pieces interesting, and you might recognise the second tune. Prepare each piece carefully, so that you can sight-read with your partner as well as you can. Don't forget to count one bar in, so that you start together!

For the first duet, you will need to move only your left hand slightly higher on the keyboard: place the fifth finger on middle C. Your right hand will remain on the same keys.

I hope you enjoy these duets!



After you have played each duet, think about the melody line: how would you describe the course of the main melody? Talk with your partner about the role of each one of you in these duets.

### Polka

Like a dialogue

Kabalevsky, Op. 39, No. 2  
'Pieces for children'

For the following duet, place again the fifth finger of your left hand on middle C, without moving your right hand.

*The owl*  
Playfully

Greek children's song

Musical score for two pieces. The first system is for 'The owl' in 4/4 time, starting with a *mf* dynamic and a first finger fingering (1) in the right hand. The second system is for 'Greek children's song' in 4/4 time, starting with a *mf* dynamic and a fifth finger fingering (5) in the left hand. Both pieces feature a dynamic shift to *f* in the final measures.

For this final duet, you will need to move both hands one octave higher.

*A morning sunbeam*  
With hope

Price  
(no catalogue number)

Musical score for two pieces in 3/4 time. The first system is for 'A morning sunbeam', starting with a *mf* dynamic and a third finger fingering (3) in the right hand. The second system is for 'Price', starting with a *mf* dynamic and a fifth finger fingering (5) in the left hand.



Florence Price was the first female composer of African-American origin to have her works performed by a symphony orchestra, in the 1930s.

**Let's reflect!**

- \* Did we/I enjoy this performance?
- \* How was our collaboration this time?
- \* What did we/I do to achieve balance in the sound?
- \* What will we/I aim to develop further in future duets?

# ***Congratulations!***

***You have now completed Unit 3 of this book!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.**

## **Unit 3**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***


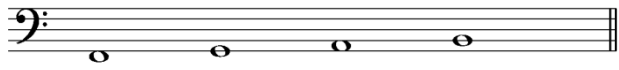


***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...***

# UNIT 4

New elements:  
Quaver pairs, accents

In this Unit, you will be playing in various hand positions in C major.

<b>Right hand</b>	<b>New Notes</b>	<b>Left hand</b>
		
		

## Building on Rhythm

In this rhythm activity, you will continue building on your sight-reading skills, by adding more elements, such as *pairs of quavers* and *accents*. While observing each rhythm, ask yourself useful questions such as: how do we count quavers? What do I need to pay attention to, when playing quavers? What is an *accent* and what does an accented note sound like?

Count one bar *as slowly as you like*, so that you can play all elements as well as you can!

Let's try this!



When playing quaver pairs,  
you don't need to rush!  
Make sure that both  
quavers share the  
beat *equally*,  
and count the whole  
duration of each one.

- 1 
- 2 
- 3 
- 4 
- 5 
- 6 

7 

8 

9 

10 

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do I think I did in each rhythm?
- ★ Were the quavers equal in each pair?
- ★ How steady was the beat while I played?
- ★ How effectively did I play the accents?
- ★ What did I find most challenging?

## Exploring the Keyboard

The notes in this activity move beyond the two hand positions you have been playing in until now. This will be fine though, since you can play each example as slowly as you need to find each note key easily. You can still use one finger for all notes, or experiment with different fingers.


You can also try to name the notes, if you want.


Let's explore further!



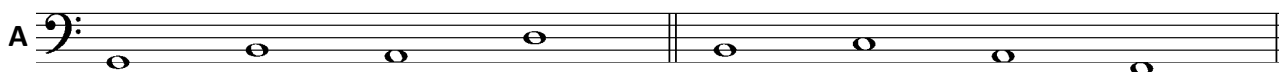
Are there any notes that you haven't played in these activities before? Which ones are they?

**Right hand**

A 

B 

### Left hand



### Hands together



### Let's reflect!

- \* How easily did I find each note on the keyboard?
- \* How confident do I feel in finding the keys of the new notes?
- \* Were there any notes I am unsure about?

### Let's Observe!

Look at the following pairs of melodies to spot their difference. As previously, spend about half a minute on each pair. There are more elements to pay attention to now, so make sure to observe each pair *closely*.

Let's see what differences you'll find!



Can you explain each difference?

For example, is it in pitch, rhythm, something else?

How would the sound change in each pair?



Pair 1

A

*p*

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 1. It consists of two staves in 2/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4 in the second measure, and rests in the third and fourth measures. The lower staff (bass clef) has rests in the first two measures, followed by quarter notes G3 and F3 in the third measure, and a quarter note E3 in the fourth measure.

B

*p*

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 1. It consists of two staves in 2/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4 in the second measure, and rests in the third and fourth measures. The lower staff (bass clef) has rests in the first two measures, followed by quarter notes G3 and F3 in the third measure, and a quarter note E3 in the fourth measure.

Pair 2

A

*mf*

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 2. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has rests in the first three measures, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, and B4 in the fourth measure. The lower staff (bass clef) starts with a quarter note G3, followed by quarter notes A3 and B3 in the second measure, quarter notes C4 and D4 in the third measure, and a quarter note E4 in the fourth measure.

B

*mf*

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 2. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has rests in the first three measures, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, and B4 in the fourth measure. The lower staff (bass clef) starts with a quarter note G3, followed by quarter notes A3 and B3 in the second measure, quarter notes C4 and D4 in the third measure, and a quarter note E4 in the fourth measure.

Pair 3

A

*f*

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 3. It consists of two staves in common time. The upper staff (treble clef) starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4 in the second measure, quarter notes C5 and B4 in the third measure, and rests in the fourth measure. The lower staff (bass clef) has rests in the first two measures, followed by quarter notes G3 and F3 in the third measure, and a quarter note E3 in the fourth measure.

B

*f*

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 3. It consists of two staves in common time. The upper staff (treble clef) starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4 in the second measure, quarter notes C5 and B4 in the third measure, and rests in the fourth measure. The lower staff (bass clef) has rests in the first two measures, followed by quarter notes G3 and F3 in the third measure, and a quarter note E3 in the fourth measure.

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ Did I manage to find every difference?
- ★ Which pair was the easiest for me?
- ★ How have my observation skills improved so far?

## Melodies on the spot

In these melodies, you will play at sight the new elements of this Unit: pairs of quavers and accents. There's a lot to observe, but this means that the music is becoming more interesting! So, your preparation needs to be more *detailed*. Try to notice any helpful *patterns* and make sure to remind yourself what each music symbol means before you start to play. Finally, pay attention to the finger numbers, as they show the new hand position for each melody. If you want to start with the melodies you observed before, these are numbers 1, 3 and 5 below.

Let's start playing!

Remember to practise each melody *silently*, to *imagine* how it may sound when you play it. This can also help you remember any articulation or dynamics.



1

2

3

Detailed description of the musical exercises: Exercise 1 is in 2/4 time, marked *p*, with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff has a quarter note G4 with a finger number '3' above it, followed by two eighth notes A4 and B4. The bass staff has a quarter note G3, followed by two eighth notes F3 and E3. Exercise 2 is in 3/4 time, marked *f*, with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff has a quarter note G4 with a finger number '3' above it, followed by two eighth notes A4 and B4. The bass staff has a quarter note G3, followed by two eighth notes F3 and E3. Exercise 3 is in common time (C), marked *f*, with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff has a quarter note G4 with a finger number '1' above it, followed by two eighth notes A4 and B4. The bass staff has a quarter note G3, followed by two eighth notes F3 and E3.

4

*mf*

3

2

5

*mf*

5

3

6

*p*

4

5

7

*mf*

*f*

3

1

8

*mf*

*f*

5

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How did I do in each melody?
- \* How easily did I find the notes in each hand position?
- \* Which articulations did I do best?
- \* Are there any rhythms that I could have played more accurately?

## Performing at sight

Now let's move on to some more pieces. As always, observe each piece *meaningfully* to get a clear idea of the music and *note in your mind* important things to remember as you play. Keep applying what you've practised in sight-reading so far, especially quaver pairs and different types of articulation. There is also quite interesting information here, which will be useful when you play. Choose a convenient tempo and count steadily for a bar, before you begin.

Enjoy the music!



Oh, I really like this piece!  
Can you guess why?

### *The bee-hive*

With movement

Chwatal

Musical score for 'The bee-hive' in 2/4 time. The treble clef part starts with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note (C5), a quarter rest, and another quarter note (B4). The bass clef part has a quarter rest, then a triplet of eighth notes (G3, A3, B3), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (C4).

3



The *menuet* or *minuet* was a popular type of ballroom dance, especially in the 18th-century Europe. Keep this in mind as you observe and play this piece.

The composer, Ignaz Pleyel was also a well-known piano maker!

### *Menuet*

With pride

Pleyel, B. 817

Musical score for 'Menuet' in 3/4 time. The treble clef part starts with a triplet of quarter notes (G4, A4, B4), followed by a half note (C5), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (B4). The bass clef part has a quarter rest, then a quarter note (G3), a quarter note (F3), and a quarter note (E3).

mf

5

### *Etude – Study*

Fast steps

Beyer, Op. 101, No. 49

'Album for the young'

Musical score for 'Etude – Study' in 3/4 time. The treble clef part has a half note (G4), a half note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). The bass clef part has a triplet of eighth notes (G3, A3, B3), a quarter note (C4), and a quarter note (B3).

p

mf

p

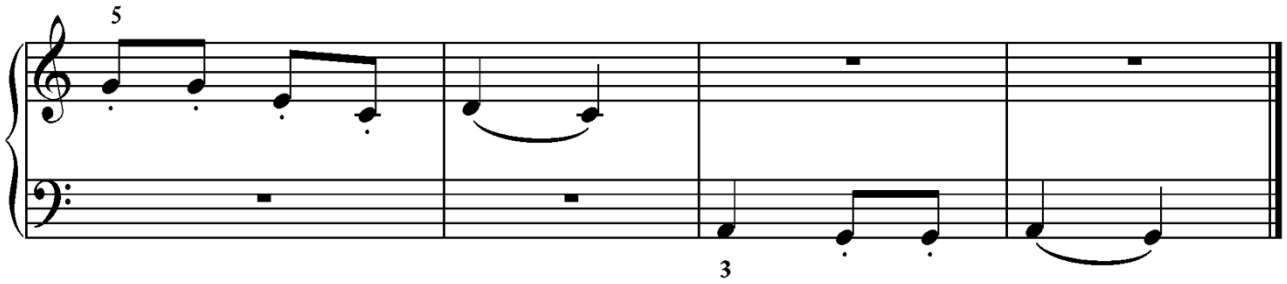
3

*The returning hunter*

Beach, Op. 64, No. 2

With triumph

'Eskimos'



**Let's reflect!**

- ★ What did I observe during the preparation of each piece?
- ★ How did I use any other information to help my performance at sight?
  - ★ Which were the strengths in this performance?
  - ★ What advice would I give myself for the next time?

**Fun for two**

You have reached the end of this Unit, so it's time for duets!

This time, the duet pieces are slightly more detailed. So, take your time to prepare each piece carefully and closely observe the musical elements on the score to understand the music.

If you want to, you may play your part once before playing with your partner, to get an idea of the piece – don't worry, as long as you don't *practise* the piece, this is still sight-reading! For the first piece, you will need to move *only your right hand one octave lower* – your teacher will be sitting on your right for this one.

Good luck!

In case you haven't seen *scherzando* before, this means that the music should be played lively and playfully, like a joke!



*A little joke*

Kabalevsky, Op. 39, No. 6

Scherzando

'Pieces for children'



For the second piece, you will need to move both hands one octave higher – your teacher will be sitting on your left.



What is a 'march' in real life?

What elements in this piece show this character?

*Ecossaise*

Like a march

Schubert, D. 299, No. 1\*

'8 Ecossaises'

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How did we/I feel about this performance?
  - ★ What did we/I enjoy the most?
- ★ What did I rehearse in my head during preparation?
  - ★ How did this help my performance at sight?
    - ★ What was my biggest challenge?
    - ★ How has our collaboration developed?

\* This piece has been adapted for the needs of this Unit in the present book. Original composition in A flat major.

## ***Congratulations!***

***With Unit 4 now complete, you've come halfway through the book!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.**

### **Unit 4**

***I learnt...***

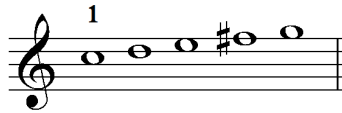
***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

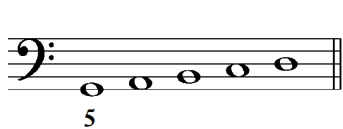
***What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...***

In this Unit, you will be playing in various hand positions of G major.

Right hand



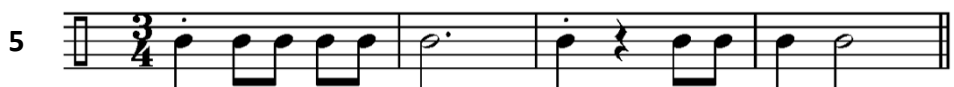
Left hand



## Building on Rhythm

In this Unit, there are no new rhythmic elements. This means that you can keep working on what you've practised so far, to make it even better! Don't forget to *prepare* each rhythm carefully in your head before you play.

Think an appropriate steady pulse and let's go!





7 

8 

9 

10 

**Let's reflect!**

- \* Which elements did I play more accurately this time?
- \* Which rhythms did I do best?
- \* What did I find challenging this time?

### Exploring the Keyboard

This activity is slightly different, as there are no examples for hands together – this is because you will be playing at sight in many different G major hand positions later. However, there is more exploration for each hand alone this time to help you get used to the G major notes.

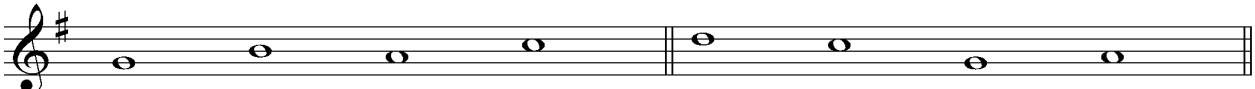
You can keep using one finger for all notes or practise the new hand positions if you want to. To do this, use the *thumb of your right hand* and the *fifth finger of your left hand* for the lowest note.


Let's explore G major!

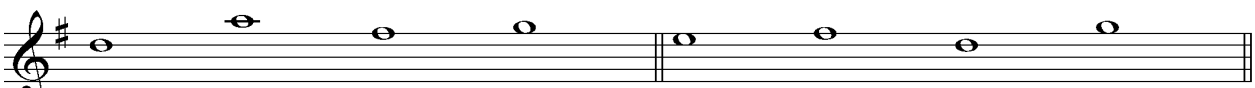


There is a key signature this time! So, every time you see F, that's F sharp. So, remember to press the black key!

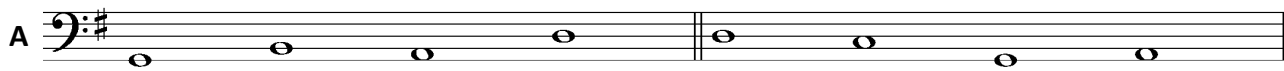
**Right hand**

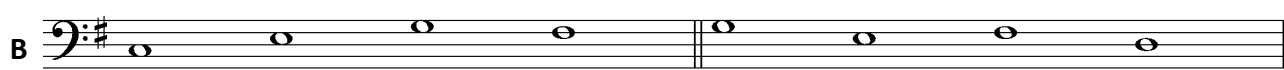
A 

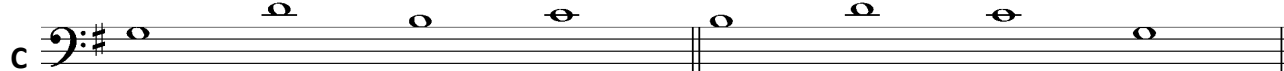
B 

C 

Left hand

A 

B 

C 

**Let's reflect!**

- \* How easily did I find the key for each note?
- \* Did I remember to play the F sharp?
- \* Were there any notes that I was unsure about?

**Let's Observe!**

By now you know that the aim of this activity is to build your observation skills, by looking carefully at each pair of melodies for *half a minute*, to spot their difference. When you have observed each pair, think about how these differences would change the sound between the two melodies.

Let's start observing!



Pay close attention to detail, as some differences may be less obvious than others!

Pair 1

A 

B 

Pair 2

A

mf

Musical score for Pair 2, Part A. It consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) in G major and common time. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G, followed by eighth notes A and B, then a quarter rest. The bass clef part starts with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G and A, then a quarter rest. The piece ends with a quarter note G in the treble and a quarter note G in the bass.

B

mf

Musical score for Pair 2, Part B. It is identical to Part A, with the melody in the treble clef and the accompaniment in the bass clef.

Pair 3

A

mf

*f*

Musical score for Pair 3, Part A. It is in 3/4 time and G major. The treble clef melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G, then a quarter note A. The bass clef accompaniment starts with a quarter note G, followed by eighth notes A and B, then a quarter rest. The piece ends with a quarter note G in the treble and a quarter note G in the bass.

B

mf

*f*

Musical score for Pair 3, Part B. It is identical to Part A, with the melody in the treble clef and the accompaniment in the bass clef.



Are there any pairs where the two melodies would sound the same?

**Let's reflect!**

- \* Which was the easiest difference to spot? Why?
- \* Which was the most challenging difference to spot? Why?

## Melodies on the spot

These G major melodies are in various hand positions, so take a look at the helpful finger numbers before you start. You can play G major scale before starting to sight-read, to get a good *sense of key*. While observing each melody, think about some useful sight-reading strategies you have practised: *remind* yourself the meaning of music symbols on the score, look for repeated *patterns* and *imagine* how the music may sound. Finally, you already know that thinking a *steady slow pulse* first is the key to feel as comfortable as possible when playing at sight.

The melodies you observed in the previous activity are numbers 1, 4 and 6 below.

Let's play some melodies in G major!



### Useful tip:

Before you play each melody, take a look at the hand position. Find which finger will be playing the F sharp and place it on the black key before you start, so that you don't forget it!

1

*mf*

4

2

*mf*

3

3

*p*

1

4

mf

f

1

5

f

p

1

5

6

mf

1

4

7

f

1

2

8

p

mf

4

5

**Let's reflect!**

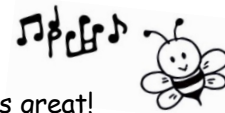
- ★ How comfortable did I feel in each hand position?
- ★ What challenges did I meet?
- ★ Which melody did I play best? Why?
- ★ Which steps of my preparation helped me the most?

## Performing at sight

Now that you've had some practice playing at sight in G major, let's have a look at the following pieces. While you are carefully observing each piece, you may feel that some of these are simpler than the previous melodies, so try to play what's on the score as accurately as possible.

As you can see, the first piece is not in G major, as there is no key signature. However, it is in G major *hand position*, so that you can practise playing more comfortably in this area of the keyboard.

Once you have prepared each piece, let's get started!



That's great!

This means that you can focus on playing as *musically* as you can and *enjoy* the music!

### *Unison melody no. 6* Rhythmically

Bartók, Sz. 107, No. 6  
'Mikrokosmos I'

A musical score for a unison melody in 4/4 time. The piece is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte). The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G, a half note A, and a quarter note B. The second measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note C, a half note D, and a quarter note E. The third measure features a triplet of eighth notes (F, G, A) beamed together, followed by a quarter note B. The fourth measure consists of a half note C and a half note D. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Have you seen the tempo marking *allegretto* before? If you have, can you briefly explain what it means? If this is the first time you've seen it, think about other markings with a similar name that you might have played and discuss these with your teacher or compare them using a music dictionary. The 'terminology' section at the end of this book might also be useful.

### *Etude – Study* Allegretto

Czerny, Op. 599, No. 59

A musical score for an etude in 2/4 time. The piece is marked *f* (forte). The melody starts with a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. The second measure contains a quarter note C, a quarter note D, and a quarter note E. The third measure features a quarter note F, a quarter note G, and a quarter note A. The fourth measure consists of a quarter note B, a quarter note C, and a quarter note D. The piece ends with a double bar line.

*Wild rose*

Tenderly

Schubert, Op. 3, No. 3 / D. 257

Musical score for 'Wild rose' in G major, 3/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The right hand starts with a triplet of quarter notes (G4, A4, B4) marked *mf*. The left hand has a whole rest. The piece concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a fermata over the final notes.

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do I think I did in these pieces?
- ★ How fluent was my playing?
- ★ How accurately did I play the musical elements on the score?
- ★ Which piece did I enjoy playing the most? Why?

**Fun for two**

In these duets you will sight-read pieces of some very significant composers: Franz Schubert, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Johann Sebastian Bach. You can talk with your teacher/partner about their life, work and musical period – I think you'll share interesting knowledge!

For the first duet, you will need to place both hands an octave higher.

Count one bar in and have fun together!



Schubert originally wrote this piece as a piano duet! Here it is a little bit simpler for you to be able to play it at sight, but the main melody and the character are the same!

*Children's march*

With triumph

Schubert, D. 928

Musical score for 'Children's march' in G major, 2/4 time. The score is for two hands. The right hand starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a triplet of eighth notes. The piece concludes with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a fermata over the final notes.

For the next duet, you will need to place both hands one octave higher. Note that the other part has faster-moving notes, so it is important to listen carefully and feel a steady beat while playing. Remember not to rush and play this piece 'With patience', as noted on the score. If you want to, you and your partner can play through your parts separately first, to get an idea of the music before playing together.



Take time to observe your part in this duet carefully, without rushing. As you see, your part has two lines this time. Notice how each hand plays in each line. Before you start to play, make sure to practise *looking ahead*, from the top to the bottom line of your part without stopping - you'll need to look *over* your partner's music.

*The Phantom tells his tale of longing*  
With patience

Coleridge-Taylor, Op. 66, No. 3  
'Forest scenes'



For this final duet, you will need to place your hands as written on the score. Make sure to move your seat on the right a bit, so that your partner can sit comfortable on your left.



Don't forget to practise **looking ahead** again, to make sure that you keep a steady pulse when moving from the top to the bottom line of your part.  
Which hand plays in each line?

**Menuet**  
**Allegretto**

J. S. Bach  
'Anna Magdalena's notebook'

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do we/I feel about our/my performance this time?
  - ★ What have we/I achieved well?
  - ★ What did I observe during preparation?
  - ★ How did we/I overcome any difficulties?
- ★ What was the best aspect of this performance?
  - ★ How can we/I improve in the next duets?

# ***Congratulations!***

***Well done for completing Unit 5!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.**

## **Unit 5**

***I learnt...***

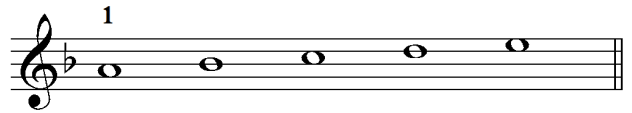
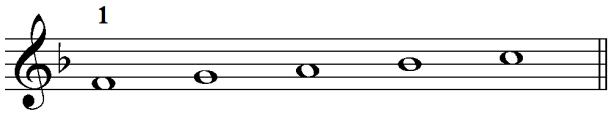
***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

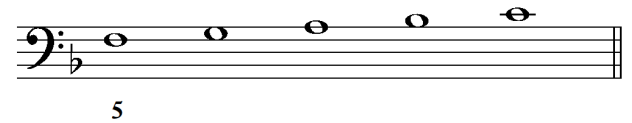
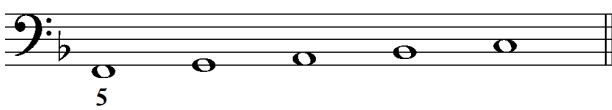
***What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...***

In this Unit, you will be playing in the following hand positions of F major.

**Right hand**



**Left hand**

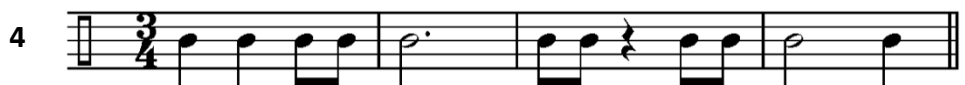


## Building on Rhythm

Through this activity you will continue to build on your rhythmic skills, by playing at sight slightly more detailed rhythms. To achieve these as well as you can, observe each rhythm and practise it silently in your head before you play it at a convenient steady speed.

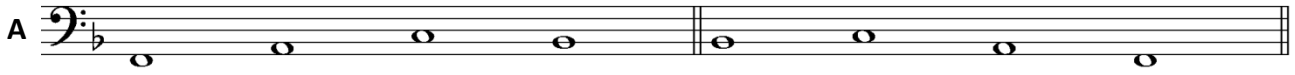
Remember to count one bar in according to the time signature before you start.


Do your best!

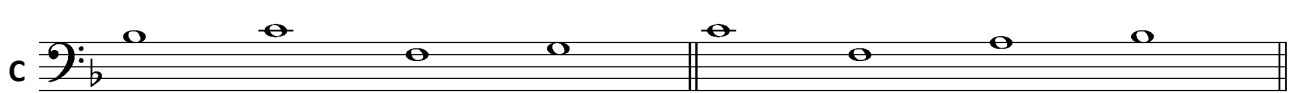




Left hand

A 

B 

C 

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How easily did I find each note on the keyboard?
- ★ Did I remember to play the B flat? How many did I find?
- ★ Are there any specific notes that I was unsure about?

**Let's Observe!**

These are some more pairs of melodies to observe. Spend about half a minute to each pair to find which element is different. If you spot the difference quite quickly, think about how you can use the remaining time effectively, to help you sight-read the melodies in the next activity. Once again, it's useful to think about how the sound would be different in each pair.

Let's start!



If you spot the difference quickly, make the most of the time left! Keep observing, to prepare for sight-reading these melodies later!

Pair 1

A 

B 

Pair 2

A

B

Pair 3

A

B



Are there any pairs where the difference you observed would not change the sound?

**Let's reflect!**

- ★ How do I feel about my observation skills?
- ★ Were there any challenging differences to spot?
- ★ Was any time left after finding each difference? If so, what did I do in the remaining time?

## Melodies on the spot

These melodies are in the F major hand positions shown at the beginning of this Unit. Use the finger numbers to help you place each hand on the right keys. If you want to, you may play F major scale to get a *sense of key* before you start playing.

Observe each melody *meaningfully*, making *mental* notes to plan what you need to remember while playing at sight. As always, there is no need to rush – aim for *accuracy* rather than speed.

The melodies from the observation activity are 2, 3 and 7 below.

Let's play some melodies in F major!



Remember to place the finger that will play  
B flat on the black key before starting,  
so that you don't forget it while you play!

1

*f* *p*

2

*p*

3

*mf*

4

*f* *p*

1 2

5

*mf* *p*

1 2

6

*p* *f*

2 3

7

*f* *p*

3 3

8

*p* *mf*

1 4

***Let's reflect!***

- \* How did I do in each melody?
- \* How fluent was my playing?
- \* Which elements from my preparation did I play effectively?
- \* Which ones did I forget or could have done better?
- \* What helped the most from my preparation?



## Performing at sight

Let's look at some more pieces in F major.

Look at each melody closely, focusing on places which may seem more challenging than others.

While *hearing* each piece in your head, think a *steady convenient pulse* to help you achieve as much *detail* as possible.

Start whenever you are ready!

Don't forget to *enjoy* the music!



### *A little dance*

With contrast

Kabalevsky, Op. 39, No. 6

'Pieces for children'



What is the difference between *allegro* and *allegretto* (Unit 5)? Remember that in sight-reading you *do not need to play as fast* as you would if you had practised the piece.

### *Etude – Study*

Allegro

Czerny, Op. 599, No. 67

### *The swing*

Cheerfully

Greek folk song of East Aegean islands

### Let's reflect!

- ★ How do I feel about my sight-reading this time?
- ★ How accurately did I play the articulation?
- ★ Did I make any mistakes? If yes, how did I react?
- ★ Which melody did I achieve best? Why is that?

## Fun for two

Here are some more duets to sight-read with your partner. As always, remember to apply to this collaborative sight-reading the strategies you practised on your own.

For the first duet, you will need to move both hands an octave higher than written on the score.

Also, remember to practise looking ahead to the second line before you start to play.

Have fun together!



After you have played this duet, talk with your partner about the balance between the melody line and the accompaniment.

If you feel that you can improve this further,  
you can try the piece again.

### Bed time

Like a lullaby

Bartók, Sz. 53, No. 15  
'First term at the piano'

For the following duet you will place your hands as written on the score; your partner will be sitting on your right this time.



This is interesting! Did you notice that the first two bars of your part have rests? This means that your partner will start two bars *earlier* than you this time! So, be *extra careful* when counting your rests, so that you start playing exactly on time!

### Etude – Study

With a change of character

Duvernoy, Op. 176, No. 8

The musical score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano part with rests in the first two bars, followed by a melody starting in bar 3. The second system shows the piano part with rests in the first two bars, followed by a melody starting in bar 3. The score includes dynamic markings (*mf*, *p*) and articulation (*legato*).

### Let's reflect!

- \* How do we/I feel about our/my performance?
- \* Which piece did we/I enjoy most?
- \* How easy/challenging did I find starting later than my partner?
- \* Which challenges did we meet?
- \* Was there a steady pulse throughout each duet?
- \* How effectively did we play the elements of expression and character on the score?

# ***Congratulations!***

***You have now completed Unit 6!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.**

## **Unit 6**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...***

# UNIT 7

New elements:  
A, E, D natural minors  
tied notes

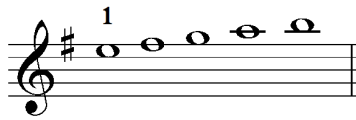
Welcome to Unit 7!

In this Unit, you will be practising your sight-reading skills in three minor scales: A, E, and D natural minors. You will be playing in the following hand positions in each key:

**Right hand**



A minor



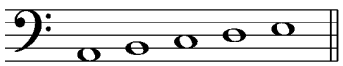
E minor\*



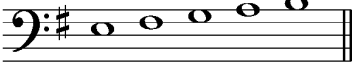
D minor\*

\*For E and D natural minors, these right-hand positions also appear an octave lower.

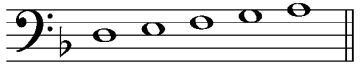
**Left hand**



A minor



E minor



D minor



This is a great opportunity to talk a bit about natural minors with your teacher. What other types of minor scales are there?

## Building on Rhythm

In this Unit, there is a new rhythmic element: tied notes.

Remember that when two or more notes in a row are tied, this means their values are added and counted together on the first note. How would you use your technique to play them?

Think about tied notes when observing the following rhythms. Don't worry if you need to play each rhythm slightly slower this time to achieve them more accurately.

Start whenever you are ready, having counted yourself in first!



When you see a pair of tied notes, don't forget to keep the first of the two notes held while counting their beats together.



4

5

6

7

8

9

10

***Let's reflect!***


- ★ How accurately did I play the tied notes?
- ★ Which rhythms did I find challenging?
- ★ How can I improve further in the next activities?
- ★ How did the tempo I chose to play each rhythm make me feel?

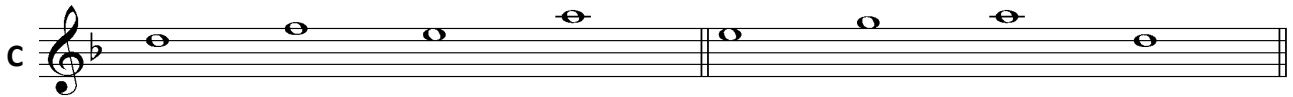
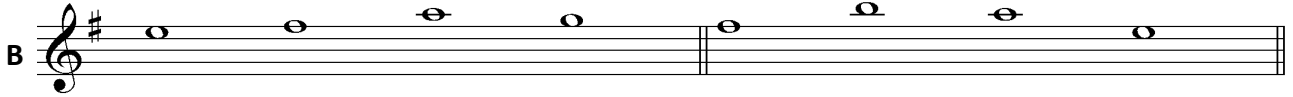
**Exploring the Keyboard**

This activity is slightly longer than usual, as you now will explore three different scales. However, there is no need to explore everything at once! You can focus on one scale at a time. As before, if you would like to explore the hand positions of this Unit, you may play the lowest note in each bar with the *thumb of your right* and the *fifth finger of your left* hand.

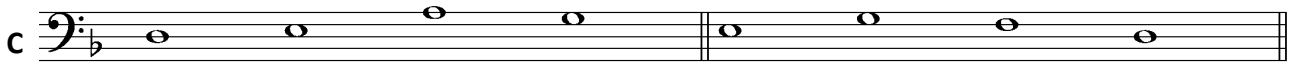
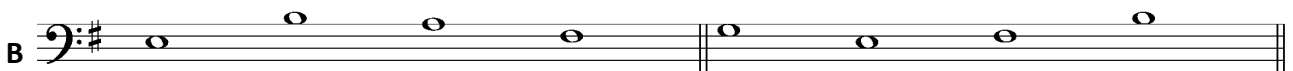
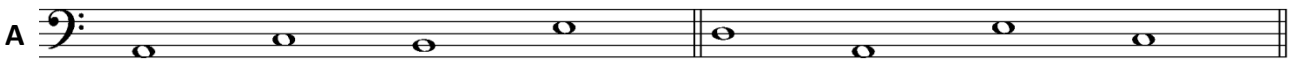
Let's explore each minor scale!

**Right hand**

Don't forget the black keys,  
as shown in the key signature of each scale. 



**Left hand**



***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How was my experience of exploring each scale?
- ★ How confident was I in finding each note on the keyboard?
- ★ Which examples did I find easier or more challenging? Why?

**Let's Observe!**

It's time to start observing again looking for one difference in each pair of melodies.  
You may have realised by now how helpful observation skills are when playing at sight.  
Let's become music detectives again!

Pair 1

A

*p*

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 1. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note D5. The lower staff (bass clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes F2, E2, and D2, then a half note C2. Both parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

B

*p*

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 1. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note D5. The lower staff (bass clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes F2, E2, and D2, then a half note C2. Both parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Pair 2

A

*f*

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 2. It consists of two staves in common time (C). The upper staff (treble clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note D5. The lower staff (bass clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes F2, E2, and D2, then a half note C2. Both parts are marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

B

*f*

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 2. It consists of two staves in common time (C). The upper staff (treble clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note D5. The lower staff (bass clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes F2, E2, and D2, then a half note C2. Both parts are marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

Pair 3

A

*p* *mf*

Musical notation for Part A of Pair 3. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note D5. The lower staff (bass clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes F2, E2, and D2, then a half note C2. Both parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the first measure and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in the second measure.

B

*p* *mf*

Musical notation for Part B of Pair 3. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note D5. The lower staff (bass clef) has a melody starting with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes F2, E2, and D2, then a half note C2. Both parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the first measure and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in the second measure.



### Let's reflect!

- \* How easy was it to spot each difference?
- \* How would the music sound different in each pair?
- \* Which pair was more challenging? Why do I think that is?

## Melodies on the spot

The melodies of this activity are written in A, E and D natural minors. If you want to, you may play each scale before you start, to get used to the key, the hand position and the sound of each scale. Remember to pay attention to the *key signature* while observing each melody. Before you start, think a *steady slow pulse* and look at the *finger numbers* to help you with the hand position of each melody. Numbers 3, 5 and 7 are the melodies from the previous activity.

Let's sight-read some melodies in natural minors!

During preparation, also think about how you will play each melody *musically*. This will help you remember to do the same when you play.



1

Musical score for exercise 1. It consists of two staves in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the bass clef. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. Fingerings are indicated: '1' for the first note in the first staff and '3' for the first note in the second staff. The melody is a simple sequence of notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

2

Musical score for exercise 2. It consists of two staves in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the bass clef. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. Fingerings are indicated: '1' for the first note in the first staff and '3' for the first note in the second staff. The melody is a simple sequence of notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

3

Musical score for exercise 3. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the bass clef. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. Fingerings are indicated: '1' for the first note in the first staff and '1' for the first note in the second staff. The melody is a simple sequence of notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

4

*mf*

1 2

5

*p* *mf*

5 1

6

*f*

5 3

7

*f*

1

8

*p* *mf* *p*

5 2

***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How fluently did I play?
- ★ How did I do with the tied notes?
- ★ How was my sense of key and how did this affect my playing?
- ★ Which elements do I need to focus more on, in my next practice?

## Performing at sight

Here are some minor pieces for you to sight-read. Each piece is in a different key, so make sure to notice the key signature before you start to play. Are there any black notes you need to be ready to play? While you are *observing* and *preparing* each piece in your head, make sure to also look at the title and other information, to also show the character.

Once you are ready, count one bar at a comfortable speed and let's go!



You may get inspired by the information for each piece, to shape the *sound quality* of your playing.

### *Loula-Maroula*

Like a question and an answer

Folk song of Cyprus

Musical score for 'Loula-Maroula' in 4/4 time. The piece is in G major. The first staff (treble clef) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a first finger (1) marking. The second staff (bass clef) starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3'. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### *Cradle song*

Lullaby

Kabalevsky, Op. 39, No. 4  
'Pieces for children'

Musical score for 'Cradle song' in 2/4 time. The piece is in D major. The first staff (treble clef) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a fifth finger (5) marking. The second staff (bass clef) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a fifth finger (5) marking. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### *Menuet*

Sadly

L. Mozart  
(no catalogue number)

Musical score for 'Menuet' in 3/4 time. The piece is in B-flat major. The first staff (treble clef) starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a first finger (1) marking. The second staff (bass clef) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a fourth finger (4) marking. The piece ends with a double bar line.

### **Let's reflect!**

- ★ What did I do during preparation? How did it help my playing?
- ★ Which places did I find most challenging? Why?
- ★ Which piece did I play more confidently? Why?

## Fun for two

In this activity, you will find three duets to sight-read, one in each of the three keys of this Unit. To make the most of your sight-reading practice together, observe each piece meaningfully, to understand all the elements you will need to play at sight.

For the *first* duet on this page, you will need to move only your left hand one octave higher.

Enjoy making music together!



Don't be surprised that your partner will not start playing at the same time as you. The *secondo* part begins with a whole bar rest. So, make sure to count your first bar *accurately*, so that they know when to start.

### *Waltz*

With a mood for dance

Shostakovich, Op. 69, No. 2  
'Children's notebook for piano'



Well done for sight-reading this duet! Did you notice that your right hand was in a slightly different hand position this time? How did it feel?

For the next duet, place both hands one octave higher on the keyboard.

### *Melancholy waltz*

With no hurry

EP

For this duet, move both hands one octave higher.



This piece is longer than previous duets. What else do you need to practise to help you play smoothly from one line to the next?

Play through your parts once before playing together, if you want.

### La bella Cubana

Lento

White

A piano score for 'La bella Cubana' in 2/4 time. The score is written for two hands on a grand staff. The first system shows the right hand starting with a piano (p) dynamic and a five-finger arpeggio. The second system shows the left hand starting with a piano (p) dynamic and a four-finger arpeggio. The third system shows the right hand moving from mezzo-forte (mf) to forte (f) and the left hand moving from mezzo-forte (mf) to forte (f). The fourth system shows the right hand moving from piano (p) to mezzo-forte (mf) and the left hand moving from piano (p) to mezzo-forte (mf). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

#### Let's reflect!

- \* How do I/we feel about my/our playing?
- \* What was the best part of our collaboration this time?
- \* Which specific challenges did we/I meet?

# ***Congratulations!***

***You have completed Unit 7!***

***Only one Unit left to complete this book!***



**Let's see what you think about your experience with sight-reading in this Unit.**

## **Unit 7**

***I learnt...***

***I improved...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***What I aim to improve  
further in my next  
practice is...***

Congratulations for reaching the final Unit of this book!

I'm sure you have developed your sight-reading skills impressively throughout the Units - I hope you've enjoyed this journey in the world of sight-reading!

This Unit has been designed as a final opportunity in this book to apply all skills and strategies you have developed and to reflect on your overall experience to date.

This set of activities invites you to use these tools to prepare step-by-step, in order to play at sight the two final pieces in 'Performing at sight' and 'Fun for two'.

Do your best and enjoy the music!



Very well done!

You've made it to the final Unit of this book!

## Building on Rhythm

The following rhythms are from the two sight-reading pieces in the final activities. This means, that if pitch disappeared from each melody, this is what you would hear! In this way, you will focus on preparing the rhythms that you will play in each of the two pieces later.

Notice that the first pairs of rhythms are repeated. The second time, the articulation and dynamics of each piece are included – why not try to show these as well? 😊

Enjoy your final rhythms for this book!

### The cat and the cricket

1 

2 

3 

4 

### Little leg dance

1 

2 

3 

4 

### Let's reflect!

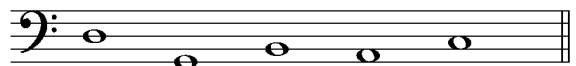
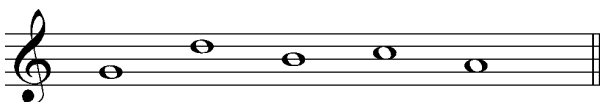
- ★ How accurately did I play each rhythm?
- ★ How effectively did I do the articulation and dynamics?
- ★ Are there any elements that I need to pay extra attention to?
- ★ What do I feel most confident with?

## Exploring the Keyboard

Here you can explore the areas of the keyboard which you will use in each of the final pieces. As previously, feel free to explore however you like! If you decide to use all fingers to practise hand position as well, then you know what to do: place on the *lowest note* the *thumb of your right* hand and the *fifth finger of your left* hand.

Let's explore the keyboard one more time!

### The cat and the cricket



### Little leg dance





***Let's reflect!***

- ★ How easily did I find the key for each note?
- ★ How comfortable did I feel in each hand position?
- ★ Were there any notes I was unsure about?

## **Let's Observe!**

Instead of an observation activity, this Unit has a list of useful questions to ask yourself while preparing each piece. Although there is often not enough time to think about *all* these questions, it is helpful to think about as many different areas as you can. Use this list for the next pieces, and you may keep it for future practice. This time, you may prepare each piece for about *a minute*.

Let's observe the final pieces!

### Title/Subtitle:

Look at the title and subtitle of the piece. What pictures do they create in your imagination? What do you think the **character** of the piece will be like?

### Time signature/Values:

Let's observe the time signature and clap a bar. Which note values are you likely to find in this piece?

### Key:

Which key is this piece in? Are there any black notes which you might need to play? If so, which fingers will you use in each hand?

### Hand position/Register:

Which is the highest and lowest note for each hand? Find them in the score and on the keyboard. Which note will each finger play?

### Dynamics/Expression:

Let's look at the dynamics. How (loud) does the piece begin and how does it end? Can you describe how the dynamics change through the piece?

### Articulation:

What types of articulation can you observe in this piece? Let's briefly explain what each one means.

### Patterns:

Let's observe the two hands. Can you find any rhythmic and/or melodic patterns? Which similarities and/or differences have you spotted between the two hands?

### Inner hearing:

Try to hear the melody in your head and imagine how it may sound.

### Hand relationship/balance:

Observe the notes for each hand; do they seem to share the melody, or is it like a question and answer?

### Other observations:

Which other musical elements can you observe (tied/dotted notes, rests, etc.)? Are there any places which seem particularly challenging (more demanding rhythms, detailed articulation, the music changing line)?

## Performing at sight

In this final 'Performing at sight' activity of this book you will play one of my own compositions, which is inspired by my mischievous cat and his friend, a cricket!

Before finding out what they're up to through your playing, spend about *one minute* to prepare the piece using the questions from the previous activity.

Enjoy the music!



Well done for developing so many different skills!  
I hope you've enjoyed it! Have fun sight-reading the final pieces!

### *The cat and the cricket*

With mischief

EP

Musical score for 'The cat and the cricket' in 3/4 time, key of G major. The score is for piano and features dynamics *mf*, *p*, and *mf*. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1, 5, and 3. The piece consists of 8 measures.

### ***Let's reflect!***

#### ***on the final 'Performing at sight' piece***

- ★ How fluent was my playing?
- ★ How effectively did I show the character of the piece?
- ★ How similar was the music I imagined to the music I played?
- ★ How much detail did I observe during the one-minute preparation?
- ★ What did I enjoy most in my performance?

## Fun for two

For this final duet, you will need to play both hands an octave higher than written. To prepare, you can use questions from the 'Let's observe' activity. Don't forget to practise looking ahead at the second line before starting to play and remember to count one bar in so that you start together.

Have fun together!

### *Little leg dance* Rhythmically

### Greek folk tune from Thrace

The musical score consists of two systems, each with two staves. The first system is for the 'Little leg dance' and the second is for the 'Greek folk tune from Thrace'. Both are in common time (C). The first system features a treble clef staff with notes and rests, and a bass clef staff with notes, rests, and fingerings (3, 5, 1, 2). Dynamics include *f* and *p*. The second system also has two staves, with the bass clef staff including fingerings (4, 1, 5, 2, 4, 1) and dynamics (*f*, *p*, *f*). The piece concludes with a double bar line.

### ***Let's reflect!*** ***on the final duet***

- ★ How do I feel about our/my duet performance?
- ★ How well did I do when the line changed?
- ★ What was the biggest challenge we/I faced in this duet?
- ★ What did I like the most in this piece?

# ***Congratulations!***

***Well done for completing the entire book!***

***I hope you've enjoyed your journey through the world of sight-reading!***



**Now let's reflect on your overall experience in this book.**

## **In this book**

***I learnt these  
strategies...***

***I strengthened  
these skills...***

***I overcame these  
weaknesses...***

***I enjoyed very much /  
I achieved well...***

***I aim to improve in  
the future...***





# *CERTIFICATE* *of Award*

*Congratulations to*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(name)*

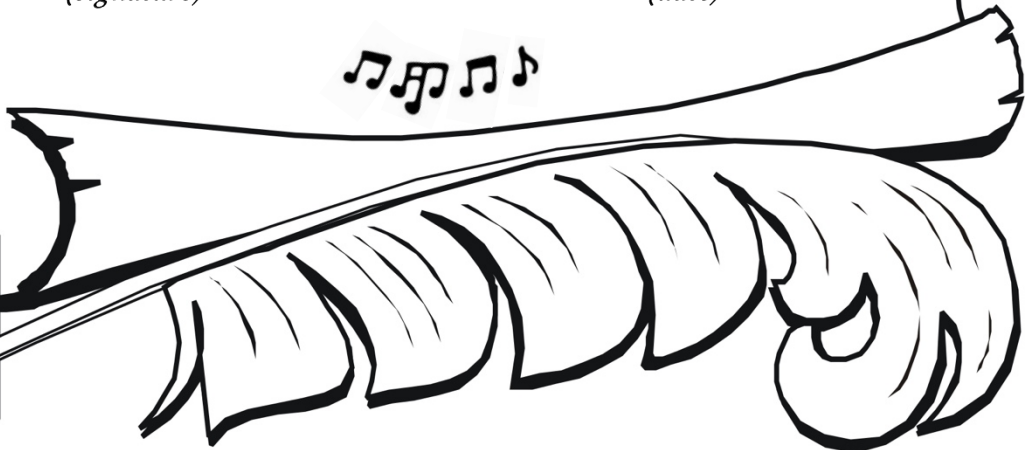
*for your consistent work towards developing your  
sight-reading skills.*

*You have become a great beginner sight-reader!*

You are now ready to continue your journey in the world of sight-reading  
through the next book of this series.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(signature)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(date)*





# Terminology & List of featured composers

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$\frac{2}{4}$ : This time signature indicates that there are two (2) crotchet beats (4) in each bar.

$\frac{3}{4}$ : This time signature indicates that there are three (3) crotchet beats (4) in each bar.

$\frac{4}{4}$ : This time signature indicates that there are four (upper 4) crotchet beats (lower 4) in each bar.

**Accent (>):** Type of articulation indicating stronger attack for the specified note.

**Accompaniment:** A part of music which supports (accompanies) the main melody.

**Allegretto:** A tempo marking, indicating a moderately quick speed, but not as fast as *allegro*.

**Allegro:** A tempo marking, meaning that the music is to be played in a fast and lively speed.

**Bar:** A unit containing the number of beats indicated by the time signature, separated on the staff with vertical bar lines. Also known as 'measure'.

**Baroque:** A period or musical era of Western music, roughly between 1600 and 1750.

**C:** A time signature, often used for  $\frac{4}{4}$

**Classical (period):** A period or musical era, roughly between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Crotchet:** The note which has a quarter of the value of the semibreve. In time signatures where the lower numeral is 4, a crotchet equals one beat. Also known as 'quarter-note'.

**Crotchet rest:** Absence of sound, equal to one crotchet beat.

**Dot:** A dot, which is placed immediately after a note, adds half of its original value onto the note.

**Dotted minim:** A minim with a dot, where half of the original number of beats is added to the value of the minim. In time signatures where a beat equals a crotchet (where the lower numeral is 4), a dotted minim equals three beats.

**Dotted minim rest:** A minim rest followed by a dot. Equals to the value of a dotted minim.

**Duet:** A composition for two performers. A piano duet may be for two performers on one instrument, or on two instruments, one for each performer.

**Dynamics:** Markings which indicate the volume with which notes and sounds are expressed.

**Ecoisaise:** A kind of country dance in a Scottish style, popular during the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was quick and energetic, and the music was generally in  $\frac{2}{4}$  time.

**Flat:** The sign  $\flat$ , normally placed to the left of a note, indicates that the note is to be lowered by one semitone.

**Forte (*f*):** A dynamic marking meaning that the music is to be played with strong sound.

**Key signature:** The group of sharps or flats at the beginning of a musical composition placed after the clef, which defines the key of the work. The signs affect the pitch of all notes with the names shown by the position of the sharps/flats on the staff.

**Legato:** Type of articulation meaning that the notes are to be played smoothly, with no breaks between them. This may be indicated either by the use of a phrase mark (slur) or by the word *legato*.

**Legato slur:** A curved line above or below a group of two or more notes, which shows that the music needs to be played *legato*.



**Lento:** A tempo marking, meaning that the piece is to be played slowly.

**Looking ahead:** The act of looking further down the score, ahead of the point of music being played.

**Lullaby:** A music piece, usually vocal, designed to lull a child to sleep.

**Major scale:** A scale which is built of the sequence of T-T-S-T-T-T-S within an octave (T= Tone, S= Semitone).

**March:** Music with strong repetitive rhythms, usually used to accompany military processions.

**Melody:** A tune, a sequence of musical sounds (pitch and rhythm) which are perceived as one unit.

**Mental practice:** The act of thinking and practising the sound of the music silently, in the mind or imagination. Also found in this book as 'imagining the music/the sound', 'hear the music in the head', or 'singing it silently'.

**Menuet/Minuet:** A type of ballroom dance in triple time, particularly popular in 18th-century Europe.

**Mezzo forte (*mf*):** A dynamic marking meaning that the music is to be played with moderately strong sound.

**Middle C:** The C nearest the middle of a piano or keyboard. It is written on the first ledger line below a treble clef staff.

**Minim:** This note is half the value of a semibreve and twice the value of a crotchet. In time signatures with one beat per crotchet (where the lower numeral is 4), a minim equals two beats. Also known as 'half-note'.

**Minim rest:** Absence of sound equal to the duration of a minim.

**Moderato:** A tempo marking, meaning that the piece is to be played at a moderate speed, not too fast, not too slowly.

**Musical era:** A period in music history.

**Natural minor scale:** One of the three types of minor scales, built of the sequence of T-S-T-T-S-T-T within an octave (T= Tone, S= Semitone); the other two types of minor scales are harmonic and melodic minors.

**Octave:** The range between eight successive notes on an instrument, defined by the beginning and ending notes. When two notes are an octave apart, they have the same name, but different register.

**Piano (*p*):** A dynamic marking meaning that the music is to be played with soft sound.

**Part:** The section on a music score with the music of one performer.

**Pattern:** Something that is repeated. In music, this can be in the *melody*, with repeated notes or similar note movements (melodic patterns), or in the *rhythm*, with repetition of the same note values or rests (rhythmic patterns)

**Pitch:** A quality of a sound (musical note) which shows how high or low it is.

**Primo:** The top part of a duet. The player sits on the right and plays the high notes. *Primo* means 'first'. The low part is called 'secondo'.

**Pulse:** The beat; a steady pace.

**Quaver:** The note that is one eighth of the value of a semibreve, and half the value of a crotchet. In time signatures with one beat per crotchet (where the lower numeral is 4), a quaver equals half a beat. Also known as 'eighth-note'.

**Quaver pairs:** Two quavers, equal to a crotchet.

**Quaver rest:** Absence of sound equal to the duration of a quaver.

**Rest:** A sign indicating absence of sound. Every note value has a corresponding rest.

**Rhythm:** The way in which different note values are grouped together, in a sequence of strong or weak beats.

**Scale:** A sequence of successive notes in ascending or descending order, which is repeated after reaching an octave. The beginning note is called the 'key note' as it gives its name to the scale.

**Scherzando:** An expression marking, meaning that the music should be played playfully.

**Secondo:** The lower part in a duet. The player sits on the left and plays the low notes. *Secondo* means 'second'. The higher part is called 'primo'.

**Semibreve:** The note that has double the value of the minim. In time signatures with one beat per crotchet (where the lower numeral is 4), a semibreve equals four beats. Also known as 'whole-note'.

**Semibreve rest:** Absence of sound equal to the duration of a semibreve.

**Sharp:** The sign #, normally placed to the left of a note, indicates that the note is to be raised in pitch by one semitone.

**Sight-reading:** The act of playing music at first sight, as accurately as possible, and with musical details, without having practised the music first.

**Staccato:** Type of articulation, an opposite of legato. Usually indicated with dots above the note. Staccato notes are to be played detached and separated. The sound quality may vary, depending on the musical era and style.

**Staff:** The five-line and four-spaces notation system, on which music is written. Also known as 'staff'.

**Technique:** The different ways in which sound is produced on a musical instrument. For the piano, it relates to the way hands, fingers, arms, posture or the whole body are used to produce the desirable sound effect.

**Tempo:** The speed of the music.

**Tie:** A curved line used to join two successive notes of the same pitch. It shows that they should form one sound, lasting for the duration of their combined values.

**Time signature:** A sign usually placed at the beginning of a composition, after the clef and any key signature. It usually includes two numerals, one above the other: the lower shows the value which represents one beat; the upper numeral shows the number of beats in each bar.

**Waltz:** A popular ballroom dance, particularly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, written in triple time.

### **List of featured composers:**

- Bach, Johann Sebastian (1685-1750, Germany). Unit 5.
- Bartók, Béla (Hungary, 1881-1945, USA). Units: 1, 2, 5, 6.
- Beach, Amy (1867-1944, USA). Unit 4.
- Beyer, Ferdinand (1803-1863, Germany). Units: 3, 4.
- Chwatal, Franz Xaver (Bohemia, 1808-1879, Germany). Unit 4.
- Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel (1875-1912, England). Unit 5.
- Czerny, Carl (1791-1857, Austria). Units: 5, 6.
- Duvernoy, Jean-Baptiste (1802-1880, France). Units 1, 6.
- Grieg, Edvard (1843-1907, Norway). Unit 1.

- Kabalevsky, Dmitry (1904-1987, Russia). Units: 2, 3, 6, 7.
- Lemoine, Henry (1786-1854, France). Unit 2.
- Mozart, Leopold (Germany, 1719-1787, Austria). Unit 7.
- Pleyel, Ignaz (Austria, 1757-1831, France). Unit 4.
- Price, Florence (1887-1953, USA). Unit 3.
- Schmitt, Joseph (Germany, 1734-1791, Netherlands). Unit 3.
- Schubert, Franz (1797-1828, Austria). Units: 4, 5.
- Schumann, Robert (1810-1856, Germany). Unit 2.
- Shostakovich, Dmitri (1906-1975, Russia). Unit 7.
- White, Joseph [José Silvestre White Lafitte] (Cuba, 1836-1912, France). Unit 7.

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