

HOW TO LEARN A NEW PIECE OF MUSIC

by Mark Mercury

Here's a simple procedure you can use to speed up the process of learning a new piece of music.

1. By yourself or with the help of your teacher, work out the fingering for each hand's part. Take a pencil and write in the fingering that you feel is best for you, that best enables you to easily and efficiently play the various passages in the piece. You don't have to write a finger number for each note. Take a look at some printed music and notice how the publisher indicated the fingering. There will be just enough numbers to guide you.
2. Practice hands separately all the way through until you can comfortably play the part of each hand. Don't try to play fast.
3. Now you're ready to start playing with hands together. Take a very small section (maybe it's three or four notes, three or four beats, or one or two measures) and slowly play it with hands together, over and over, until "your hands learn it"—until you can feel it in your hands. This may take several days of practice to accomplish. Don't try yet to play it fast. (If a section seems difficult, read my article "Effective Piano Practice" and apply its practice principles to the difficult section.)
4. Continue this way to the end of the piece—picking a small section and putting hands together until "your hands learn it." Don't try to play fast yet.

5. Now play the whole piece hands together. Don't try to play fast yet.

6. When you can play the whole piece with no mistakes, begin to practice it a little faster, then a little faster, until you can play the piece at its proper tempo.

7. Perform the piece for somebody. This will solidify what you have done right and show up weaknesses that you should work on.