

Learn a Piece by Yourself Guidelines

The following are steps to help you prepare for the performances we will all enjoy at the "Learn a Piece by Yourself" performances on April 19 and 20, 2010.

First and foremost, I would like you to perform a piece with high artistic standards. By the time of the performance, I want you to feel your piece has been thoroughly studied and is completely ready for performance. This assignment is NOT a sight-reading exercise; instead, this assignment will ask you to draw on your musical background to create an excellent performance.

In order to make this possible, I will help you to pick a piece in a style with which you feel comfortable. For example, if you have played two Bach Preludes and Fugues, then obviously you'd feel at home learning another one. If, on the other hand, you had never in your life played a Debussy Prelude, then choosing a Debussy Prelude would not be a good choice for this assignment. The length is not to be overly long, but the quality of the performance needs to be high. With this assignment, I am not looking for quantity, but I AM looking for quality preparation.

Grading: 5% of the semester grade will be given for the performance of this piece, while 25% of the semester grade will be given for the many preparatory steps you will take in the learning process.

After we have agreed on the repertoire, then you will proceed learning the piece using the following steps:

1. Once you own the original music, make a photocopy that you will mark up extensively and eventually show me after the performance. Since this copy will be for educational purposes only, it is a legal photocopy.
2. Fill in a **'Repertoire Research Guide'** and **post it to Moodle sometime between March 1 & 7**. This guide will help you to take a careful look at the piece and get a macroscopic view of it. The guide is included to the bottom of this document.
3. Play through the whole piece once (and only once) to get an overview of it.
4. A. Dig in and learn it carefully. Focus on one element at a time, in this order: counting, notes (including key signature & accidentals), articulations, dynamics.
B. Remember that the overriding leader in all of this work is the **expression**.
C. Fingerings – work out all of the fingerings in a tempo that approximates the final tempo, so that you are certain that they will work at that speed. If you choose to use fingerings than are different than in the score, **then carefully mark in your own fingerings**.
D. Make careful notes in your score to reflect all of the details worked out so far.
E. Double check to ensure careful attention to stylistic considerations.
F. At this point in the process, **sometime between March 8 & 14, post a reflective summary on Moodle** of any successes and challenges you have had in step 4. Tell me whether you feel there are specific sections that you feel will be particularly beautiful, difficult, charming, lyrical, etc. in your final performance.
5. Work through small sections of the piece slowly, then gradually work through larger sections until you are able to play through the entire piece fluently.

6. **Make your first recording of the piece and post it to Moodle sometime between March 15 & 21.** This recording is not intended to be a definitive performance, but rather a work-in-progress. This recording should help you 'hear' your playing more objectively.
7. Listen very attentively to this first recording with your score and pencil in hand.
8. **Along with your recording, post a reflective commentary to Moodle** that gives a detailed account of what surprises (good and bad) you noticed from listening to this recording. What are you doing well so far? What needs more technical precision? What dynamic regions need more contrast? How is the tonal balance? Does the climactic area emerge clearly? Etc.
9. "Play" the piece through in your mind a few times without playing it at the piano. In this phase, I'd like you to really LISTEN to details of expression to make sure that you are hearing everything well without actually playing it with your fingers.
10. If you will be playing from memory, try this strategy – break the piece into sections and begin by memorizing the final section first. Work your way backwards through the piece, section by section, so that you are constantly reinforcing the familiar material at the end.
11. Find a few recordings of the piece and listen to each one very carefully with the score and a pencil in hand. Mark in any interpretative details that you notice in the recordings.
12. **Sometime between March 22 & 25, post on Moodle the names of the performers whose recordings you listen to as well as any personal preferences regarding particular recordings.**
13. "Play" the piece again through in your mind before going back to the piano to work through some of the details you have heard on the recordings. It is very likely that you will like some interpretations and dislike others. That's a good thing. Try to create your own interpretation of the piece.
14. Soon your interpretation will begin to crystallize. Practice in two distinct modes – 1. Performance mode (run-through) and 2. Practice mode (working through all of the details using the score as a constant reference).
15. **Make another recording of the piece and post it to Moodle sometime between April 5 & 8.**
16. **Along with the recording, also post a reflective commentary** that explores how you feel your performance has evolved since the first recording. **I will listen to your Moodle recording, read your reflective commentary and send you some feedback.**
17. Solidify your performance through multiple 'run-throughs' that imitate the stress of the concert performance. Work yourself up as you perform it for yourself and pretend that you are getting nervous before you begin. Try to do pretend performances several times by yourself before inviting a friend in to hear you play it.
18. **Make another recording of the piece and post it to Moodle sometime between April 12 & 15.**
19. **Along with the recording, also post a reflective commentary** that explores how you feel your performance has evolved since the second recording. **I will listen to your Moodle recording, read your reflective commentary and send you some feedback.**
20. Find another friend to play the piece for – repeat as often as possible.
21. By the time you arrive at the class on April 19 or 20, you should have 'performed' the piece through at least 15 - 20 times, either for yourself, a recording device or for friends. The goal is for you to be able to really make music at the piano as you perform your piece.
22. **Between April 19 & 25, post a reflective commentary on the process of learning a piece of repertoire in this manner.** Of course, the majority of you will not become concert

pianists who make a living exclusively from playing the piano. Nonetheless, with this assignment, I have asked you to learn a piece by yourself and bring it to a very high artistic level for performance. *From this assignment, I hope that you can learn a lot about learning.* In your Moodle posting, please comment on the process of music learning and also reflect on how the learning you did with this piece parallels the learning you do elsewhere in the College (and potentially in other facets of your life beyond the walls of the College).

Logistical details for your consideration:

- Memorization will be optional. I personally find that it is easier to play a piece from memory so that I can focus more on the music-making and less on looking up and down from the score to my hands; however, if you prefer to play the piece from the score, that is absolutely fine.
- You can include this piece as part of your end-of-semester jury if you'd like. If you do, though, I would like to see you play it from memory at the jury.
- Dates: everyone will be playing on EITHER Monday, April 19 from 6 to 7 p.m. OR Tuesday, April 20 from 8 to 9 p.m. Both events will take place in CHM 224. Please let me know which of these dates you would prefer.

Good luck with this assignment. I, for one, am really excited to read and hear the results of your hard work. Please keep me updated with your progress.