



# Reading Technique on Keyboard Percussion Instruments

by J.B. Smith

Reading music on keyboard percussion instruments is different from the techniques used on other instruments because no contact is made with the instrument until it produces sound. With the piano, the fingers can rest on the keys before they are depressed. On the clarinet or flute, the fingers move into position before a pitch is produced. On a violin, the left hand presses the string onto the fingerboard before the string vibrates. With keyboard percussion instruments, on the other hand, the only contact made is during the striking process. As a result, spatial awareness of the keyboard and visual targeting are critical to develop pitch accuracy while reading.

Although no one uses peripheral vision exclusively on keyboard instruments, it is a useful technique which can be used to improve reading precision, stay in tempo, avoid losing one's place in the music, and allow for performance details to be quickly integrated during the reading process. Reading technique involves the following three step process:

1. A group of notes is recognized. Seeing scale passages, chord structures, and melodic shapes instead of individual notes will increase recognition speed. Using flashcards and Flashworks, described below, can be used to help develop this skill.
2. Corresponding notes on the keyboard are targeted. Using kinetic memory and peripheral vision helps visualize the layout of the instrument. The groups of accidental notes provide all the information required to orient the eyes on the instrument. Focused vision is used to read the music, peripheral vision is used to see the notes. The notes on the page constantly change, the position of the notes on the instrument does not.
3. The music is played while the next group of notes is recognized. Looking ahead is critical to accurate reading; the hands must have adequate time to get the mallets into position for upcoming passages. A reading musician must constantly anticipate what's coming up in the music. Using the 3x5 card technique described below can help to develop this technique.

Although there are distinctive phases within the process, the ultimate goal is for the 3 steps to become a single reflex.

## The learning process:

1. Learn and memorize note locations, scales and short pieces.
2. Introduce peripheral vision into the playing technique. First, grab bars with hands while looking over the keyboard by guiding off the accidental notes. For example, B natural is in line with the right edge of the B flat bar and D is in line with the space between C sharp and E flat. Second, roll notes called out by an instructor. Before moving the mallets, make sure the note is seen within the peripheral field. Finally, play scales and memorized pieces looking over the keyboard. Advanced players will find this a new challenge during warm-ups and technique practice.
3. Read music using focused vision on the printed music, peripheral vision on the keyboard. In order to stay in tempo and catch all the performance details (for example, dynamics and articulations) look ahead and recognize groups of notes.

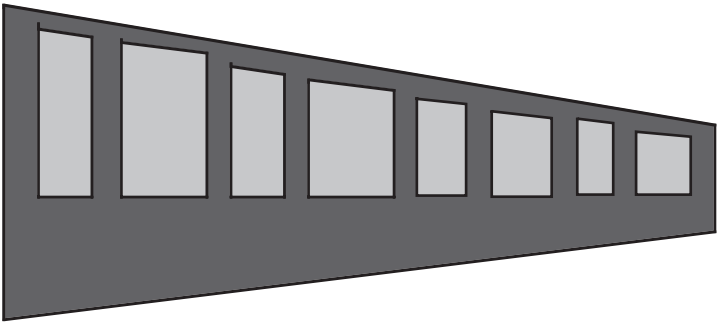


# Reading Technique on Keyboard Percussion Instruments

by J.B. Smith

**Techniques to help develop sight-reading skills:**

- With a metronome clicking the tempo, the instructor counts off one measure and then covers the first bar of a reading exercise with a 3x5 card while the student plays it. When the metronome gets to the second measure, it is covered. This forces the student to recognize groups of notes quickly and look ahead.
- Flashcards can be used to learn to quickly recognize groups of notes. Used with a metronome, cards flashed in tempo force the player to take in the note information quickly and perform the material from memory.
- Flashworks is a keyboard sight-reading computer program. The user selects the difficulty level, tempo, and key. The computer then displays short musical passages in a flashcard fashion with a metronome clicking the tempo. The program forces the user to quickly synthesize the information and then play the part in time.
- Practice using the Peripheral Vision Cap. The cap is fitted with a buzzer that sounds if the player looks down. It can be used while working on scales and arpeggios, playing memorized pieces, sight-reading, drilling with flashcards or using Flashworks.
- A keyboard instrument’s cover can be used to help guide off the accidental notes by having an outline of the upper rack notes painted onto it.



•In addition to published keyboard percussion method books and etude collections, music for flute, oboe, clarinet, and trumpet can be used for sight-reading material.

# Fundamentals Track

## Reading Technique on Keyboard Percussion Instruments

by J.B. Smith

### Flashworks Example

Memorize:

Metronome: 1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

Play



1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4