



9 Essential Aural Skills

*"Music is the art of thinking with sounds."
- Jules Combarieu*

Last month, we discussed why ear training is critical to the success of student musicians. [Click here](#) to read Part 1. This article continues with a discussion of nine learning goals that should be included in every music curriculum and how these aural skills translate into more effective musical performance.

Skills in aural comprehension produce listeners and performers who can:

- 1. See, then hear music tones and rhythms in thought before they play them.**
This skill—a key component in effective sight reading—includes the ability to see a music score and hear that music in thought. Those who have developed this skill are usually the best sight-readers. All ear training and sight-singing activities contribute to this goal. In the MusicLearningCommunity.com games, aural comprehension skills are developed simultaneously with reading skills.
- 2. Hear musical ideas in thought, then translate them into music notation.**
For centuries, music notation has been the primary means for composers to share their musical compositions so others can perform their work. The ability to write what one hears in thought is a key skill for composers. Even though music notation software has dramatically changed the composing process, composers must still be able to find mistakes and edit the manuscript to accurately reflect their intentions. For student musicians, creating music can be very rewarding when they have this skill. On the other hand, it can be a frustrating experience when one hears a cool tune in one's mind, but can't write it down! Many of the MusicLearningCommunity.com games—such as *Rhythm Pix*, *Melody Pix*, *Rhythm Regatta*, *Rhythm Factory*, *Pick the Pattern* and others—help students to see a musical pattern in notation then match it with what they hear.
- 3. Hear musical ideas in thought, then translate them into musical performance.**
This skill is the key element of improvisation. Play-back games such as *Song Birds*, *Staff Birds*, the Music Memory series and the Beat the Clock series contribute to this skill.
- 4. Sing better—and memorize more easily!**
It's not necessary to have a beautiful singing voice. The goal of singing in ear training is to develop an accurate voice. For one thing, the ability to accurately sing back pitches and musical phrases that one hears is a critical component in being able to play from memory. Students who seem to have difficulty memorizing a musical performance, may have difficulty in matching pitch. Play a pitch in their singing range and ask them to sing it back. This may

be one source of the problem. Currently, there are no games in MusicLearningCommunity.com that specifically address this skill because the right technology does not yet exist in the online environment. It is, however, on our “wish list.”

5. Evaluate and correct their own and others’ performances.

This skill is developed through all interval identification activities, games that ask “same?” or “different?” and through error detection games such as *Practice Buddy*.

6. Remember musical patterns and melodies.

Developing tonal memory skills using games such as the *Musical Memory* series and the *Beat the Clock* games helps students to remember long patterns and melodies.

7. Anticipate what comes next in a musical passage.

The ability to hear in thought and respond to what might come next in the melody and harmony of a composition is a valuable skill in sight-reading that is developed through consistent work in all areas of a well-designed music literacy curriculum and through experience.

8. Make beautiful music with others in chamber music and keyboard ensemble—and by accompanying other instrumentalists.

Effective and accurate sight-reading is critical to the success and enjoyment of any chamber music and accompanying experience!

9. Tune their instruments faster and more accurately.

While this is usually not an issue for pianists, it is a critical skill for most other musicians. However, pianists must be able to discern “out-of-tune” notes and describe the nature of the problem when accompanying other instrumentalists. They might also be called upon to evaluate the quality (tuning and voicing) of an acoustic piano.

Training the ear takes consistent practice. Ear training games are at the core of each level of the MusicLearningCommunity.com curriculum. The higher a musician’s skill in aural comprehension, the greater the joy s/he experiences during the process of learning new music. So the faster we can help our students develop skills in aural comprehension, the sooner they feel success in their progress—which means a higher probability that they will continue their music study.

Christine Hermanson
MusicLearningCommunity.com
Bachelor of Music
MSEd Instructional Technology