

Learning a Piece

- **Learn a Piece in Small Steps, One Step at a Time.**

It is most efficient and fun to learn a piece of music in small segments and to master each step before adding a new one. Dr. Suzuki introduced this concept by saying, “Learn one step at a time and by all means, master each step.” In other contexts, when specifically related to memory, it is called “Chunking” (George Miller, *The Magic Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two*). An example of chunking is found in telephone numbers: they have seven digits, arranged in a group of three, followed by a group of four.

- ***Scramble Game***

Scramble is a powerful learning tool that we developed from the concept of “one step at a time:

- (1) It provides an organized procedure for breaking learning down into small, accessible steps.
- (2) It turns practicing into a game.
- (3) It promotes engagement by causing the learner to pay close attention to the score.
- (4) It strengthens memory.
- (5) It reveals the structure of the piece

In an effort to save busy teachers time, we provide *Scramble* numbers for every piece in the seven levels of repertoire for *Mastering the Piano*. These are found in the Teaching Procedures section of this manual. Please note that *Scramble* sections are infinitely variable and can be adjusted for each student.

- **How to Play *Scramble***

Step 1. The music score is divided into numbered segments. The numbers are written on the score. Each segment is represented by a numbered card (either *Scramble* cards or ordinary playing cards).

Figure 19. *Allegretto, Op. 117, No. 5* by C. Gurlitt (*Mastering the Piano, Level 1, P. 5*)

Mastering the Piano
Teaching Strategies

The image displays four segments of a musical score for Kuhlau's *Sonatina*, Op. 20, No. 1. Each segment is presented on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Segment 1 (measures 1-4) is marked with a circled '1' and a square '1', starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and including fingering numbers 1, 3, and 5. Segment 2 (measures 5-8) is marked with a circled '2' and a square '5', including a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking and fingering numbers 2, 4, and 5. Segment 3 (measures 9-12) is marked with a circled '3' and a square '9', including a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Segment 4 (measures 13-16) is marked with a circled '4' and a square '13', ending with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score is in 2/4 time and G major.

Step 2. As soon as the student has learned two segments, the game can begin. Turn the two cards representing the segments face down. The student picks a card and plays that segment, and then picks another card, etc.

As each segment is learned, its card is added to the pile until the entire piece is learned.

There are many variations possible, limited only by imagination. One particularly useful variation occurs in sonatas or sonatinas: adding letters (a, b, c, etc) to the Scramble numbers, reveals the places where a theme modulates to a different key in the Exposition or remains in the same key in the Recapitulation. In the Kuhlau *Sonatina*, Op. 20, No. 1, first movement, Scramble 2a in the Exposition modulates to the Dominant key (G major) at Scramble 2b:

Figure 20: Kuhlau *Sonatina*, Op. 20, No. 1 (*Mastering the Piano*, Level 4, P.7)

Handwritten musical score for Scramble 2a and 2b. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time. Scramble 2a is marked with a circled '2a' and includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. Scramble 2b is marked with a circled '2b' and includes dynamic markings of *p* and *p dolce*. The score features complex rhythmic patterns and fingerings indicated by numbers 1-5.

In the Recapitulation, Scramble 2c remains in the Tonic key (C major):

Handwritten musical score for Scramble 2a and 2c. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time. Scramble 2a is marked with a circled '2a' and includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *p*. Scramble 2c is marked with a circled '2c' and includes dynamic markings of *p* and *pp dolce*. The score features complex rhythmic patterns and fingerings indicated by numbers 1-5.

Practice Scrambles 2a, 2b, and 2c as separate segments. Then practice Scrambles 2a and 2b as a unit and Scrambles 2a and 2c as another unit for secure memory.

- Use *Stop-Prepare* for Accurate Playing.

Stop-Prepare is a Suzuki technique used to prepare the mind and fingers or hands before playing an unusual fingering, a large leap, a hand-position change or any technical challenge. It is literally a physical stop to check to see that the hand or finger is placed over the correct key. The *Stop* provides time to think before playing and thus ensures accuracy.

The following example shows how to help a beginning student coordinate hands together playing by using *Stop-Prepare*.

Figure 21: Beyer *Etude in C major* (*Mastering the Piano*, Level 1, P. 4)