



Sunrise Music Piano Books – Reading & Playing Based Method

A Reading-and-Playing Based Piano Method, Levels 1–6

Curriculum Scope & Sequence

Pedagogical Framework for Series Development

How This Document Works

This scope-and-sequence document is the architectural backbone for the six-level method. It defines, level by level, what a student should be able to do, what reading and theory concepts are introduced, what technical skills are built, and what kind of repertoire belongs with each book.

Each level follows the same structure, so the books stay consistent for both teacher and student:

- Student Profile — who is ready for this level and what they're coming from
- Skill Goals — the handful of big-picture outcomes that define the level
- Technical Skills — physical/keyboard technique introduced or reinforced
- Reading & Theory — what the student must be able to read and understand on the page
- Rhythm Focus — rhythmic reading and counting skills specific to the level
- Repertoire Plan — how many pieces, what mix of original vs. arranged material, and what each piece is “for”
- Mastery Benchmark — a concrete, observable test for “ready to move on”

A note on the repertoire mix: every level blends original teaching pieces (composed to isolate one skill at a time) with arranged public-domain classical or folk material (to build stylistic range and a sense of real repertoire). The original/arranged ratio shifts across the series — weighted toward original, skill-isolating pieces early on, and shifting toward faithful arrangements of real repertoire by Level 6, since the goal of the method is to graduate students into standard repertoire, not keep them dependent on a method book.

Design principle carried through every level: students should be able to read most of what they play by interval, pattern, & note recognition, not by re-deriving every note just letter-by-letter. Landmark notes and key signatures are taught as anchors for this kind of fluent reading, not as an end in themselves. Goal is for students to read music in multiple ways.

Series Overview at a Glance:

This table is meant as a quick-reference map — useful when checking that a skill is introduced before it's required, or when a student transfers in mid-series and needs placement.

Level	Key Signatures	Core New Reading Skill	Core New Harmony/Rhythm
Level 1	C, G, F (5-finger)	Landmark notes; interval reading; hand positions	Steady beat; quarter/half/whole notes; dotted half notes
Level 2	C, G, F (full) D, B ^b , Am, Dm (5-finger)	BH grand staff, ledger lines	I & V chords; eighth notes
Level 3	C, G, F, D, B ^b , Am, Dm (full)	Transposing by interval logic	I-IV-V chords; dotted rhythms; syncopation, triplets
Level 4	A, E ^b , Em, Gm (full) E, A ^b (5 finger)	Pattern & form phrase reading	Broken chords; sixteenth notes
Level 5	E, A ^b , Bm, Cm (full) B, D ^b (5 finger)	Octave & leap reading; genre style reading & voicing	Secondary chords; swing and syncopated rhythms
Level 6	B, D ^b , F [#] , D ^b , C [#] , C ^b	Modulation; silent score reading, 7 modal scales	Borrowed chords; voicing; rubato, complex rhythms

Level 1: Pre-Reading to Early Staff Reading

Student Profile

Absolute beginner. No prior reading or keyboard experience assumed. Typically the student's first 3–9 months of lessons, though pacing is by mastery, not age or calendar time.

Skill Goals

- Establish correct hand shape, posture, and bench/arm position at the keyboard
- Identify keyboard topology by pattern (groups of 2 and 3 black keys) rather than by counting from a fixed reference
- Read music by directional/intervallic relationship before relying on letter-naming every note and drill note names on the grand staff plus finding it on the keyboard
- Internalize a steady, independent beat before introducing rhythmic complexity
- Play hands together in simple, non-overlapping rhythmic textures

Technical Skills

- Finger numbers (1–5) both hands; static 5-finger hand position in C, G, and F

- Rounded hand shape, relaxed wrist, no collapsed knuckles
- Simple legato in 5-finger patterns; basic staccato as a contrasting touch
- Crossing hands for low/high register exploration (ear-training, not notation-dependent)

Reading & Theory

- Pre-staff: high/low, same/different pitch direction by ear and by eye (line vs. space)
- Middle C position reading (hands on adjacent 5-finger spans, thumbs on/near middle C)
- Landmark note reading: Middle C, Bass C & F, Treble C & G, as fixed anchor points
- Reading by interval (2nd, 3rd) rather than letter-by-letter decoding
- Quarter note, half note, whole note, quarter rest, dotted half note recognition on the staff
- Time signatures: 4/4 and 3/4 introduced as counting frameworks, not abstract symbols

Rhythm Focus

- Steady beat keeping with body/clapping/drumming before transferring to the keyboard
- Quarter, half, dotted half, and whole note duration in simple counting-aloud context
- Introduce simple two-measure rhythmic dictation/echo exercises

Repertoire Plan

- 8–12 short pieces (4–8 measures), all in 5-finger positions (C, G, F major)
- Hands-together texture should be rhythmically simple: blocked or alternating, not independent contrapuntal lines
- Mix: roughly 60% original short teaching pieces (composed to isolate a single skill each — e.g., one piece purely for 2nd-reading, one purely for staccato), 40% simplified folk/traditional melodies (e.g., public-domain tunes in the style of 'Frère Jacques,' 'Jingle Bells') arranged into 5-finger hands-together settings
- Each piece should have a one-line 'skill focus' so the teacher can select pieces by need, not just sequence

Mastery Benchmark

Student can sight-read a new 4-measure piece in a known 5-finger position at a slow steady tempo, naming intervals (not just letters) as a primary reading strategy.

Level 2: Multi-Position Reading and Expanded Staff Fluency

Student Profile

Student reads confidently within a single 5-finger position and is ready to read across the full grand staff and shift hand position.

Skill Goals

- Move beyond fixed hand position: read intervallic shifts up to a 6th without relying on finger-number cues alone
- Achieve fluent grand-staff reading across both clefs without anchoring exclusively to landmark notes. BH playing Grand Staff with “vertical” reading, ledger lines introduced.

- Introduce basic harmonic awareness: I and V chords as accompaniment shapes
- Begin true hands-together independence (not just rhythmic unison or alternating hands)

Technical Skills

- Position shifts (lateral hand movement) within a phrase
- Basic finger substitution and simple pedal-free legato connection across a shift
- I and V root-position triads played as blocked chords in the left hand
- Dynamics: p, mp, mf, f with physical control (not just labeling)
- Eighth notes introduced technically (evenness, not speed)

Reading & Theory

- All notes within the grand staff, by letter recognition, not just finger-position default
- Intervals through a 6th, read both melodically and harmonically (two-note chords)
- Eighth notes and eighth rests in simple meter
- Time signatures: 2/4 and 6/8 added; continued reinforcement of 3/4 and 4/4
- Repeat signs, simple first/second endings, introduce staff ledger lines & reading them
- Sharps and flats as accidentals and also in key signatures

Rhythm Focus

- Eighth-note pairs and counting. Read: (1-and, 2-and) Written: (1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +)
- Syncopation introduced by listening/echo-clap, teach and write the count notated
- Simple two-against-one rhythmic independence between hands (e.g., quarter notes vs. two eighths)

Repertoire Plan

- 12–16 pieces, ranging 8–16 measures
- Mix: roughly 50% original pieces (each isolating one of: position shift, I-V accompaniment pattern, eighth-note evenness, hands independent rhythm), 50% arranged folk/traditional or Classical-style melodies (e.g., simplified arrangements in the style of early Clementi/Köhler teaching pieces, or public-domain folk tunes) set with I-V left-hand accompaniment
- Include at least 2 pieces designed purely as sight-reading drill material (not performance pieces) — student plays these once per lesson, cold, no practice after instruction

Mastery Benchmark

Student sight-reads a new 8-measure piece with a position shift and a simple I-V left-hand accompaniment, maintaining steady tempo without stopping to recalculate hand position.

Level 3: Ledger Lines, Functional Harmony, and Rhythmic Complexity

Student Profile

Student reads the full grand staff fluently and is ready for ledger-line extension reading, fuller harmonic vocabulary, and more demanding rhythms.

Skill Goals

- Extend reading range above/below the staff via ledger lines using interval logic, not memorized flashcard recall
- Build functional harmonic understanding: I, IV, V (and vi) as a working vocabulary, not just shapes to copy. Transposing by interval logic.
- Introduce true two-voice contrapuntal independence (different rhythms/articulations in each hand simultaneously)
- Read and perform dotted rhythms and syncopation accurately

Technical Skills

- I-IV-V-I progressions in root position and simple inversion in the left hand
- Basic pedaling: legato pedal on simple harmonic changes (down-up technique)
- Articulation contrast within a single phrase (legato right hand / staccato left hand, etc.)
- Wrist staccato and basic two-note slur shaping “down, up” motions of hands

Reading & Theory

- Ledger line notes (above/below/between each clef) by interval extrapolation from staff landmarks
- Key signatures: C, G, F, D, B^b, Am, Dm (up to two sharps/flats each direction)
- Dotted quarter + eighth rhythmic figures
- Syncopated rhythms notated and performed (not just echoed)
- Simple and compound meter 6/8 and 2/2 “cut time”, not yet for fluent performance
- Sixteenth notes introduced visually (recognition) ahead of Level 4 and Triplet rhythm

Rhythm Focus

- Dotted-rhythm counting drills, triplet counting and feel
- Hands-together rhythmic independence with differing note values (e.g., right hand eighths against left hand quarters)
- Subdivision practice for 6/8 meter and feeling pulse of “cut time” 2/2

Repertoire Plan

- 14–18 pieces, 12–24 measures
- Mix: roughly 50% original pieces (each targeting ledger-line range, a specific chord progression, syncopation, or contrapuntal independence), 50% arranged repertoire — simplified arrangements of early-intermediate public-domain composers (e.g., Burgmüller-style etudes, simplified Bach minuets, traditional folk/hymn tunes) reharmonized with I-IV-V vocabulary
- Include 2 'reading recital' pieces meant to be performable for family/peers, slightly easier than the technical ceiling of the level, to build confidence and stage experience

Mastery Benchmark

Student sight-reads a new piece using ledger lines and a I-IV-V left-hand pattern, correctly executing at least one dotted-rhythm figure and one syncopated figure without teacher demonstration first.

Level 4: Key Signature Fluency and Early Intermediate Texture

Student Profile

Student has a working harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary and is ready for more advancing key signatures, broken-chord textures, and finer expressive control.

Skill Goals

- Achieve fluent reading in keys up to 3 – 4 sharps/flats without note-by-note decoding
- Develop broken-chord (arpeggiated accompaniment) reading and playing fluency
- Build genuine phrase-level musical shaping: dynamics as expressive arc, not static labels. Pattern and form phrase reading.
- Introduce sixteenth notes at performance tempo and more refined pedaling

Technical Skills

- Broken-chord (Alberti bass and simple arpeggiated) left-hand patterns
- Pedaling for harmonic blending across moving bass lines (not just static chords)
- Crescendo/decrescendo executed as a controlled physical gesture across a phrase, not a sudden jump
- Basic ornamentation: simple grace notes introduced by ear before notation

Reading & Theory

- Key signatures: up to 4 sharps (A, E) and 4 flats (E^b, A^b) — both major and relative minor introduced conceptually
- Sixteenth-note groupings in simple meter
- Compound meter (6/8) fluency for performance, not just recognition
- Multi-measure phrase reading (reading ahead, not note-by-note lag)
- Basic form recognition: AB, ABA labeling within a piece as a reading/memory aid

Rhythm Focus

- Sixteenth-note subdivision at moderate tempo
- Mixed meter awareness (pieces that shift between simple meters across sections)
- Continued hands-independent rhythm at increasing complexity

Repertoire Plan

- 14–18 pieces, 16–32 measures
- Mix: roughly 45% original (targeting broken-chord textures, specific key signatures, or phrase-shaping as an explicit skill), 55% arranged — simplified-but-faithful arrangements of early intermediate standard repertoire (e.g., easier Clementi sonatinas, Burgmüller études, Bartók for children, traditional/hymn arrangements) chosen to introduce real stylistic variety
- Begin including brief composer/style notes with arranged pieces (1–2 sentences) so reading lessons double as light music history

Mastery Benchmark

Student sight-reads a new piece in a 1-sharp or 1-flat key with a broken-chord left hand, shaping at least one clear dynamic arc across a 4-measure phrase without prompting.

Level 5: Extended Harmony and Stylistic Range

Student Profile

Student is technically and rhythmically secure and ready to develop interpretive range, secondary harmonic color, and more demanding left-hand independence.

Skill Goals

- Expand harmonic vocabulary to include secondary chords (ii, vi, vii°) and seventh chords by ear and by reading. Genre style reading and voicing.
- Develop stylistic versatility: Baroque articulation, Classical phrasing, Romantic rubato/pedaling, and basic jazz/pop voicing as distinct reading-and-playing contexts
- Build octave-reading fluency and confident leaps beyond stepwise/small-interval motion
- Strengthen sight-reading stamina across longer, more textually complex pieces

Technical Skills

- Octave passages and leap accuracy (reading the leap as a recognized shape, not recalculating each note)
- Style-specific touch: detached/articulate Baroque touch vs. sustained Romantic legato vs. syncopated pop/jazz comping
- More advanced pedaling: half-pedaling and syncopated pedal technique
- Ornamentation reading and playing skill: trills, turns, grace note clusters, glissandos, etc.

Reading & Theory

- Key signatures: up to 4–5 sharps (E, B) and 4–5 flats (A^b, D^b) — both major and relative minor introduced conceptually
- Secondary chord symbols (ii, vi) in lead-sheet or figured contexts as well as full notation
- Syncopated/swung rhythmic notation (dotted-eighth/sixteenth swing feel, common in light jazz/pop arrangements)
- More complex meters: asymmetrical, alternating meters within a piece
- Multi-line texture reading: melody + harmonic accompaniment + occasional inner voice

Rhythm Focus

- Swing/shuffle feel and Syncopated feel notated and performed distinctly from straight subdivision rhythm
- Polyhythmic awareness (introductory level — e.g., simple cross-rhythm listening before notated performance)
- Rubato as a controlled, intentional choice rather than rhythmic imprecision

Repertoire Plan

- 12–16 pieces, 16–40 measures, intentionally stylistically diverse within the level (not all one genre)
- Mix: roughly 40% original (each targeting a specific stylistic touch, secondary harmony, or octave/leap reading), 60% arranged — drawing from a deliberate cross-section: one Baroque-style piece, one Classical-style piece, one Romantic-style piece, one folk/traditional, one light jazz/pop-style piece per few pieces, so reading skill transfers across genre rather than locking into one idiom
- Introduce 1–2 ensemble/duet pieces (teacher-student or student-student) to build listening-while-reading-playing skills

Mastery Benchmark

Student sight-reads a new piece containing at least one octave leap and one secondary chord, correctly distinguishing straight vs. swung rhythmic notation when present, and can describe the stylistic character of the piece after a first read-through.

Level 6: Intermediate-to-Early-Advanced Reading Fluency

Student Profile

Student is preparing for advanced study, performance contexts, or simply full musical independence — capping the method with genuine fluency rather than 'graduation' from beginner material.

Skill Goals

- Achieve fluent first-read performance of intermediate-level repertoire at a controlled tempo
- Develop modulation awareness: recognizing and reading through a key change within a piece. Introduce the 7 modal scales and characteristics of each for use in music.
- Build independence from the teacher as primary musical authority — student begins making interpretive decisions and can justify them
- Consolidate all prior technical, harmonic, and rhythmic vocabulary into fluent, musical performance

Technical Skills

- Full pedaling vocabulary used expressively and selectively (not by default)
- Voicing control in chordal textures (bringing out melody within a thicker texture)
- Extended technique as needed by repertoire choice: faster passagework, larger leaps, more demanding hand-independence. Developing rubato playing that fits the piece.
- Self-directed practice strategy: sight-reading a piece silently (score study) before playing

Reading & Theory

- Modulation recognition: identifying a key change by ear and by accidental pattern before formal theory naming. Recognizing and using borrowed chords in the song.
- Key signatures across the full key range (up to 6–7 sharps/flats) of Circle of Fifths/Keys
- Complex rhythmic notation: including triplets, mixed meter, more advanced syncopation

- Score reading at a slight remove from the keyboard (silent reading/audiation) as an explicit skill, not just a byproduct
- Multi-voice textures: clear melody/accompaniment/inner-voice differentiation in real time

Rhythm Focus

- Triplet subdivision - simple or compound context. Mastering 3 against 2 between hands.
- Rhythmic flexibility within a steady structural pulse (idiomatic rubato, not rhythmic looseness). Steady rhythm, beat, pulse in playing is essential to good musicianship.
- Cross-rhythms performed (not just recognized) at an introductory level

Repertoire Plan

- 10–14 pieces, genuinely varied in length and difficulty (some shorter/character pieces, 1–2 longer multi-section works as capstone pieces)
- Mix: roughly 30% original (each targeting modulation reading, voicing/melody-in-texture, or triplet fluency), 70% arranged/curated — this level should lean toward introducing students to real, faithful (lightly simplified at most) intermediate repertoire across eras, since the goal is transition to standard repertoire study, not continued method dependency
- Each piece includes a short 'what to listen for' note and a specific sight-reading challenge called out explicitly, so the book doubles as a sight-reading curriculum, not just a performance anthology
- Close the book with 1–2 'capstone' pieces longer and more demanding than anything prior, explicitly framed as a bridge to standard intermediate repertoire study

Mastery Benchmark

Student can sight-read a new intermediate-level piece (unfamiliar, 16–32 measures) at a slow-but-steady tempo with no stops, correctly handling at least one modulation or significant key-signature change, and can verbally describe their interpretive choices afterward.

Add Extras – for Sunrise Music Piano Books, Levels 1 – 6:

- Theory Book appropriate for level
- Improv: use SM Book's Accompaniment Section
- Composing: use theory skills & staff paper &
- Tech Tools: Dorico for iPad or Noteflight
- Music Creation: Garage Band or similar BandLab
- Music Apps: FlashnoteDerby, RhythmCat, Tenuto
- Music Sites: Piano Maestro, Piano Marvel
- Attend Music: concerts, webinars, conferences