

# Douglas Niedt's GUITAR TECHNIQUE TIP OF THE MONTH

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## Yes, it's "Doug's Dirty Little Secrets"



(Doug subtitled his Tech Tip as "Doug's Dirty Little Secrets" after reading someone's posted message on a guitar web forum. The writer asserted that professional virtuoso guitarists all had secrets they kept to themselves and wouldn't tell anyone else, so no one would play as well as them!)



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# Sight-reading

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*By Douglas Niedt*

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There is an unfortunate joke out there that goes like this:

Question: "How do you get a guitarist to be quiet?"

Answer: "Put a piece of sheet music in front of him."

Yes, it's funny. Yes, it hurts. And it's unfortunate because it's true much of the time. Many guitarists are poor sight-readers. In a musical world where the guitar is still not always respected as a "legitimate" instrument, I'm sometimes embarrassed when colleagues who play other instruments tell me they tried to play chamber music with this or that guitarist (sometimes well-known guitarists!) but found it frustrating or impossible because the guitarist couldn't read well enough.

Or, closer to home, I've had students at the Conservatory of Music, University of Missouri, who simply couldn't keep up with the demands of our guitar program, because it took them half of the semester to learn the notes and rhythms of their pieces. This left little time to really master the details and interpretation of the pieces.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF SIGHT-READING

Most musicians recognize the obvious importance of sight-reading in areas of the profession such as accompanying, teaching, ensemble playing, and radio, television, and film studio work. But what about the amateur guitarist, or the guitarist who aspires to be a solo performer? Of what value is sight-reading to them?

## Faster and More Efficient Mastery of Pieces

The ability to sight-read gives a guitarist fluency. It makes the journey of learning a new piece so much easier and efficient. It shouldn't be a battle to learn the notes and rhythms of a new piece of music!

It is essential that a guitarist be able to read well enough to begin playing a piece from ANY point. In every new piece there is always a chord change, a rhythm, a scale, an effect, a new technique, a difficult measure or part of a measure that requires specialized repetitious practice.

For example, if the difficulty is changing from chord "x" to chord "y" in the middle of the piece, the student who can't read well often has to back up several measures to figure out where he is. If wants to practice the chord change twenty times, imagine the amount of time he wastes having to also play the several measures leading up to the change (which he may play perfectly well). If his reading skills were up to par, he would be able to start immediately at the difficult spot, work the chord change, and not waste time practicing measures he already knows. In a piece that has many such spots to practice (and that would be the norm), *the poor reader wastes an unbelievable amount of time practicing material that he can already play.*

Let's look at the following example from an *Andante* by Fernando Sor:

*Andante* (Fernando Sor) measures 25-29

— Part that needs practice —

If the part that needs practice is measure twenty-eight into measure twenty-nine, then the obvious segment to practice is:



But instead, the unskilled reader will have difficulty figuring out where that spot is and unfortunately, will start at the beginning of the line!

Imagine a student driver trying to learn to parallel park a car. He finds a place on a street with an empty parking place. All he really needs to do is practice pulling into the space over and over until he gets the hang of it. But instead, the automotive version of a bad music sight-reader decides to drive around the block after each attempt to pull into the parking space. Or at the extreme, the student driver decides to drive home, park the car in the garage, and then goes out to find the same parking space and practice pulling into it again. Over and over! The poor music reader is doing the same thing when he has to back up several measures or more every time to practice his chord change. Obviously, that's a very bad waste of time, expense, and energy.

## **Good Reading Skill Results in Better Guitar Lessons**

In a lesson or master class, if your teacher says, "Let's start here," you need to be able to read well enough to begin reading from "here" and know exactly where "here" is. Having to back up to the beginning of a section, line, page, etc. wastes a lot of time, not to mention your money. Try this: take out a piece of music you are learning. Close your eyes and randomly point to a spot on the page. Keep your finger on the music, open your eyes, and begin playing from the spot your finger is pointing at. If you can't play immediately from that point, you have weak reading skills.

It's hard to over emphasize how much more efficiently you will practice and how much more you will accomplish in your lessons or a master class if your sight-reading is really good.

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## **Good Sight-reading Ability Provides Access to More Music**

On another level, good sight-reading skills provide access and familiarity to a wide variety of literature that we otherwise might not get to know. Yes, we can listen to recordings to hear unfamiliar literature, but not all the good or interesting literature is recorded. There are hundreds of brilliant compositions waiting to be discovered. In fact, for the guitarist aspiring to be a concert performer, it is almost imperative that he find music that has not been recorded to help establish his own artistic profile and personality. The good sight-reader has an open door to a broad acquaintance with a wide range of music. Those guitarists interested in transcribing music will find the ability to sight-read a wonderful gift. It will save time in finding suitable works to transcribe and make the process of transcription quicker, more accurate, more efficient, and more enjoyable. It will also open up more creative possibilities and resolutions to technical problems in the transcription process.

## **Good Sight-reading Skill Will Enable You to Discover the Meaning of a Piece Within a Greater Context**

Finally, on yet another level, extensive sight-reading will introduce many new technical, stylistic, and interpretive experiences that will contribute directly to the artistic grasp of the pieces selected for more formal study. Thanks to this wealth of experience, one may study a particular fugue or sonata not in isolation, but in relation to the whole literature of fugues or sonatas.

Vladimir Horowitz, perhaps the greatest pianist of the twentieth century, once said in an interview:

"This year I play two pieces of Faure. First of all, *I studied the whole composer. I play everything he wrote*. Ensemble music, everything, I play myself--not listen to recordings. Records are not the truth. They are like post cards of a beautiful landscape. You bring the post cards home so when you look at them you will remember how beautiful is the truth. So I play. I'm a very good sight-reader. The texture of the music talks to me, the style. I feel the music, the spiritual content of his compositions."

Yes, feeling the style of the music and the spiritual content can only be experienced by playing it, not by listening to records. Like Horowitz, I believe the concert guitarist cannot truly feel and understand the style and content of say, Bach's *Lute Suite No. 4* without also studying, at the very least, the other three *Lute Suites* and their alternate versions for unaccompanied violin and cello.

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## What About Great Musicians Who Can't Read Music?

Those of you who are reading this article who can also play styles of music other than classical, may say, "Wait a minute. Some of the greatest jazz, pop or rock musicians can't even read music, let alone sight-read. But they're great artists. Maybe learning to sight-read isn't really that important."

My answer is that those artists have a fantastic natural ability to play by ear. We also have to acknowledge that those styles of music are very different from classical, and are learned and studied differently too. But my bottom line answer is why not be able to play by ear AND be able to read well? There are good sight-readers who can't play by ear. That's no good either. I have also heard it said that reading music stifles the creative ability or hinders learning to play by ear. That is absolutely untrue. It seems to me the ideal goal is to develop a great ear AND good sight-reading ability. Have the best of both worlds.

So what is the best way to learn or improve your sight-reading? That's easy: READ, READ, READ. The prescription for learning to sight-read is to sight-read. One need not practice reading for hours every day. Just ten minutes daily every day will result in tremendous improvement in one month.

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## HOW TO DO IT

### You Have To Know Your Notes

To start, you should already know the notes on all six strings from the first through the twelfth fret. Although you could learn the notes as you work on your sight-reading, it's best if you already know them.

1. First, work vertically, naming the notes on each string from open to the 12th fret and then backwards. Here is the fourth string:

## Notes on the Fourth String

Fret Number:

Say Name of Note Out Loud:

2. On each string, one string at a time, pick frets at random and name the notes. For example, on the fourth string: Second fret=E. Fifth fret=G. Ninth fret=B. Fourth fret=F#.
3. Then, name a note at random (A, B, C, D, E, F, G) and find the fret where it's located. For example, again on the fourth string: A=seventh fret. F=third fret. C=tenth fret. B=ninth fret.
4. Next, work horizontally: pick a fret at random and name the notes at that fret from the 6th string to the 1st string and back to the 6th. Concentrate particularly on the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th, and 10th frets. For instance, the next example shows the notes across the seventh fret:

Notes at the Seventh Fret:

5. Find all the octaves and unisons. Name a note at random and find that note on every string within the first 12 frets. For example, here are all the Bs:

## The B's on All Six Strings

Musical notation for 'The B's on All Six Strings' on a treble clef staff. The notes are: 7th Fret (6), 2nd Fret (5), 9th Fret (4), 4th Fret (3), Open (2), 12th Fret (2), and 7th Fret (1). The notes are written as quarter notes on a single line.

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6. It's also valuable to write out the notes on manuscript paper. When you do the exercises in the previous paragraphs, write out the notes! You need to make the connection between fretboard and paper. Knowing that the fourth string at the seventh fret is an "A" won't improve your music reading if you don't know where that "A" is on the staff.

To improve your knowledge of the fretboard, also check out the [Guitar Fretboard Trainer](#) and [Note Trainer](#) here on my website under [Fun Stuff](#).

After you are secure in your knowledge of the fretboard and where the notes are on the staff, begin by sight-reading fairly elementary single-line melodies. The goal is to be able to read any single-line melody in any position of the guitar. A position is a four fret span. The number of the position is determined by the fret number that the left-hand first finger plays:

## Notes in 1st Position

Musical notation for 'Notes in 1st Position' on a treble clef staff. The notes are: 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4. The notes are written as quarter notes on a single line. The first fret is indicated by an upward arrow and the label 'First Fret' below the staff. The notes are grouped into three sets of four frets each, with the first fret of each set indicated by a circled number (6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4).

## Notes In 2nd Position

The image displays two musical staves in G-clef (treble clef) with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff shows notes in the 6th, 5th, and 4th positions. The 6th position notes are F# (finger 1), G (finger 2), A (finger 3), and B (finger 4). The 5th position notes are C (finger 1), D (finger 2), E (finger 3), and F# (finger 4). The 4th position notes are G (finger 1), A (finger 2), B (finger 3), and C (finger 4). The second staff shows notes in the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st positions. The 3rd position notes are D (finger 1), E (finger 2), F# (finger 3), and G (finger 4). The 2nd position notes are A (finger 1), B (finger 2), C (finger 3), and D (finger 4). The 1st position notes are E (finger 1), F# (finger 2), G (finger 3), and A (finger 4). Arrows labeled "Second Fret" point to the second line of the staff in each section, indicating the fret position for the first note of each sequence.

### Notes In 5th Position

The image displays two musical staves illustrating notes in the 5th position. The top staff shows three notes: 6 (circled), 5 (circled), and 4 (circled). The bottom staff shows three notes: 3 (circled), 2 (circled), and 1 (circled). Each note is accompanied by a circled number and a 'Fifth Fret' label with an arrow pointing to the 5th fret. The notes are written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Sight-reading is best done in positions, which minimizes shifting and having to look at the left hand. We want to keep our eyes on the music as much as possible.

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## Recommended Book and Music to Practice Sight-reading.

### Also, What Books NOT To Use

There are many sight-reading books out there. But most of them have a serious flaw. The exercises in the books are written by the author of the book. The problem is that you have no idea what the melody you are playing is supposed to sound like. And here you are, trying to read it in the middle and upper positions of the fretboard, an unfamiliar area compared to the first or second position. You could be playing it entirely wrong or be making some serious errors and not realize it, because you are unfamiliar with this unknown (and often unmusical) tune the writer/composer of the book has written.

Instead, I highly recommend a book titled *Mel Bay's Deluxe Guitar Position Studies* by Roger Filiberto, published by Mel Bay Publications. This book uses many common, well-known melodies like *Home on the Range*, *America*, *Auld Lang Syne*, *Down in the Valley*, etc. Therefore, if the student is sight-reading *Home on the Range* in the uncharted territory of ninth position, if he messes up, he will realize it. There is some danger that students who play well by

ear will play songs like this without really reading the music. But if they name the notes out loud as they play, the note-reading aspect will be preserved. The book goes through the entire fretboard beginning with second position and working up through ninth position. The pieces selected present a good mix of rhythmic challenges as well. The only minus to the book is that possibly too much left-hand fingering is given, resulting in some students sight-reading fingerings instead of notes.

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Another path to take is to sight-read beginning method books for single-voice instruments such as violin, clarinet, etc. Beginning violin methods are easily found in music libraries and some public libraries. They can also be purchased. But remember, we're sight-reading. Once you have read through a book once or twice, you won't use it again. Buying music to sight-read could get expensive. Pop "fake books" are okay, but the songs can sometimes be too rhythmically complex for the beginning sight-reader.

When opening up a beginning violin book or the Filiberto book, you will come across an exercise like this:

*Dixie*

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Dixie". The score is written in a single system with five staves, all using a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 2/4. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 2/4 time signature. The music consists of five staves of notation. The second staff includes a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fifth staff.

Most intermediate guitarists could certainly read this in first and second position. But could you read it in fifth position? Or seventh position?

## Sight-reading Step By Step

Here is the procedure to follow to sight-read a single-line melody such as *Dixie*:

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1. The first thing to do is decide in what position you are going to play the melody. The advantage with the Filiberto book is that the exercises are presented in a graduated manner beginning with second-position melodies and progressing from there. Most of the exercises fall neatly into natural guitar positions, and when they don't, that fact is explained and solutions suggested. But if you aren't using that book, start with one of the "good" guitar positions--2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, or 9th. You will find that *Dixie* falls very well in fifth position or seventh position. The other positions require frequent shifts out of position to play certain notes which makes sight-reading more difficult.

2. Look at the time signature. The meter of the piece is so important that if one must choose between perfection of notes and perfection of rhythm, there can be no doubt that the latter should receive preference. Figure out what beat or count the song begins on. Scan through the music to find any tricky rhythms and figure out how to count them (how they "go") before you begin playing. In *Dixie*, you would possibly want to examine the dotted rhythms and especially measure eight with the triplet rhythm. Again, count it or tap it out so you know how it goes.

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### Dixie

Time signature is 2/4, but song begins with pickup measure. Begin playing on "and" of second beat

1e & a 2e & a

1 & 2 &

3

Be certain to play what the eyes see. Many students tend to sight-read music they have heard according to what they assume the sound should be. One must read exactly what is on the page:

## *Dixie*, measure eight

Play the rhythm  
that is written:

1 & 2 &

NOT This:



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3. Look at the key signature. On the fretboard, find all the sharp or flat notes in the key signature that fall in the position in which you are playing. In *Dixie*, Bb is in the key signature. Therefore, find all the Bb's in the song in the position you have chosen. Here, there is only one, and it appears in measure one:



4. Find the lowest note of the piece and the highest note.

*Dixie*

Lowest note of the piece

Highest note of the piece

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5. Find the note range. The range is the lowest note, the highest note, and the notes in between. *These are the only notes you need to focus on.* Play the notes in the range ascending and descending--it may or may not sound like a scale since the lowest note of the range might not begin on the tonic or root tone of the key. This will give you the feel for the notes you will be playing. For *Dixie*, in fifth position, you aren't playing any notes on the sixth string or the Bb and C on the first string, so don't worry about them



*Dixie* Jumps in Fifth Position

The musical score consists of five staves of music in 2/4 time, written in a single treble clef. The first staff contains a continuous eighth-note pattern. The second staff features a dotted quarter note followed by eighth notes, with a circled '3' and a 'Jump' annotation. The third staff continues the eighth-note pattern with a circled '2' and a 'Jump' annotation. The fourth staff includes a circled '4' and a 'Jump' annotation. The fifth staff concludes with a circled '1' and a 'Jump' annotation. Fingerings are indicated by circled numbers 1 through 4. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' and a slur in the second staff.

### *Dixie* Jumps in Seventh Position

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Dixie Jumps in Seventh Position". It consists of five staves of music, each beginning with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a time signature of 2/4. The music is written for a single melodic line. The first staff contains a continuous sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff includes a triplet of eighth notes and a "Jump" annotation with a bracket. The third staff features a "Jump" annotation and a circled number 2. The fourth staff has two "Jump" annotations and circled numbers 3 and 4. The fifth staff contains two "Jump" annotations and circled numbers 3, 4, and 2. The piece concludes with a final note and a fermata.

8. Set the tempo (a metronome is a good idea) to a speed you can handle comfortably without being on the edge of your seat. You must always be looking ahead. It is much better to play at a very slow tempo and maintain the thread than to set too fast a tempo and have to stop and start in a confused manner.

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## The Goal

Your goal is to read both the notes and rhythms accurately without a break in the rhythmic flow. Don't go back to correct a wrong note or other mistake until you have gotten through the entire piece. The thread must not be broken even if it becomes snarled here and there. The forward motion of thought, ears, eyes, and fingers must continue uninterrupted.

Keep in mind that sight-reading is not supposed or expected to offer a finished performance. Even in the advanced stages of reading, don't expect a perfect, finished performance. The objective of the sight-reader should be to give a general but accurate idea of the piece that is being read. While attention to musical details is desirable, such details shouldn't be paid for by the sacrifice of general outline. A goal of 90-95% accuracy in notes and rhythms is good. We're not expecting a concert-ready performance!

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## The Eyes Have It!

Reading notes rapidly presents many of the same problems as reading words rapidly. Part of the reason "why Johnny can't read" is his inability or lack of training to perceive combinations of letters as syllables, combinations of syllables as words, and combinations of words as whole phrases. Does he read *c-o-m-b-i-n-a-t-i-o-n-s*, or *com-bi-na-tions*, or *combinations*? Similarly, one can be hindered in music reading by an inability to perceive combinations of notes as melodic lines or chords, and combinations of chords as familiar progressions.

The sight-reader must take in as much of the notation as possible at a glance and must look ahead deliberately in the score. He can appreciate the problem of deliberately looking ahead if he has someone else cover each measure while it is being played. The sight-reader must never think about what he is doing! He must always think about what he is *going* to do. To look ahead, the sight-reader will be doing two things at once: 1. recording mentally what is coming and 2. playing from memory what was previously mentally recorded. Did you get that? *One does not play the notes at the same moment that the eyes see them!*

In a large sense, proficient sight-reading is playing from memory. While the fingers play what has already been seen, the eyes are looking at what must be played next. At slow tempi the eyes need be only a little in advance of the fingers. Faster speeds naturally require that the eyes be looking farther ahead of the fingers. The eyes must maintain enough of a lead to insure that the fingers will be directed to the correct notes in the correct rhythms without haste or anxiety. Reading in this manner also means one cannot afford to look at the fretboard. The reader loses not only time but also his place in the score when he has to keep looking at the fretboard to locate the notes.

I mentioned having someone cover each measure as it is being played to force the reader to look ahead. Another way to encourage the reader to look ahead in the music is to set a metronome to the proper tempo and stick with it no matter what. This may induce a degree of "faking." But a little faking, if it is the intelligent kind that depends on perceiving harmonic outlines and omitting only unessential tones, is an important part of sight-reading.

## Sight-reading In Positions

So let's return to our example of *Dixie*. Follow the steps above and try sight-reading it in fifth and then seventh position (I have provided minimal fingering to make you read the notes, not the fingerings):

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*Dixie*, in Fifth Position

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Dixie" in fifth position. It consists of five staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 2/4. The score includes minimal fingering indicated by circled numbers (1-5) placed below the notes. The first staff shows the beginning of the piece with a 3-measure rest, followed by notes with fingerings 3, 4, 5, 3, 4, 3. The second staff continues with fingerings 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5, 3. The third staff has fingerings 2, 1, 3, 2, 2, 4, 3. The fourth staff has fingerings 2, 3, 2, 3, 4, 4. The fifth staff has fingerings 5, 4, 3, 4, 1, 2. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a bracket and the number 3 in the second staff.

### *Dixie*, in Seventh Position

The image displays five staves of musical notation for the piece 'Dixie' in seventh position. The notation is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Circled numbers (1-5) indicate specific fingering for the notes. Some notes have a '4' above them, likely indicating a bowing technique. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' and a bracket. The score is presented on a light gray background.

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The general plan of attack is to continue working on sight-reading melodies of *gradually* increasing difficulty. Again, the Filiberto book does that very well. If you are working with pieces from other books, read them in random positions. Name a number between two and nine inclusive. Six. Play the piece in sixth position. Name another number. Two. Play it in second position. Try a few more positions and then go on to another piece and play it in random positions. Many times, as with *Dixie* in fifth and seventh position, the entire piece will fall



### *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling* in Eighth Position

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the piece "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" in eighth position. Each staff includes fret numbers (circled) and arrows pointing to notes that fall outside the eighth position, labeled "Out of position".

**Staff 1:** Notes are marked with fret numbers 5, 6, 5, 6, 5, 6. Four notes are labeled "Out of position": the 4th fret note, the 3rd fret note, the 1st fret note, and the 4th fret note.

**Staff 2:** Notes are marked with fret numbers 4, 5, 4. Two notes are labeled "Out of position": the 4th fret note and the 2nd fret note.

**Staff 3:** Notes are marked with fret numbers 4, 5, 6, 5, 6, 5, 6. Four notes are labeled "Out of position": the 1st fret note, the 4th fret note, the 5th fret note, and the 1st fret note.

Notice, as in the example of *America* in fifth position, that notes that fall outside of the position in which you are playing can often be played in two or more locations. It is up to you to decide which location you prefer.

Although playing *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling* in eighth position will be beneficial to one's feel and knowledge of the fretboard, it would be much easier to sight-read in seventh position, where all the notes fall perfectly into place:

### *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling* in Seventh Position

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the piece "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" in seventh position. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, with fingerings 5, 6, 5, 6, 5, and 4 indicated below the notes. The second staff contains measures 5 through 8, with fingerings 4, 5, 4, and 3 indicated below the notes. The third staff contains measures 9 through 12, with fingerings 4, 5, 4, 6, 5, and 6 indicated below the notes. Slurs are used to group notes across measures, and some notes are marked with a '4' above them, likely indicating a fourth finger or a specific fingering technique.

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Therefore, if a particular position is obviously unsuitable for sight-reading a particular piece, simply try another position close by. Usually, a change of position one fret up or down will solve the problem.

Also, in order to maintain the feel of and stay within the bounds of the position we have chosen, we use the same finger for the same fret every time, even if it results in a little choppiness. In measures five, six, and seven of *Dixie* in seventh position, the left-hand fourth finger jumps from string to string. This produces a less legato sound, but maintains a solid feel for seventh position for the hand and fingers (the fourth finger could smooth things out a bit by barring some of the notes instead of lifting from string to string):

*Dixie*, in Seventh Position

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the piece "Dixie" in Seventh Position. The first staff contains the first five measures of the melody, with fingerings circled below the notes: 4, 5, 4, 3, 4. The second staff contains the next five measures, with a bracket labeled "Choppy Area" spanning the first three measures. Fingerings for the second staff are circled below the notes: 2, 4, 3, 4, 4, 3, 4, 1, 4, 1, 2, 4, 3, 4. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a bracket and the number 3 in the final measure of the second staff.

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## Practice Sight-reading Every Day

Remember, practice sight-reading every single day for maximum effectiveness. You can't master sight-reading by suddenly cramming your study into several six-hour marathon sessions. Many music majors in university music programs have learned this the hard way when, trying to pass the sight-reading portion of their piano proficiency exams, failed miserably because they waited until the last minute to practice their sight-reading.

Don't attempt to read anything more difficult than a single-line melody until you have mastered that level. Always choose something you can read reasonably well the first try. This is sight-reading--you do not *practice* the piece. Play it one to three times (or two or three times in two or three different positions) and go on to the next piece. If you run across a rhythmic pattern that confuses you, or a note whose location you are unsure of, *AFTER* sight-reading the piece, go ahead and briefly review those spots to clarify the rhythm or note in your mind. Then, when you run across it again in other pieces, you will sail right through it.

It's a great idea to sight-read for your teacher. He can monitor your progress, clarify and correct any rhythmic problems, and direct your study in an efficient manner.

If you think you're a hot-shot sight-reader already, let me tell you about the great pianist/composer Franz Liszt.

Beyond any doubt, Franz Liszt was the greatest sight-reader who ever lived and all musicians of the nineteenth century testified to his miraculous powers. An American composer named Otis B. Boise visited him at Weimar in 1876 bearing a *full orchestral score*. Liszt asked him to play it, and Boise tells the following story:

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"There has never been an occasion in my career when my pianistic caliber seemed to me so small, as when I for the moment contemplated exhibiting it for the first time to that great master; and I also felt that my innocent composition would suffer in his esteem through the shortcomings of my piano playing. He evidently noticed my worry and relieved me at once by saying, 'I think after all I should obtain a better idea of details if I play it myself.'

Accordingly, he seated himself, glanced at the instrumental scheme, and began the most astoundingly coherent rendering of an orchestral score that I had heard and such as I never since heard from another musician.

Those who have attempted such tasks know that the ten fingers being inadequate to the performance of all the details, it is necessary to cull such essentials from the mass of voices as well as clear the line of development.

Liszt did this simultaneously. No features of the workmanship, contrapuntal or instrumental, escaped his notice, and *he made running comments without interrupting his progress.*"

Now, go get started on *Dixie*. After all, the rest of us mere mortals have to start somewhere.

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