

General Memorization Tips for All Students

Memorization should not happen as an accident. Too often we memorize a piece simply by having played it over and over again. This “muscle memory” approach does not encourage thoughtful, musical playing, and memorizing this way is not as dependable when we have to perform from memory (as we often do).

Making Sense of it all:

- You must know where all the main sections begin and end.
- Does the piece have a “form”? Sonata form? ABA form?
- You must know all the main “themes” or “melodies” of the piece.
- Look for patterns! Does anything repeat? If so, does anything change the second time?
- Analyze the music as much as you know how to: analyze the intervals (2 nd, 3 rd, etc.), look for “chord progressions”.

What to memorize first:

- You must have a strategy. Decide what order you will memorize things in.
- Memorize the most important parts first. Memorize the melodies.
- You may want to memorize Hands Separate (be able to play one hand at a time from memory).
- Memorize one section at a time. Never try to memorize too much at once (just like you shouldn’t practice too much at once).

How to “Practice” memorizing:

- Place your music beside you as you try to play it from memory. If you place your music in front of you, you will probably end up looking at it the whole time. If you try closing your book, you may have to stop and get it back out too often. Putting it beside you allows you to look when you need to.
- Practice starting from the beginning of any section from memory. Once you can do this, practice starting from the middle of any section, then any measure, and so on until you can start anywhere in the music from memory.
- You don’t always have to play with the metronome and “in tempo” when practicing memorizing a piece. You are trying to get to know the music so sometimes this requires us to play it in a way that is different than how we might perform it. Take your time and get to know all the notes very well.
- Practice performing from memory. Play for family members, friends, pets, imaginary friends – anything that will help you get used to playing straight through the piece without stopping.