

The Rostron Piano Studio

Memorization Guidelines for Pianists:

Securing the Intellectual, Aural, Visual & Tactile Aspects of Performing

1. Discover the harmonic and melodic structure - phrases, sections, modulations, etc. - for **intellectual** memory.
2. Begin memorizing by working one phrase at a time—with the music, without the music, back and forth—until you start to “get it”.
3. **Memorize the sound** of the music. Think through the piece; however, have the score handy so that you can look up any memory slips.
4. **Memorize the sight** of both the page and your hands on the keys.
5. **Memorize the feel** of the keys in patterns under your fingers, eyes closed or staring off, away from the score or your hands.
6. When playing from memory, if you become stuck, immediately look up the passage in the score, but look back down or away from the score to play.
7. Once you’re able to get through the piece without the score, decide on and number various “starting places.” Then practice beginning at these starting places, at random, from memory.
8. When playing through from memory keep your focus on what the music is supposed to sound like, rather than any accidental miss-played notes.
9. On passages with the melody in one hand, to learn the accompanying-hand part thoroughly, play both hands from memory, but “shadow” the melody hand (play very lightly, barely pressing down the keys) and listen very carefully to the accompanying part.
10. In order to make sure you know *every* note, without using “muscle memory,” play through super slowly, one note at a time (1 second on each note or chord) from memory. For young students, instead of 1 second on each note, play at half-tempo.
11. We frequently are looking at one hand at a time, and this becomes a part of our memory; however, *one time only*, play while looking at the hand you’re not accustomed to watching, so that if that happens accidentally in a performance, it won’t be as distracting or uncomfortable.
12. After the music is memorized, be sure to sometimes go back and play with the music, looking for things in the score you may have missed.
13. If a memory slip occurs in a performance, always jump forward, rather than back. This is when those “starting places” are useful. This must be practiced, so be sure to do this during run-throughs as recital time nears.
14. If you have a memory slip during the last run-through before the performance, be sure to fix it—look it up and play the passage again *from memory*—or it could likely happen again on stage!
15. Memorizing the music is one thing; *performing* from memory requires another skill - *being present*. Practice *being present* throughout your day, in many situations. Also, there’s great power in your imagination and your intent - *imagine* being totally focused, confident, and enjoying performing!