

THE APPLICATION OF SYNCOPATED RHYTHMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SIGHT-READING SKILLS FOR GROUP PIANO STUDENTS

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MTNA GP3 FORUM, AUGUST 7-8, 2026

Objectives:

- Explore different strategies that allow students to foster feelings of competence, autonomy, and belonging, suggested as the most basic psychological needs of adolescence (La Guardia & Ryan, 2002).
 - Offer practical rhythm activities and drills that inspire creativity, expression, and active musical engagement.
- A. Music is organized within a regular metrical pattern of weak and strong beats. Syncopation happens when accents fall on weaker beats instead of aligning with the strong beats of the meter, usually by starting on a weak beat and sustaining through the downbeat without rearticulation.
- Syncopated rhythms were rated as more enjoyable and happier than unsyncopated rhythms (Keller & Schubert, 2011.)
 - Syncopation promotes movement, social connection, creativity, and collective expression across cultures.
- B. Research Questions:
- i. How do the systematic introduction and regular practice of syncopated rhythms change sight-reading abilities among college-level group piano students?
 - ii. How does the consistent practice of syncopated rhythms change music students' capacity to sustain a consistent pulse?
 - iii. Do students consider the exposure to syncopated rhythms a valuable element in their career?
- C. Learning Theories and Rhythm Instruction
- Jerome Bruner: Learning progresses from action to visual representation to symbols.
 - Frances Clark: Emphasized "sound before sight" and "known to unknown."
 - Both support teaching rhythm through movement, clapping, and listening before introducing notation.

D. Method

- i. Participants: ($N=72$) (Group Piano II & IV) – Control Group ($N=32$); Experimental Group ($N=40$)
- ii. Treatment: 4-week period. 10-minute syncopated rhythm lesson each class (80 minutes total)
- iii. Activities: Rhythm drills, Sight-reading short pieces, rhythmic notation.
- iv. Materials: Original pedagogical compositions by main researcher. Works by Robert D. Vandall, Wynn-Anne Rossi, Dennis Alexander.
- v. Data Collection through pretest and posttest, pre and post-study survey to learn about students' perspectives, and journal with notes from observations after each meeting.

E. Lesson Sequence/Sample Lesson

- Teacher claps the rhythm and student notate. Then student clap and count aloud the rhythm:



- a. Clap and count aloud the rhythm in this excerpt. Identify the harmonic foundation. Practice hands separate.

- F. Results suggest in 4/4 meter, no significant differences emerged between groups. However, in the 3/4 meter, students in the experimental condition demonstrated significantly higher posttest scores $t=-2.55798$, $p=.006233$. ($p < .05$), while control groups did not show improvement. In addition, t-tests revealed that Group Piano IV experimental groups improved significantly in both meters, while the

Group Piano II control group declined in 4/4 performance, probably due to hand coordination challenges in more demanding excerpts.

- 92% of participants who completed the posttest felt neutral to very likely more confident playing syncopated rhythms at the piano.

G. Activities that energize the piano studio

- Review chord progression. Practice chord progressions using syncopated rhythms.

I IV I V7 I

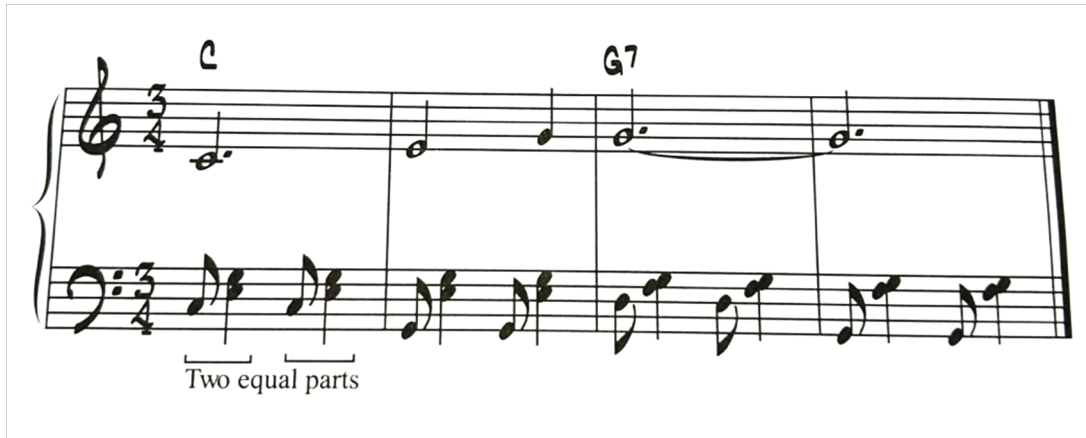
- Sight-read the following excerpt. When mastered, it can be transposed to another key or **mode**.
- Change role between hands.
- Change the melody's motion; instead of moving down, begin at the root and move up.

I IV I V7 I

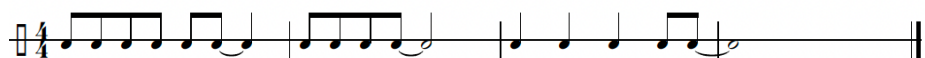
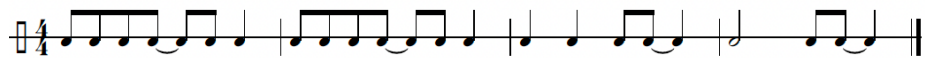
- Composition assignment: Create a melody while having the following L.H accompaniment pattern. Use the basic chord progression in any minor key in an 8-measure composition.

4/4

- Improvisation assignment: Use the following left-hand pattern as accompaniment to create a melody in the R.H (see example). Repeat this exercise until feeling very comfortable (playing it without looking at the music). Transpose to other key signatures.



These rhythmic ideas start as the foundation for a composition. Students can include different types of progressions.



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