



Thinking Like a Musician

A professional's approach to learning new piano repertoire — from the composer's imagination to your own artistic interpretation.

NEW PIECE — WHERE DO I START?



PART I – UNDERSTANDING THE COMPOSER

Every Piece Begins Before the First Note

Like an architect's blueprint or an artist's sketch, every piece begins in the composer's imagination. Our goal is to discover that vision *before* we play.

Every score is a conversation across time.

1

What

What did the composer write?

2

Why

Why did they write it that way?

3

How

How can I bring those ideas to life?

Before Playing a Single Note



Observe First

Before touching the keys, take in the whole picture:

- Title & composer
- Style & form
- Tempo & character

Build the Musical Road Map

Look for repeated ideas, phrase shapes, harmonic direction, climaxes, etc.

Read Between, Above, and Below the Notes

The composer's language speaks through every marking on the page. Always ask: **Why?**



Dynamics

Intensity and volume shaping



Articulation

How each note is touched



Tempo Changes

Speed and flow decisions



Expressive Markings

The emotional roadmap

Musical Language Evolves

Notation has changed very little. **Its meaning has changed enormously.** Style, ornamentation, articulation, tempo, and pedal all carry different weight across eras.

Choosing Your Score

- **Urtext** — the composer's original intentions
- **Edited editions** — with interpretive suggestions
- *Ask: What truly belongs to the composer?*



Understanding the Sound World

Before practicing, ask: **How should this sound?**



Vocal?

Singing lines, breath, phrasing



Orchestral?

Color, texture, instrumental imitation



Polyphonic?

How many voices? Which leads?



Dance?

Rhythm, pulse, character

📄 **Technical Forecast:** Identify voicing, octaves, arpeggios, leaps, and pedal challenges *before* practicing. Pedal serves the music – not habit.

Memorization Starts Early

Andante (♩ = 132) Op. 9 No. 2

2

espress. *p* *dolce*

3

f *p*

6

cresc.

Memory is a **learning tool**, not just a performance goal. Begin building it from the very first encounter with a piece.

Start With:

- Theme
- Bass line
- Harmony
- Rhythm

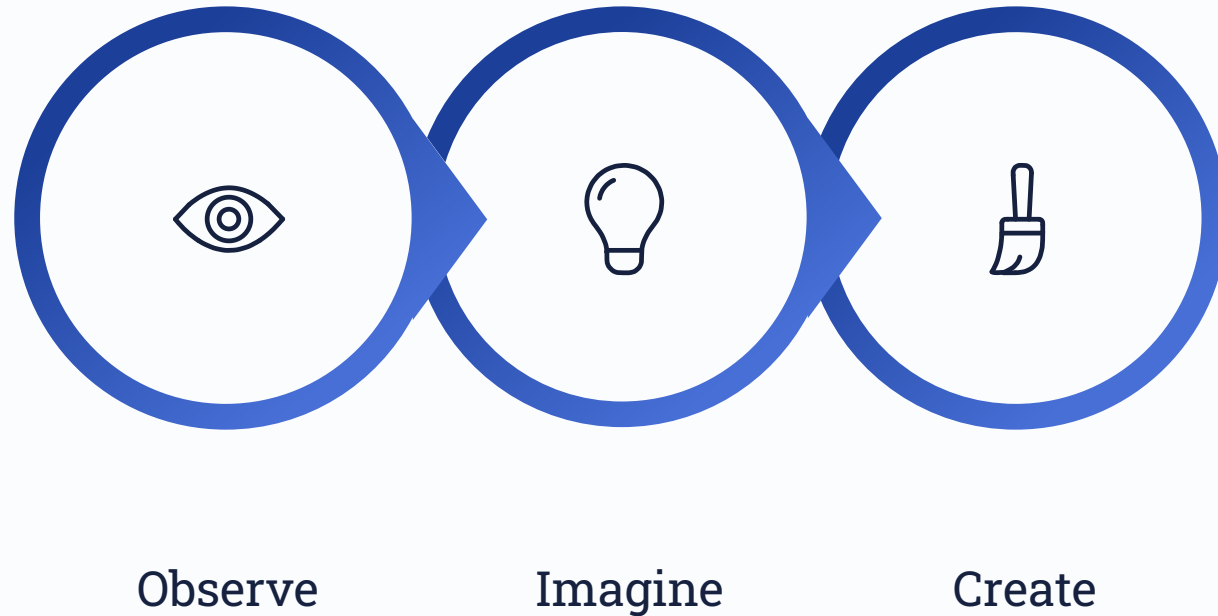
Each of these layers deepens your understanding and anchors the music in your mind and hands.

Every Piece Is a Teacher

Composer	What It Teaches
Bach – Inventions	Independence of voices and polyphonic thinking
Mozart & Haydn – Sonatas	Structure, symmetry, proportion, elegance and humor
Brahms	Rich Romantic polyphony and inner voices
Rachmaninoff	Phrase development, tonal richness and color, Pedal

 **Live Demonstration:** Applying today's ideas to a brand-new piece — a prepared excerpt or volunteer's "wish-list" piece.

The First Twenty Minutes with a New Piece



These three stages — observe, imagine, and create — form the foundation of a thoughtful, artistic approach to every new piece you encounter.

Don't Rush to Play the Notes

First, **get to know the music**. Every score is an invitation into the composer's imagination.

Recommended Resources

- Malcolm Bilson – *Knowing the Score* (Cornell lectures)
- Leimer & Giesekeing – *Piano Technique*

This is a topic that grows with the musician — return to it, refine it, and let your own musical discovery continue to evolve.