

# Struggle with Sight Reading

Are you one of the many pipers out there who learned to read music as you learned the bagpipes? Sight reading is a skill that many of us struggle with, an entirely new language that we learn at the same time as the many other skills we need to play our instrument. But many pipers shy away from trying to improve how they read music, when it's just a skill we need to work on like any other!

Here are some tips to try if you want to get better at this vital musical skill and firstly don't stress about it too much. Start with the basics with rhythm being key. When you first learned to read English, you didn't start with Shakespeare or Burns, obviously! You took little baby steps with simple books, the same principle applies here and always begins with basic rhythms. Explore YouTube or rhythm tutorials to get a feel for the beats and timings. Tap along to music on the radio in your car, focus in on the beat and clap along to music you encounter throughout the day. I highly recommend listening to a few quality pipe band tunes to help with your ongoing bagpipe music immersion. Most of all though, remember to have fun while you're doing it. You will be surprised how quickly you train your ear to pick up the groove and rhythm in music. Once you are comfortable with rhythms, move on to identifying notes. No need to dive into complex pieces right off the bat. Spend some time looking at sheet music you have band tunes, or solo stuff. Then seek out new tunes from friends and bandmates so you can mix up the note combinations and test your knowledge. Familiarize yourself with the staff and how different notes relate to each other. Just like learning the alphabet, start simple and gradually increase complexity.

Another great exercise is to write out tunes you already know ideally from memory. This does sound like a bit of a challenge, right? However this forces you to engage with the music, deepening your understanding of note relationships and rhythms. If remembering tunes to write them down is too hard, even copying from existing sheet music can be enlightening. You'll learn how musical phrases are constructed, and soon enough, sight reading will feel more intuitive. Practice these things consistently but again, remember to enjoy the process. The goal isn't to become a sight-reading robot. Instead, let your curiosity guide you by choosing tunes you like the sound of or that you're interested in. The more you engage with music, the quicker you'll pick up new skills. Most of all remember to embrace the process as part of your musical journey. Sight reading goes hand-in-hand with your overall playing ability. As you improve your bagpiping skills, your sight-reading prowess will naturally grow. Before you know it, you'll be tearing through sheet music with confidence!