

A New Approach to Sight Singing

by Sol Berkowitz; Gabriel Fontrier; Leo Kraft; Perry Goldstein; and Edward Smaldone
Seventh Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, 2024

Progressive Sight Singing

by Carol Krueger
Fourth Edition, Oxford University Press, 2024

Reviewed by KARIN BUER



A New Approach to Sight Singing, Seventh Edition

In its preface, the seventh edition of *A New Approach to Sight Singing* (hereafter *New Approach*) describes its ultimate learning outcomes as a greater ability to sing at sight and the ability to better imagine the sound of music when looking at its notated form. It is a collection of sight singing and rhythm reading materials meant for undergraduate music majors in the core aural skills sequence. Its 457 pages are spiral bound, and the contents within are sufficiently spaced to allow students to write notes in the margins or between exercises. No electronic version of the text exists. As of August 2024, the textbook costs \$116.25 if purchased directly from the publisher and \$93.00 on Amazon. Considering that the book is meant to be used for the entire aural skills sequence—typically four semesters—the price works out to roughly \$23–\$29 per semester. Students could also opt to purchase a used copy of the book or to use a rental program.¹

Overview and organization

New Approach consists of four main chapters, organized by activity type: Melodies, Rhythm, Duets, and Sing and Play. Each chapter is then divided into sections that progress in difficulty level. All of the chapters (except “Melodies” which has five sections) have four sections that are meant to map onto the four-semester sequence typical of many undergraduate aural skills curricula. The authors rate the difficulty level of the sections as Section I = elementary, Sections II and III = intermediate, and Section IV = advanced.² Therefore, the Section Is of each chapter are meant to be used

1 For students considering a rental program, they should be made aware that they will need to rent for each semester of the aural skills sequence. Therefore, buying may be more cost-effective.

2 Section V of the “Melodies” chapter contains post-tonal material. It can be used simultaneously with

concurrently, during the first semester of aural skills study. Section II of each chapter would be used during the second semester, and so on. This type of organization allows the instructor to easily vary the type of exercises done in class or given as homework.

Included at the end of the textbook is a short chapter entitled “Supplementary Exercises.” These drill-like exercises may be used for warm-ups during or outside of class. A brief preparatory chapter explains lead-sheet notation, provides some suggestions for voicing chords at the piano when reading lead-sheet symbols, and discusses the interpretation of rhythmic notation, particularly swung eighth notes. This newly added chapter reflects the seventh edition’s commitment to including more examples in jazz and popular styles.

Changes from the sixth edition

One of the main goals of the seventh edition of *New Approach* was to expand the musical examples from the sixth edition to reflect a more diverse and inclusive repertoire, beyond Western European art music. To this end, the authors added numerous examples by women and composers of color, new examples in jazz and popular styles, and additional examples in vernacular styles such as Creole and Portuguese fado.³ These newly added examples are interspersed throughout to match the appropriate level of difficulty.

Other changes in the seventh edition include the addition of lead-sheet symbols to many examples, both popular and classical, and an increase in the number of examples that include Roman numerals.⁴ While the harmonic analysis can be helpful for pedagogical purposes, its omission from numerous examples also gives students the opportunity to practice this skill on their own. The “Duets” chapter in particular does not contain any harmonic analysis.

Section IV of all the chapters, or it could be isolated and used for a separate advanced aural skills class.

3 Composers new to the seventh edition include Louise Reichardt, Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, Charlotte Sainton Dolby, Edmond Dédé, Franziska Lebrun, Josephine Lang, Chiquinha Gonzaga, Bob Cole, Cy Coleman, Jerome Kern, Jean (“Toots”) Thieleman, Count Basie, Hortense de Beauharnais, Scott Joplin, Corona Schröter, Eubie Blake, Mélanie Bonis, Germaine Tailleferre, Clara Schumann, W. C. Handy, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Francis Johnson, Sydney Lambert, Miles Davis, Joe Garland, Antônio Carlos Jobim, Charlie Parker, Wayne Shorter, Ethel Smyth, Lili Boulanger, Leonard Cohen, Michel Mauléart Monton, Nat Simon, Joseph Kosma, Emilie Mayer, Luiz Bonfá, Consuelo Velázquez, Kenny Dorham, H. T. Burleigh, Bronislaw Kaper, Cole Porter, Alberta Nichols, Stevie Wonder, Nadia Boulanger, and Florence Price, among others.

4 Note: Roman numerals appear above the staves rather than below.

While the “Rhythm” and “Duets” chapters remain unchanged, the “Sing and Play” chapter has been revamped considerably since the last edition. In particular, the piano parts have been simplified. This welcome change will allow students to focus their efforts more specifically on the skills of pitch autonomy, intonation, and rhythmic alignment without getting overly discouraged by any keyboard technique deficiencies—deficiencies which would more appropriately be addressed in a keyboard musicianship class.

Content summary

The core chapters of *New Approach* contain very little prose.⁵ Instead, they consist almost exclusively of musical examples, some of which are author-composed and some of which are pulled from the literature. All examples gradually progress in level of difficulty. Examples from the literature, of which there are approximately 200, are occasionally altered or transposed for pedagogical purposes.⁶

Chapter 1 (“Melodies”) consists of unaccompanied melodies, and at 225 pages out of 432 total, it forms the core of the book. Unlike the other chapters, it includes a short introduction with some general suggestions for sight singing. The introduction echoes what most instructors would cover in class—how to establish the key and tempo, solfège versus scale-degree numbers, conducting patterns, practice tips, etc.—but would nonetheless be beneficial for students to read. The melodies in Section 1 of Chapter 1 are entirely diatonic and feature steps and skips that outline diatonic chords. Harmonies are introduced in a methodical manner (tonic in major, tonic in minor, then in both major and minor: IV, V, ii, V⁷, vii^o, and vi). Instructors may wish to reverse the order and introduce melodies outlining the V chord before those outlining the IV chord, and the textbook allows for that kind of flexibility. Students will get immediate practice in reading many different keys (both major and minor) and clefs (treble, alto, and bass). Rhythms remain fairly straightforward, but students will encounter both simple and compound meters. With the exception of a handful of melodies in cut time, beat values are limited to quarter notes and dotted quarter

5 The beginning of each section includes a brief description of the types of exercises that will be found in that section. Intermittent bullet-pointed statements will alert the reader to upcoming topics (e.g., “The next eight melodies contain skips in the ii chord, in both major and minor...”) or provide additional instructions (e.g., “The next three melodies should be sung as if notated in the treble, alto, and bass clefs in turn...”).

6 Whenever an excerpt is altered, it is indicated in the text.

notes. In Section 2, melodies contain larger leaps and more complex rhythms than in Section 1. Tenor clef is introduced as well as chromatic passing and neighbor tones. The level of difficulty increases quickly to include modulation to closely related keys, secondary dominants, Neapolitan and augmented sixth chords, and finally modal melodies. Section 3 features more chromaticism, more difficult modulations, and a wider variety of rhythmic complexities and phrase structures. Other challenges include leaps to chromatic notes, leaps of sevenths, syncopation, and some modal mixture. The melodies in Section 4 require advanced skills. Students will contend with a variety of complexities including large dissonant leaps, modulation to remote keys, complicated syncopations, irregular and changing meters, modal mixture, and extensive melodic and harmonic chromaticism. Section 5 features post-tonal melodies. It is organized systematically into seven sections, each of which focuses on a specific interval.

Chapter 2 (“Rhythm”) contains unpitched rhythmic exercises, and each of the four sections corresponds roughly with the difficulty levels encountered in the analogous sections of Chapter 1. Unlike the melodies of Chapter 1, however, the rhythms do not include tempo indications, dynamics, or articulations. The authors contend that isolated rhythm practice is not an end in itself, and therefore the lack of interpretive markings was a conscious decision to increase the usefulness of the exercises, e.g., students can perform the same exercise at a variety of tempi. However, the lack of markings may make it more likely that students’ performances will become mechanical, so they should be reminded of the importance of musicality and encouraged to add their own dynamics and phrasing.

Chapter 3 (“Duets”) comprises vocal duets, which can be assigned as homework or performed at sight as an in-class activity. The duets in this chapter allow students to develop important ensemble skills, such as focusing on their own part while listening to another, improved intonation, and rhythmic precision.

Chapter 4 (“Sing and Play”) gives students the chance to practice singing with their own piano accompaniment, thereby increasing their harmonic awareness and rhythmic coordination. These exercises are meant to be prepared in advance.

Discussion

New Approach offers great flexibility to instructors, allowing them to cater activities to individual classes and students. The sheer volume of exercises provides more than enough material to use for both classroom study and individual practice.

The exercises themselves are thoughtfully composed, selected, and arranged, resulting in a methodical and pedagogically sound collection of sight-singing repertoire. The mixture of keys, clefs, and time signatures ensures that students can apply sight singing skills to different contexts. It is also encouraging to see the expansion of styles and composers represented in this edition.

The structure of the textbook lends itself extremely well to a four-semester aural skills sequence. And because the sections are organized by difficulty level and work concurrently across the chapters, instructors have a wide selection of corresponding materials from which they can create a variety of in-class activities or design assignments. The topical index is an added resource for instructors who need to align with written theory classes. Instead of listing items alphabetically, the index is organized by topics (e.g., “skips to chromatic notes,” “syncopation,” “tenor clef,” etc.). It lists the first occurrence of a topic as well as significant occurrences thereafter. In future editions, an expanded topical index that identifies even more occurrences of a topic and also includes more topics (such as modulation) would be a welcome improvement.

New Approach at its essence is a collection of material for sight singing, and as such, its focus is primarily on the music. This characteristic offers both advantages and possible disadvantages. Written explanations are limited, which may keep students’ attention on the exercises themselves. On the other hand, some students may benefit from additional information, such as advice pertaining to the learning process, specific warm-up drills, or suggestions for practice. Instructors who adopt this text will have a lot of flexibility, but they will also need to provide additional context and incorporate scaffolded activities.

New Approach does not have an eBook option, nor does it come with any electronic resources. The publisher suggests their “InQuizitive for Aural Skills” online resource as a supplement, which includes activities, videos, tutorials, and quizzes. However, this resource requires an additional cost and is not directly linked to *New Approach*.



Progressive Sight Singing, Fourth Edition

Carol Krueger’s *Progressive Sight Singing* (4th edition) is designed for undergraduate music majors in the core aural skills sequence, particularly those who enter with very little formal training. In its description, it claims to “provide a step-by-step introduction to the underlying grammar and syntax of musical structure and

prepare students to perceive that structure with both the ear [i.e., dictation skills] and the eye [i.e., sight singing and audiation skills].” With its meticulously crafted organization, well-paced and methodical content, and extensive and accessible online resources, it is likely to achieve that goal. The textbook itself, which is also available as an eBook, is a staggering 790 pages long. In addition to its substantial length, individual pages are densely packed with text and musical exercises. Factor in the wealth of online resources that accompany the textbook, and the result is a mountain of aural skills material.⁷ The cost for the book and its online resources as of August 2024 is \$119.99, which works out to \$30 per semester for a four-semester aural skills sequence. If a student is considering buying a used copy, they should note that throughout the book, there are some workbook-type questions. Though none of the questions are likely to be graded, a used copy may have answers written in.

Overview and organization

Progressive Sight Singing is divided into two main parts, which are designed to be used concurrently throughout the four-semester aural skills sequence. Part I (Chapters 1–26) is devoted entirely to rhythm reading, while Part II (Chapters 1–24) deals with melodic reading. The substantial rhythm reading content found in Part I is one of the book’s many strengths, negating the need for a separate rhythm reading text. In addition, several short preface chapters and appendices contain a wealth of important information for both students and instructors.

The preface “An Introduction to the Music Literary Process” provides insight into Krueger’s pedagogical philosophy and explains the reasoning behind the sequencing of activities found in each chapter. In order to maintain emphasis on *the pattern* as the basic unit of musical meaning (rather than individual pitches or durations), Krueger points to the way we learn language. As such, she breaks down each new skill into three phases, each with its own distinct set of exercises: 1) preparation phase (learning activities center on imitation), 2) symbolic association phase (pitch and rhythm are represented visually with standard music notation), and 3) integration phase (tonal and rhythm patterns are integrated in order to read accurately and fluently).

Another preface, “Building Musicianship and Independence,” and Appendix D “Improvisation,” aside from being great resources for students, offer practical ideas to instructors for class activities that help with skills such as audiation, error

⁷ The book’s companion website (Oxford Learning Link) can be found at www.oup.com/he/krueger4e.

detection, musical memory, and improvisation. Appendix E, “Vertical Harmony/Chord Progressions,” contains a catalogue of 3- to 5-chord progressions (in major and minor modes, diatonic and chromatic) written out in music notation and shown with a variety of voice-leading options. Instructors may find this particularly useful for in-class drilling or when creating dictation exercises or quiz material.

Chapter design

The chapters in *Progressive Sight Singing* each follow the same sequence, which was thoughtfully and intentionally crafted in order to mirror the way we learn language. Krueger describes this sequence as the music literary process—learning sound before sight before theory. Each chapter introduces a single new skill or concept, first in isolation and then integrated with previously learned skills. In general, instructional material (including background information, music theory context, and suggestions for practice drills) precedes the musical exercises themselves. Chapters are further broken down into the following sub-chapters:

- “Building Aural-Oral Skills”: introduces a concept by imitating patterns (learned by ear/by rote), and by doing vocal exercises designed to hear intervals, scales, and chords in relation to a central tonic. Graphic representations of the vocal exercises are available on the Oxford Learning Link companion website and can be displayed for in-class drilling.
- “Symbolic Association”: sounds learned in the first section are translated into musical symbols (learned by sight). This sometimes involves some written exercises, solutions for which can be found on the companion website.⁸
- “Patterns”: these exercises focus on patterns that prepare the eye and ear for reading the new element or skill that is the topic of the chapter. The patterns are reinforced with recordings on the companion website.
- “Exercises”: the culmination of the chapter, these lengthier exercises are either author-composed or taken from classical and folk literature. The majority are solo exercises, but they also include some two-part exercises (for one person or for duet work), canons, and small ensemble exercises (some of which can be done as sing and play exercises).

8 However, in August of 2024, the solutions pages had a notice: “This resource is under construction and will appear here soon.”

- “Dictation and Improvisation Skills”: describes and illustrates dictation procedures and suggests activities for dictation and improvisation, many of which are available on the companion website.

Changes from the third edition

The fourth edition of *Progressive Sight Singing* introduces a few noteworthy changes from the previous edition. It places additional emphasis on dictation and improvisation. To that end, “Dictation and Improvisation Skills” sections (described above) have been added to each chapter, and a new appendix, “Improvisation,” appears near the end of the book. Some new repertoire has been added, and additional videos and recordings have been added to the companion website.

Content summary

Part I: Rhythmic Reading (Chapters 1–26)

In line with the intended audience of the book, the rhythm reading chapters progress at a pace suitable for students with little formal training. However, students who are more advanced at the start of their undergraduate degree will also be appropriately challenged as they incorporate a rhythm syllable system and physical gestures, and integrate rhythm skills with sight singing. Although the chapters do not divide equally among a four-semester sequence, I suggest this possible plan, which takes into account the topics of each chapter and their correspondence with Part II: Chapters 1–5 for semester 1, Chapters 6–12 for semester 2, Chapters 13–19 for semester 3, and Chapters 20–26 for semester 4.

The first three chapters focus on simple meter with a quarter-note beat, and only to the level of the eighth-note division, while Chapter 5 introduces compound meter with a dotted-quarter-note beat up to the eighth-note division. Rests are included from the start so that students learn to read durations and rests simultaneously. Chapter 4 momentarily pauses the introduction of new rhythmic skills, and instead discusses some important terms and symbols (such as dynamics, tempo, articulation, the fermata, etc.), while reinforcing the rhythms from Chapters 1–3. Chapter 4 serves as an important reminder for students to maintain musicality and consider all the markings in the score, not just pitches and rhythms, and its strategic placement near the beginning of Part I helps to set the expectation early.

Chapters 6–12 introduce less common beat values (eighth notes and half notes in simple meter, dotted eighth notes and dotted half notes in compound meter), triplets,

and syncopation. Sixteenth notes make their first appearance, first in Chapter 7 as the division of an eighth-note beat and later in Chapter 12 as the subdivision of a quarter-note beat. To some, this may seem atypical—sixteenth notes are often introduced in the context of a quarter-note beat long before they appear in the context of an eighth-note beat in less common meters. However, by building a strong foundational understanding of the beat and its division before moving on to the subdivision level, Krueger allows students to focus on the physical and aural perception of the metrical structures, without getting hung up on written values.

Chapters 13–19 build upon the skills developed in the previous twelve chapters (more complex syncopations, a wider variety of subdivision patterns in simple meter, triplet patterns with eighth or quarter rests, etc.), and they include another chapter devoted to terms and symbols (Chapter 13). The concepts of subdivision and borrowed divisions are expanded to simple meters with half-note and eighth-note beats, and subdivision in compound meter is finally addressed.

Chapters 20–26 round out the rhythmic reading section with additional subdivisions and borrowed divisions in compound meter. Advanced topics are addressed including irregular divisions of the beat, hemiola, cross-rhythms, asymmetrical meters, and mixed meters.

Part II: Melodic Reading (Chapters 1–24)

Because of their even number and their distribution of topics, the chapters in Part II divide logically among a four-semester sequence: Chapters 1–6 for semester 1, Chapters 7–12 for semester 2, Chapters 13–18 for semester 3, and Chapters 19–24 for semester 4.

The first six chapters build a foundation of diatonic patterns in major and natural minor. Melodies are based on stepwise motion, leaps within the tonic triad, and diatonic intervals that include tonic. The variety of key signatures ensures students learn to read in all keys. Straightforward rhythms (aligning with Chapters 1–3 of the rhythm section) allow students to focus more on the pitch elements as they begin their aural skills training.

Chapters 7–12 include melodic and harmonic minor scales and expand the harmonic implications of the melodies to include V and V⁷. Rhythms become slightly more complex (corresponding through Chapter 12 of the rhythm section).

Chapters 13–18 see the introduction of C clefs (soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone) as well as melodies that outline or imply the subdominant chord. Rhythms match the difficulty level found through Chapter 19 of the rhythm section.

The last six chapters progress in difficulty at a much faster rate than the previous eighteen, and as such, they are quite dense content-wise. For this reason, instructors may consider including Chapters 19 and 20 in semester 3. Chapter 19 covers all the other diatonic triads and seventh chords beyond I, IV, and V7. Chapter 20 sees the start of chromaticism in the form of nonharmonic tones. Chapters 21–23 focus on chromatic harmony, including secondary dominants, modulation to closely- and distantly-related keys, the Neapolitan chord, and mode mixture. The last chapter provides an introduction to diatonic modes. Notably missing from these final chapters are augmented sixth chords, although some progressions can be found at the end of Appendix E.

Electronic resources

One of *Progressive Sight Singing*'s greatest attributes is its electronic resources, available at the Oxford Learning Link: www.oup.com/he/krueger4e. The site contains a wealth of material for both students and instructors. Instructors may be particularly interested in the vocal-pitch exercises and chord progression graphs (which can be displayed for in-class instruction), the additional rhythmic and melodic exercises (which can be used for testing or further drill), and the flash cards and improvisation activities (which can guide class activities). The video tutorials can provide insights for instructors on pedagogical techniques, and they can also give students additional instruction in some important concepts. Recordings (audio and video) can be played directly on the website; all other materials must be downloaded and opened on your computer.

Discussion

Progressive Sight Singing stands out as a thoughtfully-paced and highly comprehensive aural skills text. Krueger draws on her many years of experience teaching musicianship skills and her expertise as a choral educator to curate abundant exercises that can guide students of all backgrounds. For students with no prior formal training, the learning curve in many aural skills classes can be discouragingly steep. *Progressive Sight Singing* offsets this tendency with its carefully managed presentation of new topics and its scaffolded approach to new skills. There is a high level of student support built directly into the text and the website—from the recordings to the tips for practicing to the extensive preparatory exercises—and this, in turn, supports and complements the work of the instructor.

The visual representation of aural concepts (e.g., graphics, charts, dictation shorthand) and the emphasis on physical gestures (see especially the “Rhythm

Demonstrations” and “Tonal Demonstrations” videos on the website) both contribute to the textbook’s student-centered ethos. Concepts are not presented in a singular way. Rather, they are approached from multiple angles in order to reach students who have a variety of learning styles. Likewise, the meticulous organization along with clear and frequent headings leave no doubt, for the student or the instructor, as to which skills are the focus of any given chapter or sub-chapter. One possible drawback of the detailed headings is that students do not get much practice determining on their own whether an excerpt is in simple or compound meter, or whether it is in a major or minor key. (It is not until Chapter 22 that melodies are given without an indication of their mode.)

In terms of flexibility, *Progressive Sight Singing* falls somewhere in the middle. For instance, the preface boasts that instructors can use whichever tonal and rhythm reading systems they prefer.⁹ And indeed, throughout the textbook, moveable-*do* solfège is presented along with scale-degree numbers. In minor modes, *la*-based minor, *do*-based minor, and scale-degree numbers are all provided.¹⁰ Instructors should note, however, that Part I (“Rhythmic Reading”) uses the Takadimi system, and the video demonstrations on the companion website use moveable-*do* solfège and Takadimi syllables. Also, while syllables appear in the preparatory material and some of the online resources, the sight singing and rhythm reading exercises themselves do not include any syllables. Less flexible is some of the other terminology used in the textbook and in the online videos, which demands that the instructor adopt specific pedagogical tools. For example, terms such as “heel tap” and “echo chant” appear in written directions and may be confusing to students unless the instructor also uses those terms and practices the techniques in class.

Though the graduated presentation of material remains one of *Progressive Sight Singing*’s chief strengths, two potential pacing issues may require some adjustments by the instructor. First, sixteenth-note subdivision in compound meter is not introduced until Chapter 19 of Part I (“Rhythmic Reading”), which would fall near the end of the third semester. Not only is this late, but the rhythms within Chapter 19 are quite complex, and so students do not get the incremental lead-up that they experience with other topics. Second, the last five chapters of Part II (“Melodic Reading”) move noticeably faster and contain a greater density of topics and skills than the previous chapters. Since these chapters feature the most advanced material (nonharmonic

9 Appendices A and B provide an overview of the different tonal and rhythm reading systems.

10 The simultaneous use of two and sometimes three tonal reading systems can look a bit clunky, and students will have to take extra care to follow the right part.

tones, chromatic harmonies, modulation, modes), they have the potential to overwhelm students. On the other hand, one might argue that the gradual learning and systematic reinforcement of earlier skills that occurs in Chapters 1–19 will build a strong foundation that allows students to tackle the faster pace of the final few chapters.

Conclusion

A New Approach to Sight Singing and *Progressive Sight Singing* both serve as excellent textbook options for instructors teaching the undergraduate core aural skills sequence, and the most recent editions expand and improve upon their earlier versions. Each offers an abundance of sight singing material which has been carefully selected, created, and arranged. In determining the best fit for a particular class, curriculum, or institution, one may wish to consider some of their fundamental differences.

While *New Approach*'s focus remains squarely on the music itself, *Progressive Sight Singing* combines the musical exercises with a substantial amount of pedagogical material, including electronic resources. Similarly, *New Approach* centers only on sight singing skills, whereas *Progressive Sight Singing*, with its inclusion of dictation exercises and improvisation activities, functions as a more wide-ranging aural skills textbook. As such, *New Approach* may be a more appropriate choice for experienced instructors who appreciate its flexibility and who are able to provide additional instructional support beyond the textbook itself.

Progressive Sight Singing stands out for its robust rhythm content, which rivals its pitch content in terms of organization, pacing, and sheer volume. *New Approach* does indeed include a substantial rhythm chapter, but instructors may still wish to supplement with additional rhythm material. The level of scaffolding also varies considerably between these two textbooks, with *Progressive Sight Singing* offering a highly scaffolded presentation of concepts and *New Approach* remaining more succinct.

Both textbooks, in their own distinct ways, offer many benefits. If you would like a comprehensive aural skills textbook that integrates sight singing and rhythm reading exercises with instructional content and that includes digital resources, *Progressive Sight Singing* fits the bill. If, on the other hand, you are looking for a well-paced, extensive, and varied collection of sight singing material that affords the instructor more flexibility, *A New Approach to Sight Singing* would be an excellent choice.