

# Sight Reading For Bass

## Rhythm Studies - Eighth & Sixteenth Notes

By Cliff Engel

If you take an analytical approach to sight reading standard notation and break it down into its fundamental components, you are left with two primary variables consisting of notes and rhythms. Since there are only 12 unique pitches in the Western-based musical alphabet, memorizing their positions on the staff in the bass clef as well as on the fingerboard of your instrument is a relatively easy task. The much more challenging aspect of sight reading standard notation is experienced in learning to instantly recognize rhythms. Unlike notes where there are a relatively few number of them, the rhythmic combinations you could be potentially presented with in a piece of standard notation are practically limitless.

In this lesson, we will work through a collection of rhythm studies exercises comprised of eighth and sixteenth-note combinations in an effort to increase the proficiency of your rhythmic recognition skills when sight reading standard notation for bass. Since the principal goal of this lesson is to improve rhythmic acuity as it pertains to sight reading, these rhythm studies exercises have been notated using rhythmic notation.

Initially, you won't need your bass to practice rhythm studies. Because we are focusing on rhythmic recognition independent of note recognition, we are not concerned with notes. In fact, specific notes will be completely irrelevant when working with rhythm studies. To acquire maximum results from these exercises, simply begin by clapping through these rhythms at a tempo that is as slow as you need it to be in order to play the rhythms perfectly in time without making any errors and then increase the tempo accordingly.

Be sure to practice all of these rhythms against the steady, even pulse of a metronome or drum machine. Begin with a tempo that is slow enough to minimize mistakes but at the same time is fast enough to push you and create a challenge. From there, gradually increase the tempo. Because this lesson is quite lengthy, I would recommend breaking down these examples into smaller sections to make them more manageable. At first, try to play through these rhythms in one, two, four, eight, and twelve bar segments without pausing. Eventually, your goal should be to play through complete pages in their entirety without stopping due to a mistake. If any errors occur, stop and correct them before proceeding, and if you are having a particularly difficult time with a measure, decrease the tempo significantly so that you don't allow yourself to become frustrated and continue to reinforce bad habits through inaccuracy. Most musicians will overlook the significance of elemental exercises like these and rush through them in a sloppy fashion in order to get to more advanced material, but don't sacrifice accuracy for speed because this will be counterproductive to our long term goals. The best sight readers can be presented with standard notation, sight read that material perfectly on the first take, and make their performance sound like a prepared piece of music that they have been playing for years.

After you feel comfortable with these rhythms and can clap through them flawlessly, apply them to your bass by simply choosing any single note or combination of notes on your instrument and then allow those notes of your choice to sound for the durations that are indicated in the rhythmic notation of these rhythm studies exercises. Any note on the fingerboard or even any open string can be utilized to complete these exercises. Again, start at a slow tempo and then gradually build from there. If any of the exercises seem easy, simply increase the tempo. With all the rhythmic variability possible, no matter how fast you can read through these rhythms error-free, you can always improve your rhythmic recognition skills and heighten the degree of difficulty by increasing the tempo. Becoming a proficient sight reader of standard notation on an advanced level is a process that takes dedication and time. This isn't a subject area that anyone is going to have completely mastered within just a couple weeks or even a couple months.

Although these exercises may seem somewhat dry, great strides can be made in your ability to sight read standard notation over a relatively short span of time by concentrating on these basic rhythmic recognition exercises. By becoming a proficient sight reader, you will see your options as a working bassist increase exponentially because you will be able to more effectively communicate with other musicians. There are so many gigs available which require the ability to read standard notation. Whether your goal is to become a commercial session bassist, a member of the college jazz ensemble, bass chair of the local symphony orchestra, play in the school musical, or provide support in your community church, becoming a proficient sight reader will only increase your opportunities and chances of obtaining these gigs. Not only does being able to sight read greatly increase your value as an in-demand bass player, but as an additional benefit, it also makes your practice sessions much more productive since you are able to use that time more efficiently and cover more material.















































































































