

A Path of Success: Pedagogical Considerations about Leveling and Sequencing Piano Repertoire

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The session began with the presenter highlighting the leveling division of pedagogical piano literature into three categories: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. By utilizing the words “early” and “late” to further describe these categories, a nine-items scale was generated (Table 1). The presenter referenced the Royal Conservatory of Music curriculum since it showcases a similar leveling system, including ten distinct levels plus the preparatory A and B levels, as well as the book *The Pianist’s Guide to Standard Teaching and Performing Literature*, by Jane Magrath, which also references a similar leveling categorization.

Table 1. Categories of pedagogical piano literature

Level in numbers	Category’s name
1	Early Elementary
2	Elementary
3	Late Elementary
4	Early Intermediate
5	Intermediate
6	Late Intermediate
7	Early Advanced
8	Advanced
9	Late Advanced

Leveling Repertoire: Elements to Consider

The session continued with the presenter emphasizing that, while thinking about the leveling of a piece of repertoire, teachers should consider three initial broad categories, including the following musical elements: technique, reading, and expression. Following, he pointed out that a thorough analysis should employ more specific musical elements, such as structure, texture, contour, tonality, rhythm, articulation, dynamics, and pedaling. A meticulous examination would proceed with a cross-reference between these specific elements with the broader musical elements of technique, reading, and expression. The presenter featured a leveling worksheet (Table 2) to be utilized as a basis for this analysis, also serving as a leveling exercise. This material, which can be found in the cited book by Courtney Crappell, includes questions that serve as starting reflection points about the musical contents of the piece being analyzed. Through a ten-point scale, teachers could classify each one of the eight categories by averaging their values. After that, they would average all eight categories to discover the final leveling result for the piece.

Table 2. Leveling worksheet

	Expression	Reading	Technique	Average level
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1. Structure				
What is the form? Is it short or long? How much original material appears?				
2. Texture and Contour				
Is it monophonic, homophonic, or polyphonic? Do the contours include small and large intervals? Do you see repeated notes or other demanding figurations? What types of accompaniment patterns appear?				
3. Tonality				
Is it tonal or atonal? Is the mode major, minor, or another? Are there primary, secondary, or chromatic chords? Does it modulate?				
4. Rhythm				
What is the tempo, and does it change? Is it flexible? Are there sudden or gradual tempo shifts? What is the meter? Is it symmetrical or asymmetrical? Is there rhythmic variety?				
5. Articulation				
How many different articulations appear? Do articulations change suddenly? Do they require distinct or subtle variations? What is the proximity of one articulation to another? Do they overlap?				
6. Dynamics				
Do you see dynamic changes? Are there terraced (sudden) or gradual shifts? Will subtle dynamic changes be required for phrasing?				
7. Pedaling				
Which pedal(s) will be used? Is there any overlapping sustain pedal? Will the sustain pedal be used to connect, blend, or to enhance the tone of notes?				
8. Maturity				
Are there shifts between moods and characters obvious or subtle? How often and when do the characters shift? Does the composition require special knowledge of a musical period or genre? Would the music appeal to a wide range of ages, children and adults, or would it require a mature perspective?				
Final level (average of all categories)				

Final Thoughts: Level Numbers as References

To conclude the session, the presenter stressed that, although the leveling system of numbers is helpful, it should only be observed as a reference. As one gains practice and experience in leveling pieces of piano literature, the presenter suggested frequently referring to *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performing Literature* to check for proper leveling. He also

pointed out that reflecting on the featured musical concepts that compose the body of any pedagogical piece is of utmost importance, more so for appropriately sequencing repertoire for advancing students. The session ended with a reminder about how essential the teacher's perceptions of students' individual needs and challenges in their music studies are, and how important it is for the repertoire selection to meet students where they are while propelling them to the next level.

References

Crappell, Courtney. *Teaching Piano Pedagogy: A Guidebook for Training Effective Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 122.

Magrath, Jane. *Piano Literature for Teaching and Performance: A Graded Guide and Annotated Bibliography*. The Piano Education Press: the Frances Clark Center, Princeton: NJ.

Royal Conservatory of Music, The. *Piano Syllabus: 2022 Edition*.