

## Important Concepts

Before we dive into the exercises, here are some important concepts and practice suggestions.

### Legato Stroke

In this case, the word legato **refers to the look of the stroke** (smooth and connected) rather than the sound that it produces. This style of stroke requires the same speed on the downstroke and the upstroke. This is an excellent general purpose stroke and will be used for most of the exercises.

### Piston Stroke

The piston stroke has no noticeable “prep” before the downstroke or added lift after the rebound (you rebound back to where you started). By removing the unnecessary movement of the mallet, we have created a more efficient and accurate stroke. This stroke requires a downstroke that accelerates and an upstroke that decelerates (like dribbling a basketball). There should be a **noticeable pause between strokes**. The piston stroke is excellent for slower passages that demand the utmost accuracy and for practicing double verticals and shifting.

### Shifting

Shifting is the movement from one tone bar to the next. The shift occurs **during the rebound of the stroke**. As the mallet is rebounding off of the tone bar, it should move in a smooth arc and stop directly over the next tone bar to be struck. If the shift occurs too late (after the rebound), your arc will be “squared off.” Efficient shifting will lead to greater accuracy and consistency.

### Ideo-Kinetics

This fancy word means that you use your muscle-memory, or kinesthetic sense, to play notes outside of your field of view. This is a great tool to improve your sight-reading ability and accuracy during demanding passages.

### Flow

This is the ability to combine the above concepts and guidelines into one fluid idea. This will allow you to see and experience the “bigger picture” in music (musical and rhythmic phrases, dynamics and expression). This is a big part of becoming a great performer.

### Playing Zone Suggestions

As noted in chapter 2: For exercises that require a lot of movement and speed, try to play in the middle of the bar for

the natural notes and on the edge for flats and sharps. When you play on the edge of the bar, try to play on the angle of the bar, as if you’re slicing the mallet head in half.

Playing on the center and edge will allow for maximum speed and fluidity. For other exercises, such as the Modular Four-Mallet Exercises, which don’t require a lot of movement and speed, play in the middle of the bars for the majority of the time. Ultimately, this is the choice of the instructor. Try to take each musical situation as it comes and then decide what will allow you to play with the most fluidity and the most consistent sound.



## Natural Phrasing

The rule of **natural phrasing** says that when the musical line is ascending (going up), a natural crescendo will occur. On the flip-side, when the musical line is descending (going down), a natural diminuendo will occur. This is a **good general rule**. If you are going to apply this method, it's best to know that it's **most effective when used subtly**. This will prevent you from waking up in a cold sweat, having nightmares about scales being rehearsed over and over again from pianissimo to fortissimo, up and down, up and down. This "exaggerated method" is so extreme that it sounds like a two year old playing with the volume slider on a home stereo. Phrasing should be subtle, natural, and compliment the music. Here's an example of a very basic scale exercise that will help illustrate this concept.

### The "volume slider" approach (what to avoid):



You will notice how extreme the dynamics change in such a short amount of time. Granted, there may be musical situations where this is necessary, but more often than not, the benefit here would simply be for a **brief effect**. Be careful not to refer to this technique as "phrasing." It will develop habits in players that will be anything but musical.

### A more natural approach (to reinforce the direction of the line):



Obviously, this approach makes the "dynamics" much more subtle. Another good exercise is to sing the phrases to the performers, have them sing them back, then play them on the keyboards. If you can sing it with the right feeling behind it, there's a good chance that same energy will transfer from your brain to your hands. This can be a very powerful teaching tool.