

## The Art of Polyphony: 12 Top Tips

1. Learning any polyphonic work will require a substantial amount of analysis; it can be helpful to take the score away from the piano. Observe the shape and construction of each melodic strand within the contrapuntal texture.
2. When the score has been digested, it can be useful to lay each part out on a separate staff, separating the textures, allowing complete understanding of the musical line.
3. Once the melodic material has been marked up and each strand of music has been grasped, work through the piece deciding how the texture will be divided between the two hands.
4. Taking the score to the piano, now is the time to mark up the most ideal fingerings. This will take time and will involve working hands separately.
5. Aim to play each voice (or musical line) separately (using the correct fingerings, which may feel tricky at first), disentangling various strands of texture, providing a feel for the musical content as a whole.
6. Always sub-divide the beat and count in semiquavers, then use a metronome for reinforcement.
7. Separate hand practise is crucial. Each hand must know what it's doing to the point that it can, not only play fluently (free from hesitations and with all correct rhythms), but is totally independent of the other hand.
8. The inclusion of multiple touches is helpful; slow *non-legato*, dotted rhythms and accents (see example below which is taken from the opening of the C minor Prelude from Book 1 of the '48' Preludes and Fugues by J. S Bach) on different beats of the bar, especially on unexpected beats.
9. When practising hands together, assume one beat at a time to begin with, placing each note carefully and with focus, being mindful of the rhythm, as well as notes and fingerings.
10. Experiment by singing one voice (or line) whilst playing other linear textures at the same time.
11. In order to interpret any polyphonic material, a degree of 'separating' notes will be necessary depending on the piece, and there are many varying degrees of separation, from *staccato* and *staccatissimo*, to *tenuto* or *portamento*.
12. Colour, voicing and articulation will become deciding factors in the success of a performance. This is an issue which can be resolved from the outset, if tonal importance, rhythmic clarity, and touch are all instigated when playing each melodic strand separately at the beginning of the learning process.

