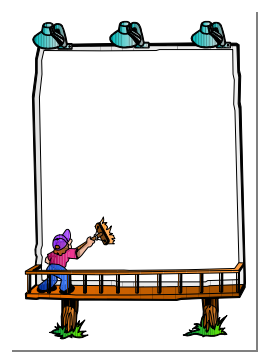


Getting the Most from Your Piano Instruction

You can learn faster and easier if you do a few simple things. These suggestions are not time-consuming and easily carried out if you schedule time for them in your day on a regular basis.

- _ Take the time to read your assignment book, I write specific assignments and practice suggestions which are intended to assist in practice.
- _ When practicing, please make sure that the environment is free from distractions and noise. Turn off the TV, put the answering machine on, and give yourself a quiet environment to work.
- _ Make sure the music is legible; in other words, make sure you have enough light.
- _ A music stand is imperative for the instrumentalist to assure good posture. Please do NOT lay music on your bed and practice bent over!
- _ Set aside a specific time each day for your work at the piano, and stick to the schedule. If you are a morning person, practice in the morning. Avoiding or delaying getting to your instrument will just make you run out of time.
- _ Unlike studying for tests or exams, piano practice cannot be crammed in at the last minute or day before the lesson. The structure of the assignments is set up so that students, if they have followed the daily assignments, can get all their practice homework finished within the structure of a week's time and be relaxed about the lesson.
- _ Take the suggestions in the assignment book seriously. After 34 years of piano study myself and 19 years of teaching experience, I know the suggestions for practice will work and prove successful, if followed.
- _ Do participate in Home Concerts, and recitals, even if only to audit. So much can be learned by performing yourself and listening to others perform.
- _ Do attend as many recitals and concerts as possible. Given the large number of musical organizations sponsoring concerts there is ample opportunity to hear music. Again, the more that you hear, the more of an idea of the musical concepts you can get.
- _ Do read biographies of composers, performing artists and conductors. Also, rent movies that are related to the lives of musicians. There are so many wonderful movies and books readily available, that really no one has the excuse not to know more about the composers, their lives and music. If you can't find the time to read books, classical CD's and records usually have useful and interesting information about the composer, the musical structure and ideas expressed, and the performers in the recording.
- _ Obtain a musical dictionary. The dictionary will give the meaning of the Italian terms (for example, *Allegro vivace* or *Molto espressivo*) which are used in the score to indicate how the piece of music should be played and how it should sound. You'll find your playing of the music will improve faster if you understand how the composer meant the music to sound in the first place. A short dictionary of musical terms is found in this *Guide*, but is not intended as a substitute for a full-blown musical dictionary.



Tips for Parents

When Should My Child Begin Lessons?

One cannot magically deem a child to “be ready” for lessons at any given point. More important is the idea that the child needs to be tuned into music from early on - from the age of 1 day is a great starting point. It doesn't matter if the you want to start a musical genius or if you simply want your child to be delighted with the wonderful sounds of serious music. Perhaps the single easiest and best thing you can do to get your child ready to begin lessons is to expose yourself and your child to lots of classical, jazz, and other forms of musically sound and well performed music together. An appreciation of good music will help get and maintain your child's interest.

How wonderful for the child to be hearing the music of Bach's Violin Sonatas or Partitas, to Chopin Etudes, Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, or Beethoven's *Pastorale Symphony* as well as the jazz/improvisational sounds of Wynton Marsalis, Oscar Peterson, Chick Corea, George Shearing or Gary Burton! One does not need to have to spend thousands of dollars investing in a huge CD collection; having a radio station tuned in to the sounds of the great classical and jazz composers is an excellent way to develop knowledge and appreciation of good music. With rhythmic patterns, harmonics, and melodic ideas already well established in the child's musical ear, the segue into lessons will be an easier process because the child can see a well-defined goal for the lessons.

There are varying opinions as to when a child should “officially” start lessons. Give a good deal of thoughtful consideration to the fact that, the younger the child is when beginning lessons, the more involved the parent will have to be with actively helping out with practice time, attending the lessons and being positively involved during the lessons. Generally, the child should be able recognize numbers 1-5, and understand the correlation between the numbers on the page and the finger numbers. If the child knows the alphabet letters of A thru G, that is all that is required from a beginner. Most beginning books will spend a lot of time reinforcing these skills, so don't be too concerned if the knowledge is not always perfectly articulated. Your child should be able to sit still for about 10-15 minutes while focusing on having fun at the piano. Under no circumstances should you expect a little one to be able to sit for longer than 10-15 minutes at a time while keeping a strong focus on any one musical concept. If your child can do these things, chances are you can start meaningful lessons for the child.

Many parents get very frustrated because they do expect their child to be able to concentrate for a longer amount of time. The child simply cannot, and lesson time and practice time becomes pure torture. There are many musical concepts that can be taught via moving physically up and down the piano, playing notes at the highest and/or lowest parts of the piano for example, going up and down the keyboard saying the letter names of the notes aloud, going up and down the piano finding all the groups of two and/or three black keys, or finding the individual natural keys on the piano. Rhythm can be approached in a very active manner, having the child clap their hands and/or march in time to certain rhythmic notation.

There are of course exceptions to any and all claims of appropriate starting ages for children. I have had the best luck with starting children who can already read. Don't let your expectations and desires be the sole determinant of when the child begins lessons or how fast you feel they should progress. The most common frustration of the parents arises because they have forgotten that their child is taking the lessons and doing the practice. Remember, the child is a child, not a miniature adult.

Having a top working instrument is so important for anyone considering lessons. Especially for younger children who have less patience with non-working things. Please DO NOT buy an instrument at Sam's Club or Music Go Round unless you have a professional musician play it first. I highly recommend renting a band instrument for the first year to be sure that is the instrument your child is going to stick with. See Deb about good places to purchase instruments.

Although having an acoustical piano is not mandatory for the beginning student, it certainly is beneficial to have for the child to experiment with and create. If money is a factor, there are many places that will allow a person to rent an acoustical piano (not a grand piano per se). If you choose to get an electronic keyboard initially, the keys need to be the size of a normal standard acoustical piano and touch sensitive, because nearly ALL beginning methods DO introduce dynamics such as *forte* (loud) or *piano* (soft) after a few lessons. Make sure the physical practice space has adequate lighting, ventilation, and a solid, secure seat. One can often find piano benches at estate sales, garage sales, etc., if your piano does not already have a bench. If you have an acoustical piano, please make sure that it is **in tune**; having it tuned twice a year will help. Remember that much of the life of a child is devoted to exploration of new things and concepts, so the more you can make the home situation like the studio, the more the child will be able to indulge his exploration instinct at home.

Being a Supportive Parent of a Piano Student

Many successful musicians regard their parents' influence and inspiration as the most important in sparking their own interest in serious music. Whether or not your child makes a career of music, your efforts in bringing the world of music to your child will make his or her life fuller and happier. You can help your child learn faster and enjoy lessons more by doing a few simple things:

- **Become Involved With Your Child's Instrument Training.**
- Communicate often to monitor progress and learn what you can do to be helpful to the learning process.
- **Encourage Your Child As Much As Possible.** Be sure to praise effort as well as accomplishment. Even if your child does not learn as fast as another, in the long run, hard work will determine the final result. There is no better way to bring about the hard work than to reward the effort. Try to express interest in what your child is doing, even if you are getting tired of hearing "Chopsticks". Encourage your child in every way possible to perform for family and friends in relaxed settings.
- **Avoid Negative Criticism.** Most of us respond better to thoughtful, loving help than undirected criticism. If your child seems uncooperative, it may mean that they need more help, encouragement, and support. Punishment is usually not a long-term solution.
- **Make Sure Your Child Knows That You Consider Music a Serious Commitment.** Schedule piano practice time for your child just as regularly as you do Little League or soccer practice. See to it that practice sessions are as free as possible from distractions. If the piano is in the living room, try to limit access to the living room during your child's allotted practice time. If your child has not practiced for some reason, do not cancel lessons. If you find the child's interest in lessons waning, the best thing to do is to discuss the problem with Mrs. Graf; often, this can be solved with proper stimulation and supervision by you and the Mrs. Graf working together.
- **Provide As Much Cultural Enrichment As Possible.** The experience of listening to music without the pressure of having to play the notes correctly can add greatly to your child's appreciation for music generally and lessons in particular. Go to concerts with your children whenever possible. Introduce your children to the works of the masters by playing the music in your home. These days, computer technology, especially the advent of CD-ROM's, has made it possible to explore great music in a way that is fun for the entire family. If you have a CD-ROM drive equipped computer, try any of several different CD-ROM's of this type.

Suggested Practice Techniques and Accomplishment Guidelines

Keyboard Town - each weekly assignment should be learned smoothly in one week. It is recommended that each individual line be done 5 times a day, with the student always singing or saying the names of the notes ALOUD when practicing.

Music Tree - each weekly assignment should be prepared and ready to drop after one week of practice. To achieve this goal, each page should be done five times a day. The student should be saying the rhythmic counting aloud at home.

Technic Tales - each assigned exercise can take from 4-6 weeks to get the control of the individual finger control and the technique. It is suggested that to get the form correct, the student do each hand position assigned 8 times a day. This is easily accomplished by going up 8 notes or down 8 notes.

Hanon - it should take no more than 5 lessons to get a *Hanon* exercise completed. The first week to be spent at a slow tempo, hands sep. or together, after that, we spend time getting the speed of the exercise up to indicated tempo.

Scales - this should also take not more than 5 lessons to learn the notes, and then proceed to increase the speed.

It is essential that when doing *Hanon* and *Scales*, that the finger form is constantly focused on, and used, to avoid a waste of valuable practice time.

Repertoire - The length of a certain piece of music that one week be spent on learning notes at a slow tempo; the second week be spent on putting the hands together; the third week be spent on memorizing and putting the final polishing touches on the piece; the fourth and fifth weeks be spent on memorizing and putting the final polishing touches on the piece. It should not take longer than 12 lessons to get a piece learned, memorized and polished.



will determine how long it takes to learn. I suggest a slow tempo, usually hands separate. The next week is adding dynamics and pedal; the fourth and fifth touches on the piece. It should not take longer than 12 lessons to get a piece learned, memorized and polished. The average length is usually 5-8

Chamber Music/Ensemble Playing

Originally the name “chamber music was applied to music which was meant to be for a small group in a room (*da camera* - in chambers), as opposed to a large group in a concert hall. Today, it is usually applied to any music performed by a small group including strings and piano. Chamber music involves two or more musicians performing music. Usually in performance of chamber music, the written music is used, and all musicians are usually seated while performing. One big disadvantage to solo instrumental music is that we tend to get lonely spending hours by ourselves practicing our own music. Band members can remedy this by being involved in their school music program. Pianists should consider chamber music. Chamber music is a lot of fun because it involves practice and rehearsal time with other musicians, which can be a very rewarding experience. I still have good friends with whom I did chamber music. When interest was waning in practice, it was great to have chamber music to spark me up again. Often, the first part of rehearsal time was chatting about life, love, and things in general, then rehearsal time, which was always a fun time, and usually out for some treat or snack after a rehearsal that went well. We often would custom design our outfits and really enjoy putting our creative genius together to do something different for our concerts. Also, chamber music was an individual study thing. Our teachers heard the finished product perhaps one or two rehearsals before the performance, and it was great to show teachers what we could do on our own.

Because chamber music is so inherently intimate and cooperative, playing it is considerably different and, in some ways, more rewarding than playing solo. It does require a bit different approach however. As a pianist chamber music teaches you to keep on going, even if you miss a note or a beat. It also makes you really aware of keeping a consistent beat, because the piano is usually the heart-beat of the composition, a pianist also learns to be aware of the other musicians playing and to respond spontaneously to another person’s musical cues or flubs. I love chamber music, and strongly urge all students to get involved in doing some.

Preparation for Music as a Career

If a student is seriously considering music for a course of study in college and/or as a career, there are some things to think about. First, the decision to get serious about music must come before Senior year in high school; prospective colleges want to see a resume and portfolio of contests that the student has entered, listings of recitals and concerts the student has participated in, and a listing of all repertoire. Senior year in high school is spent auditioning for different colleges, and does involve a lot of travel and time. All repertoire for college auditions needs to be learned during sophomore and junior years of high school. At the same time, the student should enter as many local and national contests as possible, as well as giving some solo recitals. It sounds intimidating but really isn’t; the recitals would consist of the music to be performed at the competitions and at the college auditions. Full tuition scholarships in music are some of the most accessible; a good GPA is important, but in music it is far more important to have a full portfolio to present to the colleges.

Band students/instrumentalists have different repertoire for each instrument and should see Mrs. Graf for suggestions.

A piano student should have learned the following repertoire prior to college if considering music as a major:

Bach	<i>Two and Three Part Inventions</i>
Bach	<i>English and French Suites</i>
Bach	<i>Well Tempered Clavier Book I</i>
Beethoven	Sonatas, at least one complete sonata from each period of Beethoven’s composition styles should be learned, memorized and performed. A total of three complete sonatas
Chopin	At least Five preludes, Three Etudes, One Nocturne
Debussy	At least Three preludes, and Children’s Corner
Mozart	At least Three complete sonatas
Prokofiev	At least Three compositions.



Contemporary composers	Bartok, Barber, Poulenc, Shostakovich, Muczynski should all be familiar to an incoming freshman for college.
Concertos	At least one concerto by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and a contemporary composer should be in the students repertoire list.
Chamber Music	The incoming freshman should have copies of programs where the student has participated in the chamber music performance.
Accompanying	The student should be familiar with the art of accompanying the different sections of the orchestra, as well as vocalists.

All Major and minor scales, arpeggios, as well as technique books by Hanon, Czerny, Brahms and Pischna should be fully learned and successfully accomplished by the incoming freshman.

Theory An incoming student should know basic theory skills, including the construction of all major and minor scales, all intervals and their inversions, and basic understanding of primary chordal writing. Hence, the use of the computer assisted theory lab as part of our regular lessons.

A student who decides senior year to get serious about music will find themselves up the proverbial creek without a paddle and stands little or no chance of obtaining a good scholarship to any good school for music. There is no way that all this material can be learned in one year. The learning of this music is a process that begins in fifth or sixth grade, even if the student is not totally decided to make the commitment to a college career in music. The student will be prepared and Senior year in high school can be a great deal of fun and travel. This is why I basically have a cow when students want to take an entire summer off from piano. Summer is the ideal time to get a lot of material learned, memorized and ready to perform, so that the stress level when school is in progress will be a lot lower, especially when trying to not be a piano bench potato while doing sports and doing well in school.

It takes a commitment of hundreds of hours of time for the teacher, student, and parents to get a student fully prepared for college admissions auditions and the chance for generous scholarships. I need to repeat that Senior year in high school is far too late to think about getting serious about music, if the student hopes to get a full tuition scholarship to any major schools.