

## GETTING STARTED WITH PIANO

by White House of Music



### The Fundamentals of Piano Playing

#### The Piano: A Great Instrument for New Musicians

While many band and orchestra students pick up their instrument from fourth grade through middle school, their first exposure to the world of music is often tied to the piano! It's not unusual to see students starting their musical journey with piano lessons in first or second grade. Depending on the child, we'll even see some students pick up the basics of the piano as young as four years old!

The best time for a student to learn the piano depends on the individual child. If your child can sit down and keep their attention on a task for up to a half-hour, they're probably ready to start taking lessons. For children under five, they may benefit from group music classes where they can sing and learn rhythm basics.

#### Making Music for Life as a Pianist

[Learning to play the piano](#) is a skill that can help guide a child's musical journey throughout the rest of

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their lives. Many of the abilities taught (like learning to read music) can benefit a student looking to migrate to other band or orchestra instruments. Quite often piano students will continue to play for the rest of their lives, taking advantage of opportunities in teaching, playing in churches, or performing in other public venues.

In an academic environment, elementary students can participate in talent shows and recitals. In middle school, a piano student may be proficient enough to accompany their school choir, while high school students can participate in jazz band, theatre productions, etc. Many parochial schools offer private lessons and opportunities to perform pre-service music in church.

There are plenty of opportunities for students to showcase their talents outside of school. From recitals offered at most White House of Music locations to the Federation and Wisconsin School Music Association contests, there are venues available for students of all skill levels. Learning to play the piano develops more than simple musical skills. Research has proven that musical training enhances verbal memory, spatial reasoning, and literacy skills which will reap benefits in other academic disciplines.

Picking up a skill like piano playing and performing in front of an audience can boost a shy child's self confidence. Other life skills enhanced by studying the piano include the ability to set goals and the discipline to follow through to reach those goals. In addition, learning to play the piano provides an outlet for a child's creativity and self expression.

## Musical Development for a Beginning Pianist

While the fundamentals of playing the piano can be learned within a year, it normally takes 4-5 years of lessons for a student to establish a base proficiency. Once a student has reached this level of skill, it will be much easier for them to recall this knowledge in the future.

### Mastering the Basics of the Piano

Training on basic piano technique (correct hand position, posture, articulation, fingering, etc.) involves good coaching and repetition so that correct technique feels natural and becomes a habit. Proper technique will lay the foundation needed to learn harder repertoire as a student progresses.

A teacher should create a practice plan and write down detailed instructions at weekly lessons to help the young pianist stay focused while practicing. This will also help the parents become their child's mentor at home. Communication between the teacher and parent is essential in order for the student to accomplish their musical goals.

### Substitute Practice With Play

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It is important to keep the "fun" in learning to play the piano. Teachers and parents should come up with meaningful incentives such as rewards or contests. This mindset is similar to youth sports in that most children would rather scrimmage than do tiresome drills. Instead of telling your child to practice, encourage them to play for other family members, their friends, or even the household pet! These practice or "performance" sessions can be done live or remotely through an online platform for out-of-town relatives.

As your student's abilities progress, encourage them to play pop-culture tunes they enjoy. Have a "fun book" of sheet music featuring songs from their favorite movies or TV shows that they can play during each practice session. There are plenty of options for students of all interests and skill levels!

### **Piano Practice Sessions: Determining Frequency and Duration**

As with many other instruments, it's always better to have regularly scheduled short practice sessions, rather than the occasional long practice. If your student practices two hours a week, it might be best to have six twenty-minute sessions each week rather than two hourlong practice sessions! It also helps to schedule a practice session the day after a private lesson for improved recollection.

For younger students who are working on fundamentals, 10-15 minute practice sessions offer a good starting point. After 3-4 years of training, practice sessions can increase to 20-30 minutes each day. For High School Class A level pianists, practice sessions may be as long as one hour each day, for five days a week. Your piano teacher can provide feedback on what frequency and duration are appropriate for your student, as this number may vary depending on their goals and ability.

## **What Kind of Equipment Does a Beginner Pianist Need?**

### **Music Books and Sheet Music Downloads**

Piano teachers will typically recommend 3-4 books for new piano students to get them through their first year of study. Faber Piano Adventures, Alfred's Basic Piano Library, and Bastien Piano Basics provide some great starter material. If a student is interested in learning a specific song, White House of Music can also help provide you with a digital download.

### **Selecting a Good Starter Piano**

It's important for a student to learn on a 88 note piano. A 61 note keyboard will hamper your student's development, as they will run out of keys to work with once they have begun to expand their repertoire of music.

An 88 note weighted action digital piano like the Yamaha P-125 offers an excellent portable solution for

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beginner pianists. If you're worried that your student may give up on the piano early on, White House of Music offers a one-year buyback guarantee!

## Some Final Advice for Parents of Beginner Pianists

Successful student pianists require assistance from teachers and parents alike! It is important that you are actively involved with requiring regular practice sessions and that you understand your student's assignments. Kids sometimes have a tendency to forget to bring their music books to class, so it always helps to make sure they have all their learning materials for each lesson! Try to schedule student practice and playtime regularly, like brushing teeth or making their bed to ensure accountability and provide structure to their training.

We often hear adults lamenting over the fact that their parents allowed them to quit piano lessons. Realize that your student will hit plateaus during the process of learning the piano. Encourage them to work through these plateaus as they will be rewarded eventually. Someday your child will thank you for giving them this lifelong gift of music!

If you have any questions about private lessons or the learning process, [contact your local White House of Music store](#) today!

## REQUEST LESSONS

Fill out this form to be paired with a teacher that fits your instrument and scheduling needs!

[Request Lessons Now](#)

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