

Tips for Practicing with Your Beginning Piano Student

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Thank you in advance for your help and dedication to making this a positive learning experience for your child! It is impossible to progress at the piano without regular, consistent practicing, and while practicing is sometimes hard work, it is also very rewarding. You will have to learn a very few fundamental things about reading music, but they will be easy for you to remember, and your student's teacher will be thrilled to explain them to you! The teacher has the chance to see your student only once a week, but you see your child every day – together, united with the student in the goal of successful daily practicing, teacher and parent can make a wonderful team and a force to be reckoned with! ☺ With that in mind, listed below are some things you can do to help your young beginning student, even if you are not a pianist yourself.

Practicing Basics

- Your student needs a place to practice – you can provide an acoustic piano or an electronic keyboard with weighted keys, placed in a quiet room away from the TV and other distractions.
- Chances are that your student has not been born with an innate sense of good practicing habits. You will have to help them remember when to practice by having a time set aside in their schedule, and then helping them to follow through.
- The *amount of time* your student needs to practice each day can vary depending on their level of advancement. However, the fact that they need to practice *every day* will never vary!
- Stay in communication with your student's teacher – they want to see your child succeed as much as you do! If your student is having particular trouble with a certain piece, write a note to the teacher in the assignment book, letting the teacher know of this.

When Practicing...

- Remember that your student will not always love the fact that you are correcting them. That does not mean they do not need you! On the contrary, in these beginning stages, they often lack the ability to self-monitor their success when practicing on their own, and you provide a much better gauge of what needs improvement! Let them know that your involvement and input is requested by their teacher, and will happen as needed.
- Use positive reinforcement whenever possible (e.g. "I know you can play softer than that!"), but don't be afraid to kindly tell your student that they did not play it correctly, and they need to work on that passage/piece again.
- You can ask your student about high and low, up and down sounds – while this may seem basic to you, it is often confusing to a beginning student, especially when there are two keys being played close together.
- You can help your student keep a steady beat by either clapping a steady beat, or counting out loud to 3 or 4. You can also say the type of note your student is supposed to be playing, eg. "quarter quarter half-note." Your teacher will be more than happy to explain these to you.
- Encourage your child to count out loud with you. You may encounter resistance because "it's hard." That's because it is! Your student is using their eyes to read the music, their fingers to play the keys, and their ears to tell them if what they do is correct or not. Asking them to use their mouths as well to count out loud is difficult. However, it has been demonstrated many times that students who count out loud when learning a piece develop superior coordination and an improved sense of pulse. Be patient with your student, but urge them to count out loud with you at least part of the time!
- Reinforce the dynamics (the loudness or softness) with your voice as you count, say the lyrics, or sing.
- Break their pieces down into smaller parts. Don't have the student play the entire piece over again if they only mess up at the very end! Instead, work on the very end with them, and figure out together if it is the rhythm, or the notes, or the way the hands move that is causing the problem. When you have that part worked out, then try the entire piece again.
- Check your student's assignment book regularly to make sure they are practicing everything.