



Making Piano Lessons A Success



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The Purpose

Hey there, I'm Karen, and I'm so glad you're here. As with any learning journey your child embarks on, open communication between the parent, the teacher, and the student is key. Over the past 30+ years of teaching piano, I've seen so many talented students with the potential to thrive who just didn't reach their full potential. Most of the time, it came down to a lack of practice and focus outside of lesson time. That's why I put together this little booklet—not just to set expectations but to offer support and guidance so that the hard work we do during our lessons continues throughout the week.

There's nothing quite like the thrill of playing a piece of music you love and playing it well. It touches something deep inside of you. That's the feeling I want every student to experience. But here's the truth: that magical moment doesn't just happen on its own. It takes dedication, consistent practice, and keeping your instrument in good shape to get there. I know that many parents feel uncertain about how to help with piano practice, especially if they don't have a musical background themselves. My hope is that this little booklet becomes a helpful guide for you at home, because the most productive learning happens in those moments between lessons.

Thank you for being a part of this journey with your child. Let's make some beautiful music together.

With gratitude,
Karen Compton-Dandino

Your Student's Instrument

Acoustic Pianos

There's no substitute for an acoustic piano when learning to play. The sound, the feel, the response—they all contribute to a richer learning experience. But like anything worth keeping, it needs a little care. Keeping your piano in tune and well-maintained isn't just a nice-to-have; it's essential. An instrument that isn't properly maintained can be frustrating to practice on and can actually hinder your child's progress.

Here are a few simple maintenance tips:

- Tune the piano once a year, preferably in the fall after the furnace comes on.
- Use an experienced technician for repairs.
- Repair any non-functioning keys or pedals immediately to avoid bad habits forming.

Electric Pianos/Keyboards

If you have an electric piano or keyboard, that's okay too, as long as it's a full-sized keyboard with touch-sensitive keys. But remember, because electric pianos can still make sound even when keys aren't fully depressed, students must be extra mindful of their touch and technique.

A few tips:

- Keep the volume at least halfway up to support dynamic contrast and artistry—this is why we avoid headphones.
- Ensure the keyboard is on a stand, and adjust the height so it's comfortable for your student.

Location of Your Instrument

Find a quiet, well-lit place for your piano, away from distractions like the TV. Make sure your child isn't reaching up to the keyboard—use a pillow on the bench if needed to get the right height.



Practicing: The Key to Progress

There's a simple truth in piano: successful practice leads to a successful lesson. And the key to successful practice? Repetition and following the Practice Plan at the end of the section

Here's what to listen for during practice:

1. **Repetition, Repetition, Repetition:** I never assign a piece to be practiced just once. Typically, it's one time saying note names, one time clapping and counting, four times playing and singing note names, and four times playing and singing counting.
2. **Practice Hands Separately:** With a new piece when assigned, practice each hand separately to build a strong foundation, focusing on rhythm, notes, and fingering.
3. **Focus on Sections, Not Just Full Pieces:** Longer pieces will be broken into sections to practice using the practice plan on each section.
4. **Count Out Loud:** Counting is essential, whether it's a new piece or recital prep.

Each practice session should include:

- Scales
- Chords
- Arpeggios
- Repertoire

Do's of Practicing:

- Follow all practice instructions and ensure hands are practiced separately only when instructed.
- Count out loud and name all notes.
- Pay attention to hand position, wrist and elbow movement, and sitting posture.

Don'ts of Practicing:

- Don't rush or skip repetitions.
- Don't count silently; always count out loud.
- Avoid poor posture or speed.

Practice Steps

Check off each step after you complete it

1. Name all notes **OUTLOUD** 1X _____
2. Clap and Count **OUTLOUD** 1X _____
3. Play and sing note names **OUTLOUD**
3X _____
4. Play and sing counting **OUTLOUD**
3X _____

Repeat each step for ALL assigned pieces

Parents: Your Role Matters

Your involvement makes all the difference. Find time once a week to be an audience for your child's practice. Your interest and encouragement mean the world to them, and it helps build confidence and performance skills. Remember, they're learning to play in front of others, and your support is crucial.

Recital Preparation

As we get closer to recital time, things shift. The focus narrows to specific pieces, and the practice routine intensifies. Be supportive—this is a big moment for your child! Invite friends and family to listen in, even over Zoom, and encourage them to keep going, even if it feels repetitive.

Wrap Up

I hope this booklet becomes a helpful resource for supporting good practice habits at home. Learning to play and perform the piano is a wonderful, challenging adventure that can last a lifetime. From the very first lesson, we're laying the foundation for future success, and it takes all of us—student, teacher, and parent—working together to make it happen.

Thank you for being part of your child's musical journey. I'm always here if you need me, and you're welcome to join us at lessons anytime!

With gratitude,
Karen Dandino

