

Practice Tips

I. Physical Setting

1. Make sure there is good light and a quiet setting. Avoid placing the piano in a dark, cold basement or adjacent to a frequently watched television.
2. Be sure the student is sitting at the correct height. The forearms should be parallel to the floor. Most students will need a cushion or two under their sitters to be sure that they are sitting correctly.
3. Be sure the student is not sitting too close to the piano. He/she should be able to stretch the arms out with closed fists and touch the fallboard around where the brand name is without having to bend the arms or lean forward.
4. Children whose feet do not reach the floor comfortably should have a foot stool, box, or some other support under their feet.
5. The piano should be kept in tune and in good working condition. I heartily recommend my technician, Mike Reese (305-9193). He's just about the best in the business!

II. Student's Physical State

1. It is wise to avoid practicing when really tired. This leads to poor concentration, improper posture and position and negative feelings towards practice and piano study in general.
2. Posture during practice should be identical to that used in performance: feet flat on the floor with right foot slightly in front of the left, near the pedal, sitter toward the front of the bench, back tall, shoulders erect and down, head balanced freely on spine.

III. Length of Practice Time

1. When determining the length of a practice session, ask yourself how long your child can maintain concentration. As a general rule, it is wise to break practice sessions up into segments of 30 minutes or less, allowing 3 - 5 minute breaks in between to relax and stretch. It may be helpful to

break practice up into several shorter segments during the day, for example, 15 minutes before school or before supper and 15 minutes before bedtime. Students always need to be alert physically for pain or fatigue. Inattentive, careless practicing breeds injuries.

2. It is much more important for a student to practice sections of all assigned pieces carefully than to “warm the bench” for a certain number of minutes. Has the goal been met for a certain piece? If not, more work should be done in order to have it ready for the lesson.

3. A general guideline for amount of time to practice is as follows:

Beginner: 15-20 minutes for the first ½ year, then up to 25 minutes a day, 5 days each week

2nd - 3rd year students: 30-45 minutes, 5 days a week

4th-5th year: Minimum of 45 minutes, 5 days a week.

Beyond that: Approximately 1 hour (or more) 5 days a week.

IV. Managing Practice Time

1. A pianist should warm up (just as an athlete would!) before working on repertoire. Each student is assigned warmups and technical drills that should be practiced at the beginning of the practice session.

2. Mindless repetition of a piece or section is a waste of time. Repetition is useful, but should always have a goal in mind. When repeating a passage, the student should concentrate on a specific physical or musical change, and then focus attention on hearing that change and assessing whether or not the change is effective.

3. Especially when beginning a new piece of music, the composition should be divided into small working sections. This allows for quicker synthesis. Even after working on a piece for a long while, practice in small bits is very beneficial. For more information, see the document entitled “Practice Steps”.

4. A good amount of time should be spent practicing hands separately and slowly. When the tempo is increased, it should happen gradually, but even then slow practice should not be abandoned, especially once the piece is memorized.