Speedy Piano Lessons

Your Guide to Hitting All the Right Notes in 10 Lessons
A Guide to Hitting All the Right Notes

In this e-book, you will find everything you need to know to get started on your musical journey. Inside you will learn the history of the piano, how it works and begin lessons on how you can become a piano player.

Think of it as your very own private teacher, right at your fingertips.

Also included are images, videos and other relevant resources gathered in one place, to help you along the way.

Enjoy the adventure!
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A Brief History of the Piano

Bartolomeo Cristofori of Florence, Italy invented the very first piano during the early eighteenth century. Cristofori’s job was to design and maintain the keyboard instruments used in the court of Prince Ferdinand de’ Medici. The instruments used primarily during this time were the harpsichord and the clavichord. Each of these instruments have similarities to the piano: the harpsichord makes music by plucking strings or quills, while the clavichord is more like the piano in that strings are struck by a metal object. Neither of these instruments is capable of producing a sustained note and they are not able to achieve a wide variety of loudness or softness in their tones.

The new invention of Cristofori was originally called gravicembalo cel piano e forte, which simply means, “harpsichord with soft and loud.” This new instrument used hammers to hit the strings and depending on the pianist’s touch at the keyboard, a key could be pressed lightly (producing a soft tone) or firmly (producing a loud tone).

And unlike the harpsichord and clavichord, this pianoforte was able to sustain a note, for as long as a pianist desired.
Cristofori’s new instrument was smaller and played music more softly than today’s standard piano. The strings that attached the keys were thin and tended to break. By Mozart’s time, the strings were double stranded and the hammers were covered in leather.

During the nineteenth century, the piano underwent many changes. The frame was changed from wood to iron, which allowed the strings to become stronger and thicker. The fortified strings were able to withstand a lot more tension and pressure – Beethoven was known for breaking many strings during a performance because he hit the keys with such force! More strings were added and the hammers were covered with felt to produce a better quality of tone from the new steel strings. Now, let’s meet a few of the early pianists and some of the works they are famous for composing and playing.

Early Pianists and Their Works

Even though the piano was still evolving into the instrument we know as the piano today, keyboard players fell in love with the instrument, because of the dynamic features it had. Since the piano was not limited in dynamics, it allowed composers to create more unique compositions, which in turn, would give the composers a greater ability to affect the emotions of their listeners.
Here are a few of the famous piano players and composers from the 18th to 19th century, who’s contributions to music can still be enjoyed today, throughout the world.

Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809)

Joseph Haydn was born in the small Austrian village of Roharau. He trained as a singer and musician, eventually composing for Prince Esterhazy, who had an orchestra for his royal court. Haydn spent 30 years composing many symphonies and other works. It wasn’t until he left Hungary for London that he realized he was a famous composer. His works had become popular in England and many of his compositions were being performed and his sheet music was popular among musicians. Haydn is considered to be one of the greatest composers of the classical era.
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)

Wolfgang Mozart is perhaps the most well known piano composer of the 18th century. He was born in Salzburg, Austria and became involved with music at the age of 6. Considered to be a musical prodigy, Mozart played the harpsichord, violin, piano and organ. By the time he was 13 years old, Mozart was already famous throughout the world of music, having written symphonies, concertos and sonatas. At the time of his death, at the age of 35, Mozart had produced more than 600 works, almost all of them of the highest quality. He is regarded by many, as a natural musical genius.
Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

Ludwig Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany. He spent a childhood learning music, from singing to playing the piano. When he later moved to Vienna, where he would spend the rest of his life, Beethoven became one of the first composers to make a living without having a benefactor. His nine symphonies have certainly made him famous, but Beethoven wrote many diverse pieces of music, from string quartets, to chamber and choral music.
Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)

Born in Zwickau, Germany, Robert Schumann began playing piano, flute and cello during his childhood. He went on to become known for compositions for chamber music. A hand injury kept him from being able to become a concert pianist, though his wife, Clara Wieck Schumann was a famous pianist in her own right, and she performed many of his pieces, including his concertos.

Clara Wieck Schumann (1819 - 1896)
Clara Schumann was the wife of Robert Schumann. She was born in Leipzig, Germany and began a lifelong study of music at an early age. With her marriage to Robert, Clara became a voice for his compositions, premiering his works as well as composing her own pieces. Together they collaborated on many concertos.

Frederic Chopin (1810 - 1849)

Frederic Chopin was one of the greatest pianists of his day. He began to play at the age of six and by the time he was eight, he had begun to compose music and gave regular concerts. He is known for his expressive piano compositions, which are filled with dynamic elements and other artistic features.
Franz Liszt (1811 - 1886)

Franz Liszt was a composer and pianist, perhaps best known for his solo recitals that filled up concert halls in Europe. He wrote music for the piano and also transcribed many popular orchestral works for the piano, as well. Because of his showmanship and the music criticisms he wrote, Liszt was a dynamic personality in 19th century music.
The Versatility of the Piano

As a pianist, you can play an incredible variety of musical styles, ranging from classical music to the contemporary hits of today. More music has been written for the piano than for any other instrument; not only because the piano has been popular for so long, but also because playing the piano is like having access to an entire orchestra at your fingertips! The low notes go lower than a double bass and the highest notes can reach greater heights than the smallest piccolo. You can glide from note to note, smoothly and seamlessly just like a violin, or you can pound the chords as if you were banging a drum. You can play single notes or play thundering chords, both subtle melodies and complex pieces. A piano allows you to play the melody and the accompaniment at the same time, giving you the flexibility to sing along or play duets with other instruments. We’ve seen what a piano is capable of, let’s take a closer look at how the piano is put together.

Getting to Know the Piano

A piano is one of the biggest musical instruments you can buy. Even the smallest upright piano is five feet wide and over three feet in height. They take up a great deal of floor space and easily weigh over 400 pounds.

The piano comes in many different styles, designs, shapes and sizes. Pianos have two basic categories: the vertical and the horizontal. Let’s take a look at the differences and similarities between the two types.
**Vertical Pianos**

Vertical or upright pianos, are instruments that are distinguished by their height and the position of their strings. The height of a vertical piano ranges from between 36 to 60 inches.

The upright or vertical piano is the usually the most popular choice for beginning piano students for a variety of reasons including; affordability, space available and the warm sound produced by the soundboard. The soundboard is vertical, with dampers and strings stretching downward and hammers and dampers horizontal to the board. The vertical piano takes slightly longer to achieve resting position because the hammers strike outward, or horizontally. The support base of the soundboard, including the wooden reinforcements, can be seen on the backside of the upright piano.

Uprights are typically less expensive, though depending on the model, can sometimes exceed the value of a grand piano. A five-foot upright can match a standard horizontal piano, in terms of rich tone quality and depth of sound produced. The keyboard is essentially the same and similar to the grand piano, there is a great deal of variety in material construction.
Grand Pianos

Grand pianos are the largest piano type, and usually viewed as the most majestic and expensive. Grand Pianos (also known as horizontal pianos) are characterized by horizontal soundboards sometimes stretching up to 4 feet, from front to back. The soundboard is encased in a supportable opening platform that lifts on the left in an upward direction. Dampers lie on top of the strings, adjacent to the hammers, which are also horizontal. The casing is "bottomless", which lets you see the soundboard support base. Keys consist of wood coated in ivory, or sometimes pure ivory, depending on the piano's manufacturers and classification. The grand piano has the standard 88 keys and sheet music platforms. Grand pianos are said to produce finer tones and have a reputation for responsive key action.
Although there are many different types of pianos, they are all constructed in basically the same way. The inside of piano resembles a harp, with strings that range in size from thick (to produce low notes) and thinner strings (for high notes). The sound is created when a small felt-covered hammer, which is connected to the keys, strikes the strings.
In addition to, or in place of a typical acoustic piano, you can choose to play on a digital piano. Sometimes, due to lack of space or financial limitations, a portable music system is the best option. Let’s look at some of the different choices available.

- **Computer**: Most computers allow you to expand the opportunities for your piano playing with a MIDI system. MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. Basically, a MIDI keyboard plugs into your computer and translates the notes you play (including their sound and other relevant data) into codes. These codes can then be read and converted to sound through...
the computer’s speakers. If you connect a piano keyboard you can have the computer print out the notes you play and also record your playing, for feedback.

- Digital Piano: Another alternative is a digital piano – some digital pianos look and feel like the real thing. Look for one that has small hammers built into their actions to mimic the feel of a real piano. These keyboards come with names such as hammer action or weighted action. Another good thing to look for is a touch sensitive keyboard, where the sound gets louder if you play harder, just like an acoustic piano.

As digital pianos and computer software become more advanced over time, the sounds produced become more sophisticated and the options include sound effects, editing and recording – something an acoustic piano cannot replicate. However, as a piano player, the differences between an acoustic piano and any other keyboard option gets bigger, the better your piano playing technique gets. An acoustic piano allows you to add a certain quality and nuance to your playing that a digital piano or computer keyboard cannot duplicate - at least not yet!

Digital pianos and software programs cost less, are easier to maintain, take up less space and never have to be tuned. Acoustic pianos will cost several thousand dollars and need more space, but they produce an unparalleled quality of sound and playing satisfaction. They also tend to hold their value and with proper maintenance, provide a lifetime of musical enjoyment.
Most pianos have 88 keys: 52 white keys and 36 black keys. The white keys are called naturals and the black keys take their name from the surrounding white keys by adding “sharp” or “flat” to the white key’s note names. These keys are arranged in alternate groups of two and three black keys. This layout makes it easier to find the notes you want to play. For example, the white key located just before two black keys is always the C note. The key found before a group of three black keys is the F note. There are always eight white keys between C notes and this group of eight notes is referred to as an octave. Within each octave are five black keys. The 88 keys add to more than seven octaves, which allow you to play very low notes from the highest notes, to everything in between. The most important note to remember on the keyboard is Middle C, found in the middle of the keyboard. This note is also known as C4, as it is the fourth C on the piano, counting from the left. The A note is the note to which most instruments are tuned. This note can be found six white keys to the right of C4.

Each key operates a hammer, inside the piano. When you press down on a key, the corresponding hammer strikes one or more strings. The longest, thickest strings produce the deepest sounds, while shorter strings produce the higher sounds. The lowest range on the piano uses one string per tone, while the middle range uses two strings and the highest range needs three strings for the most reverberation. The harder you strike the key, the louder the sound. When you release the key, the sound stops immediately.

You can manipulate the sound with the pedals of the piano. Most pianos have three pedals: the damper pedal, the soft pedal and the sostenuto, or sustain pedal. The pedals are located at the base of the piano, under the keyboard and you control these pedals with your feet.
**Soft Pedal:** The left-most pedal is the soft pedal, and on the grand piano, it softens the sound of notes. When played, the pedal shifts the keyboard slightly to the right, so that the hammers hit one less string. When Bartolomeo Cristifori invented the *una corda*, or soft pedal, he wanted a mechanism that would soften the sound of notes that are already meant to be played softly, to enhance the effect.

**Sostenuto Pedal:** The middle pedal is not used as often as the other two, but its effects are quite remarkable. Italian for “sustain”, this pedal holds the dampers down when pushed, which allows the pianist to sustain any note, while the rest of the keyboard is unaffected. The selected notes will stay sustained until the pedal is released. This way, sustained notes can be heard alongside other notes being played. The sostenuto pedal is on virtually all grand pianos, but less expensive upright pianos do not offer this pedal. Often times with a vertical piano, the sostenuto is replaced by a practice pedal, which muffles the sound so you can practice without disturbing those around you.
**Damper Pedal:** The right most pedal is called the damper pedal or loud pedal and it is often used more than the other two combined. It is called the damper pedal because it holds the dampers up, preventing them from dampening the strings. This effect lets the strings ring out, until you release and lift your foot off the pedal.

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**The Language of Music**

Music is its own language and just like learning any new language, you’ll need to study the fundamentals before you can become fluent. Of course, learning to read music is not required to be able to play the piano. Many good pianists can’t read music; they’re often the ones who can play a piece of music after hearing it played once. But if you
want to expand your music vocabulary, there are some advantages to learning how to read music:

- You have access to thousands of music books, which means you can play songs without having to hear them first
- You become more of a musician, not only a pianist
- If you can read music, you can write music, too – imagine composing your own songs!

An Introduction to the Musical Staff & Notes

Piano music is written on special paper that has two sets of lines and spaces. Each set is called a staff. Each staff contains five lines and four spaces. The lines and spaces represent notes on the piano. The placement of a note on the staff indicates how that note is supposed to sound. A note placed on the top of the staff will sound higher than a note placed on the bottom. For piano players, there is one staff for the right hand and one for the left hand, with both instructions on the same five lines. A clef is used to indicate which hand plays which note. For the right hand, a treble clef, for the left, a bass clef.
Clefs, Notes and the Staff

Clef is French for key and is the symbol that appears at the beginning of every piece of music. Using these clues, you can work out the position of every note on the staff, for both the right hand and the left hand.

On the staff, notes tell you what to play. Each note gives you two pieces of information – which key to play and how long to hold each note before you play the next note.

When you look at a piece of music, you notice that notes have different shapes. Some have tails, some have solid note heads while others are hollow. Each type of note lasts for a different number of beats. Here are the note counts:

- **Whole Note** – A white (hollow) note head without a stem (a line extending from the note head). This is played for four counts, which means you strike the key and hold it for a count of four.
- **Half Note** – A white note head with a stem. A half note lasts two counts.
- **Quarter Note** – A black note head with a stem. A quarter note lasts one count.
- **Eighth Note** – A black note with a flag stem (a stem with an extra flag on the side). This lasts one-half count.
- **Dotted Half Note** – A half note, followed by a dot. This note is held for three counts. A dot after a note always gives the note an additional one-half of the value of the original note.

Rests are markings on the staff that indicate when you are to observe silence. They measure time, just like the notes.

- **Whole Rest** – Rest for four counts
- **Half Rest** – Two counts of silence
- **Quarter Rest** – One count of silence
Now that we’ve spent some time reviewing notes and rests, let’s work on using the piano notes to play some simple melodies. The main goal here is to use the letters of the piano keys to play simple songs. All of the songs in this lesson are relatively easy and will be well known. As you learn to play each piece, you are also learning to control your fingers and becoming familiar with the keyboard.

Before you begin practice, please keep in mind some important tips:

- The keyboard is divided into twelve keys, repeated several times along the keyboard, forming several octaves. The letters of the white keys are A, B, C, D, E, F and G and together they form what is known as the musical alphabet. The letters which correspond with the black keys are C#, D#, F#, G# and A#.

- The following simple song will only feature the white keys
This first song is a familiar melody, “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” The keys in this piece are C, D and E. To challenge yourself once you’ve mastered the song, practice with your right hand and then switch, and practice with your left hand.
Playing the Notes & Additional Musical Notation

The notes have been introduced and you have had practice corresponding letters to keys, so now it is time to learn some additional musical notations. As discussed previously, along with the keys there are sharps, flats and naturals. The black keys take their names from the surrounding white keys, by adding a sharp or a flat to the white key. A sharp tells you to play the black note just up from the white note with the same name. So a C# is the black note found just up from C, just between C and D. Whether on the treble clef (right hand) or bass clef (left hand) part of the staff, a sharp sign before a note usually indicates that the black key just to the right of the white key shown by the note.

A flat note is just the opposite of a sharp; instead of moving up, you move down the keyboard to the next black key. A natural sign cancels out a sharp or flat, when necessary. This means to go back to the original white key and do not flat or sharp the note.

An accidental is a sharp or flat note that is not part of the key signature (you will learn about key signatures in the next section). This sign tells you to flat or sharp a note for the whole measure and then return to the old key signature in the next measure.
**Rhythm**

Music has a basic rhythm or beat. When you tap your foot along with your favorite song, you are responding to the rhythm of the music. Rhythm is produced when multiples of beats are grouped together into larger units called bars or measures. This pattern of beats determines the rhythm of a piece of music. Here is an exercise to get used to counting “in time.” Count steadily from 1 to 4 and then repeat the sequence a few times, like this:

1-2-3-4/1-2-3-4/1-2-3-4/1-2-3-4 repeat

every time you return to the beginning of the sequence, you are at the start of a new bar.

Now, combine what we’ve already learned about the value of notes and put it together with what we know about rhythm. A whole note lasts for the duration of a whole bar of music. A half note lasts for a count of two, so two half notes make up a bar. A quarter note lasts for one beat, so there are four quarter notes to every bar. Basically, you can put any combination of notes in a bar of music as long as they add up to four. Who knew you would be doing math while you learned how to play the piano?!

**Key & Time Signatures**

In this section, you will find out how to determine the key and timing for each piece of music you are playing. The staff contains very valuable information and will guide
you while you are learning a piece of music. When you look at a piece of music, at the very left of the first measure, you will notice two important signatures: the key signature and the time signature. The key signature consists of sharps or flats on certain lines or spaces, located at the beginning of the staff – right after the clef sign. The key signature is important because it tells you what key the piece of music is written in. The key signature acts as the game rules for the entire piece, it tells you if a note is sharp or flat and other valuable information.

The time signature is found at the beginning of the staff, to the right of the key signature. It is typically two numbers, one over the other. The top number tells you how many counts or beats to a measure. The bottom number refers to the note value. The most common time signature is 4/4. In the case of 4/4 time, the top 4 indicates that each measure will have four beats. This means that all of the notes in the measure should add up to four beats (one whole note, two half notes, an half note and two quarter notes, and so on). The bottom 4 tells you what kind of note gets one beat or count. A quarter note gets one beat, an eighth note gets one-half beat, a dotted half note gets three beats, and so on.

**TIP:** When you are just learning about time signatures, it is a good idea to get in the habit of counting aloud while you play the piano. Speaking the counts out loud, such as “one and two and three…” will help reinforce the time signature and note value of the piece you are practicing. Make it a habit to count aloud while you are learning! Eventually this will become second nature and you can count
the notes in your head.

**Tempo**

Tempo is a word that describes the speed of the piece of music, how fast you should play. Tempo is important because it describes what style of piece the composer had in mind when he wrote the music. Tempo indications are often written in Italian. Here are the most common tempo markings and their descriptions:

- largo – very slow
- lento – at a much slower rate
- adagio – still meaning slowly
- andante – moving pace or walking tempo
- moderato – moderate speed
- allegretto – quick pace
- allegro – lively
- vivace – quickly (a little bit faster than allegro)
- presto – very fast
- prestissimo – faster than presto

All of these terms are subjective, which means you have to decide what “lively” or “walking tempo” means to you. It is a good idea to keep the tempo slow to start, until your playing becomes more fluid. As you become more confident in your playing, you can increase the speed at which you play. Two other terms that are often used with tempo have to do with how the notes are played on the piano. *Legato* is Italian for smoothly and means the notes are meant to be played joined together in seamless fashion. To play legato, hold each note just until you have played the next one and release the first note at the exact moment you strike the second one. This helps the music flow, without any gaps in the sound. The opposite of legato is *staccato*, which is the Italian word for detached. The notes are not meant
to be joined together, but to be played with gaps in the sound.

A metronome can become your new best friend when it comes to controlling tempo and rhythm. It isn’t always easy to keep perfect time when you are learning something that is technically tricky. A metronome acts like a drummer, banging out a series of beats that help keep your rhythm, timing and tempo consistent. It is only natural to slow down when a difficult part of the music is coming up, or to speed up when a melody is familiar. Using a metronome regularly when you practice, will help maintain a steady beat throughout the piece.
Let’s take time to practice a second song. Practice first with your right hand And then your left. The letters you will use for “One Love” by Bob Marley are C, D, E and F.
Warming Up & Fingering

Fingering, knowing which finger to put on which note, is one of the most important elements of developing good piano technique. Fingering is a sequence of practiced physical moves that give your mind and body a pattern of motions. You need to practice fingering in order to improve the strength in your fingers.

**TIP:** Your fourth finger is not as strong as your other fingers. Place your hands on a flat surface and lift each finger individually. All fingers move easily, except the fourth finger, which seems a little weaker and wants to stay attached to the little finger. Practicing the piano and doing finger exercises will help all of your fingers to become more flexible.

Good fingering is concerned not only with hitting the right notes at the right time, but also with how you play the notes. The correct fingering helps the pianist be able to technically perform a piece, solidly learn it and realize the musical meaning. When you find yourself wishing you had complete control over each of your fingers, take a look at your hands at the keyboard. It is not a natural fit! All of your fingers are different lengths, and each finger has a different set of muscles and a different way to make the keys go down. Fingers get exercise everyday, when we write, shake, wave and point. But when you put your hands on the keyboard, your fingers need some extra help to make the music sound like you want it to.

Developing control and agility comes with warming up each finger. Here are a few simple exercises you can do to get your fingers ready to play:

- Give your joints, muscles and bones in one hand a gentle massage with the other hand. Squeeze, stretch and rub your hand – whatever feels soothing,
then switch to the other hand.

- Spread your fingers into a wide span, palms down. Squeeze your hand into a fist, bringing your thumb all the way under your pinky so you make an X with the thumb and pinky under the other fingers. Spread your hands into a wide span again. Bring your hand back into fist and repeat it with your thumb crossing under your fourth, third and second fingers.

- Make a tight fist and wrap your thumb across the outside fingers. Expand all of your fingers in a comfortable stretch. Close your fist again, with the thumb tucked inside fingers two through five. Repeat with both hands, alternating the thumb position.

- Warm up your wrists by holding your hands in front of you, palms facing away – as if you are signaling “stop” with both hands. With a loose motion, slowly circle your hands both clockwise and counterclockwise.

Finger strength comes with freedom of movement. When you feel tense, or keep your muscles tight, you restrict your movement. You want your hands and wrists to feel comfortable but they also need to be strong. Warming up and exercising your fingers and hands will help you play at your best, every time you sit down to practice.

Be aware that fingering that seems comfortable and playable at a slow learning tempo may be difficult when the tempo gets faster. Try out different types of fingering (play with the tips of your fingers or hit the notes with the flat part of your finger) to see what feels most relaxed for you. Once you decide on a particular fingering, stick with it!
Playing Position, Posture and Hand Position

Good playing position, posture and hand position are essential when playing the piano. They will keep your muscles from getting tired and sore as you play.

Proper Playing Position

Playing position refers to how you situate yourself in front of the piano. Similar to how you adjust yourself when you sit in front of your computer, or at your desk, you’ll want to adjust your body and piano stool to achieve the greatest comfort level possible. Start with a common sense approach – make yourself comfortable in a stable, balanced position so you can easily play and read music, with plenty of room to move freely. Piano players can get so caught up in the complication of reading notes, fingering and keeping the rhythm, they forget about the position of their bodies. Remember to keep track of your comfort level and make adjustments as needed while you play.

If you’re too close to the piano, you can cramp your arms and hunch your shoulders. If you sit too far away from the keyboard, you tend to overreach, putting stress on your neck, upper arms and shoulders. Be sure you’re sitting facing the middle of the keyboard. You want to feel comfortably loose, with enough room to move freely and enough support to feel light and long in the upper body and head. Pull your stool or bench in far enough that your knees are directly under the keyboard. A good way to measure if you are at the right height is by ensuring your elbows are even with the height of the keyboard when you are sitting at the piano, with your hands in playing position. You should see a slight arc from the elbow to the top of the wrist and back down your hand to the keyboard.?

You should be able to move easily in either direction of the keyboard, just enough to follow and support your arms when they reach from the low to middle to high
Good posture is all about supporting your body while you play the piano. It means keeping your shoulders lowered and pulled back. Here are some tips to help you establish good posture while you are playing the piano:

- Align your body so that your shoulders, neck and head are supported from underneath
- Plant both feet firmly on the ground, with your knees right above your feet
- Sit evenly, with you weight equally distributed along your bench or chair – you should feel stable and secure
- Don’t let your weight fall back, sit up straight and feel a line of support run up through your spine to the top of your head
- If you raise your shoulders or hunch and lean, this will create tension in your neck and shoulders which will lead to soreness in you arms, neck and shoulders
- If you feel like your back is rounded, your chair may be too far from the piano, causing you to slump while you play
- Breathe in and out to feel relaxed
The video below covers some of the important steps in developing and maintaining good posture while you learn the piano. Good habits instilled early on become a way of life!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InqmH-o1cX0

Get a Grip on Proper Hand Position

Good hand position involves your fingers and your wrists. Your hand should feel fully supported by your arms and shoulders, all the way through to the wrist. It is important that you don’t let your wrist fall below keyboard level. Your wrists should be high enough that your fingers make a slightly curved shape with your fingertips on the keys. Curl them loosely, as if you are holding an imaginary ball. You can also try placing your relaxed hand on your knee, covering your kneecap. Then, lift your hand from your knee to the keyboard and it will be in the proper, curved position. As you move up and down the keyboard, try to keep this shape and feeling, limiting the twisting motion in the wrists.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeGzVM4ydwo&feature=related
An Introduction to Scales

Scales are the basis for most of the music you are familiar with, from classical to rock and roll, and everything in between. Scales are, at the simplest level, collections of notes that sound good together and provide the core notes used in any piece of music. Knowing your scales and being able to play them effortlessly, will help you build a solid groundwork for playing the piano.

Just like learning your ABC’s when you begin to read, the time spent on developing your scales may not seem very exciting. It is essential to build a good foundation in scales so that you will be able to build on your playing, becoming more proficient and able to expand your piano repertoire. Mastering scales and playing good music go hand in hand, so let’s look at some of the reasons you should add a variety of scales practice into your daily piano work out goals:

- Playing scales is a workout, similar to going to the gym. Instead of working out your whole body, you are focusing on your fingers and arms.
- Scales increase your strength, enabling you to play harder pieces and play them more accurately.
- The more you practice your scales, the more control you will have over your finger dexterity. As you begin to practice, the synapses in your brain that control your fingers will get stronger and become more powerful. This translates into playing harder pieces with less effort.
- Playing scales on a regular basis will help you create a smoother touch on the keys, keep a steady pulse when you play and add a layer of elegant sound to your performance.
Even just five minutes a day, set aside for practicing your scales drills, will help you take out the bumps between notes, giving you a smoother, more controlled feel when you play notes.

Instead of focusing on the repetitive nature of scales, think of this practice time as an opportunity to challenge yourself and make your overall playing more enjoyable. Learning to play scales well is the key to understanding the very nature of piano. Keep at it and you will only see positive results in the time you invest!

**Major Scales**

Piano music scales are a series of notes in ascending or descending order that present the pitches of the key or a mode, beginning and ending with the tonic (the first note) of the key or mode. Are you familiar with the “Do Re Mi” song from the musical, *The Sound of Music*? The five-note major scale is basically the first five notes of this scale: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, and So. Why stop at five notes? Simple – a pianist has five fingers so the five-note scales, also called pentascales, have five notes. Learning how to move comfortably around the first five notes of all the scales in a simple, five-finger position helps you focus. Instead of worrying about moving all over the keyboard, you can concentrate on controlling each finger. The pentascales introduce you to the first five notes of all 12 scales, one for each black and white key.
The starting note of the pentascale is the key in which you are playing. For example, as illustrated above, the C scale starts on C. The rest of the notes in the scale are either a half step apart from each other (from one note to the very next note) or a whole step apart from each other (two half steps). Each key has its own combination of white notes and black notes; when you are playing in a key, you are using those notes most of the time, and you end and begin on the same note, giving your piece a sense of completion and finality.

Each major scale has a parallel minor scale, which means they share the same notes. The corresponding natural minor scale for C major is A natural, as seen here:
In this illustration, you can see how the C major and A natural scale are parallel to each other.
An interesting side note: while major scales usually sound happy and upbeat, most minor scales are often used to compose somber or sad music.

**Chromatic Scale**

This scale is made up of all the notes on the piano, one after another, in a series of half notes. Below is a video on how to practice your chromatic scales in a unique and interesting way:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipwRCoYhLQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipwRCoYhLQ)
How to Practice Scales

When you make practicing your music scales as part of your everyday schedule, here are a few guidelines to help you:

- Start with just five minutes day
- Play slowly at first, to give your body a chance to learn the muscle memory
- Use the following sequence to get the most out of your practice: first practice scales with your right hand, then switch to your left hand. Next use both hands; first in a counter movement (by placing each thumb on the same key, moving in opposite directions) then try a parallel movement (both hands are playing the same notes, but using different fingers moving in the same direction)
Getting comfortable on the keyboard not only involves teaching each finger which note to play and when to play it, it also involves being able to move your hands from one place to another on the piano. A simple way to get at ease is to practice the same patterns in different octaves. For example, you can start by playing the pentascale in C, then start the same pattern on a different C, then yet again on a different C.

A Quick Look at Intervals

An interval is the space between two notes. Using the C Major scale as an example, the interval between the C and D is a second in the scale. Following along with the example; the distance between the C and E is a third, C to F is a fourth, C to G is a fifth, C to A is a sixth, C to B is a seventh and C to the next C is an eighth. An interval of an eighth is also called an octave.
Playing Chords

When you play more than one note simultaneously, this is called a chord. You can play a chord with the left hand or the right hand, or with both hands at the same time. Playing chords is one of the greatest pleasures of piano playing because you are able to bring out the full range of sounds and full harmony of the piano.

To get your piano to really sing out, you need flexibility in the wrist to increase your playing speed when you play chords. To balance the notes, to create a sound that is smooth, you need control in your fingers to vary the quality of your touch. You want to learn to play chords with a relaxed approach, so that you can improve your technique and gain a better sound without awkward hand positions or stiff fingers.

Practicing chords should become a part of your daily practice routine. You want to make it a habit to develop fluid motion in your chords and release muscle tension as part of your cycle to practice with each chord.

It is important to keep tension from building up in your hands, arms and fingers while you play chords. Because chords require a certain amount of muscle tone and firmness in the finger joints to be able to play, you want to monitor your body for any tension that occurs while you play. As you practice, be sure to breathe through your body with deep breaths, to keep the air...
Finding the natural places to relieve tension during a piece depends on the type of choral passage you are playing. During a rest, you have an obvious chance to relax your hands and take a deep, cleansing breath. On long-held chords, you can release the tension building up in your muscles while holding down the notes and you can find quick breaths as you play staccato notes.

The key is not to hold on to any stiffness. After playing a chord, or series of chords, consciously let your wrists relax and absorb the weight you’ve put into the keys. As you press down on the keys, feel the weight travel to your wrists where it is absorbed and released with a slight bounce. It is important to maintain enough muscle tone and shape in your hands and fingers to hold down each chord note.

TIP: In order to learn how to play chords in different positions, you have to be comfortable with the feel of the chords. Not only do you have to get used to seeing what the chords look like in a piece of music and learning how it sounds, you have to know what the chord feels like with your hands. As you practice, your hands will remember the chord position in the future.

Each time you strike a chord note, you are playing the role of sound engineer, as well as pianist. You get to decide which notes you want to bring to the front and which notes you want to play quietly. You can custom balance each chord with some
subtle changes in your speed and the lightness of your touch. The piano, for all
its size and force, is designed to transmit and amplify the nuances you bring to each
piece of music. When you want to bring out a certain note within a chord, try a
gentle touch on the other chord notes. This will help bring down the volume and allow
the emphasized key to ring through, loud and clear. Experiment with this technique
the next time you sit down to practice chords, see if you can highlight different
notes to fine-tune your chord “voicing.”

Special Techniques

As you become more familiar with the keyboard and how to move about the
piano, there are a few techniques you can try that will help expand your
enjoyment of this instrument:

**Crossing fingers over and under:** This is just what it sounds like, a way to move
all over the keyboard without having your fingers end up in knots! With this
technique, you move your fingers over or under each other. Sometimes your
forefinger needs to cross over your thumb and sometimes the notes demand your
thumb to move under your forefinger. How to practice:
Play an F with your right thumb and then play an E with your second finger. Now play a C with but instead of using your third finger, use your thumb. Notice how your thumb crosses under your forefinger.

Next, place your thumb on G and play an E with your second finger. Note that your forefinger is crossing over your thumb.

Practice crossing over and under until it feels more comfortable. The easier you can move around the keyboard, the faster you will master more difficult pieces.

**Using the Pedal:** The piano is like having a whole orchestra at your fingertips. One of the instruments a piano resembles is the percussion instrument. It produces a pitch that has a quick attack when you strike a key quickly, releasing the hammer to strike against the string. If you hold the key down, you notice the sound tapers off, because you’re keeping the damper inside the piano off the string, letting it vibrate freely. After you let go of the key, the damper returns to stop the string from vibrating which stops the sound.
Good pedaling is all a matter of timing and listening. Check to make sure that your foot is in the correct position, resting lightly on top of the pedal. Your heel should stay in contact with the floor and you can use your toes plus some of the ball of your foot, to press the pedal down. Pedaling should not affect your posture, so if you find yourself shifting around to accommodate the pedal, you may need to find a new position. Have fun trying out the pedals to sustain a note, or chord. Experiment with different pressures on the pedal and timing throughout a piece of music.

**Developing Dynamic Control:** With today’s advancements in modern technology, a computer can play the piano, with speed, accuracy and technical precision. What a pianist brings to the performance is emotion, nuance and artistry. These aspects of shaping notes into making music are developed through a few key elements. To influence a piece of music, the pianist has a range of tools to choose from; loud, soft and everything in between. These elements are known as dynamics.

Using dynamics is more than just playing loud or soft, it is a matter of when you change the volume and how you change the sound. Do you crash down on a chord to emphasize emotion or do you play a measure softly, to relay a feeling of calm? These are all part of taking the audience (and the piano player) on an emotional musical journey. The energy of a piece of music has an ebb and flow, a
range that is determined by speed, volume and use of dynamics. Try practicing your scales and piano pieces with emotion, play by building to a climax on the high notes (crescendos) and bring a song gently down to an inevitable resting point (decrescendos). Here are some more Italian lessons for piano players, which will help you develop dynamic control – these are listed from softest to loudest, with the abbreviations included:

- Pianissimo (pp)
- Piano (p)
- Mezzopiano (mp)
- Mezzoforte (mf)
- Forte (f)
- Fortissimo (ff)

In addition, here are some other common terms that composers will use to give the pianist guidelines for inflection:

- Szforsando (sf) — suddenly loud
- Crescendo (cresc.) — getting louder
- Decrescendo (decresc.) — getting softer
- Diminuendo (dim.) — getting softer

**Articulation:** This has to do with sound, not just the amount of volume produced, but rather the quality of the sound, or tone. There are two key components to
articulation, legato and staccato. Both of these deal with the way the pianist touches the keys while playing.

- Legato touch: This term is based on the Italian term, which loosely translated means “no tie.” What this means to the piano player is that a smooth sound is required, with no gaps. This is achieved by holding down the first note until the second note is played, then quickly releasing the first note.

- Staccato touch: This term is the opposite of legato, it is almost as if the keys on the piano are suddenly too hot to touch, and the pianist must remove his/her fingers as quickly as possible. Staccatos range from light and quick, to loud and heavy. You can practice hitting different keys at various strengths, to practice your technique for legato and staccato.

All of these techniques will help your piano playing skills, through both technical proficiency and artistic expression. You understand that sound is created by a touch of a finger, which leads to a strike on a felted hammer against a string. You only have control over one aspect of how a string is struck – the force of the motion that causes the hammer to hit the string.
Pianists can create different tones on the same instrument through a unique combination of dynamics, articulation and other expressive techniques. Why not join their ranks and liven up your next practice song, which is London Bridge is Falling Down. See how many different ways you can bring this song to life. Once you’ve mastered the simple songs here in this Piano e-book, you can take the practice and techniques you’ve learned and challenge yourself with longer and more complicated pieces of music.
London Bridge

London Bridge is falling down,  
G A G F E F G

Falling down, falling down.  
D E F E F G

London Bridge is falling down,  
G A G F E F G

My fair lady!  
D G E C

Build it up with iron bars,  
G A G F E F G

Iron bars, iron bars.  
D E F E F G

Build it up with iron bars,  
G A G F E F G

My fair lady!  
D G E C

Middle C
Practice, Practice, Practice!

Playing the piano is a lot like doing any sport or athletic endeavor. As with any nimble activity, doing well is based on learning and mastering a series of precise, fundamental movements. For pianists, that means learning standard fingering for common passages and then applying that knowledge to more complex and difficult technical passages, as your musical experience expands.

There is no quick fix or magic formula to playing the piano well. Playing the piano is in large measure, a matter of making a daily commitment to help you achieve the goals you have set for yourself. As you develop your skills, you learn that the basic patterns and rhythms you have been introduced to here, can be changed, adapted and altered to fit any situation. But it is important that the basics be in place first.

You can learn to play the piano without knowing how to read music or without a teacher to instruct you, but there is no substitute for practice.

How long you need to practice depends on a combination of factors such as, your natural talent and what you want to achieve. Many accomplished musicians practice for hours everyday, to keep at the top of their game. You may not want to become a professional, but you do need to know that the more you practice, the faster you will learn. Most beginners can make noticeable improvement when practicing for thirty minutes a day.

If playing half an hour at a stretch seems like too long, try breaking it down into more manageable chunks of time. Divide your practice time into two 15 minute
sessions or even 3 ten-minute sessions. Establishing a daily routine early on, will give you the framework on which to build your piano playing.

It is a good idea to set a goal for each practice session, or for the week ahead. Rather than focusing on how long you need to sit in front of the piano, decide on a goal (learning a new chord, memorizing a scale or completing a whole song). This will help you focus on the music instead of the clock and will encourage you to play more and more each time.
As you practice this simple piece, you will find that you are able to identify all of the piano notes on the keyboard much faster. Once you are able to easily identify the notes and play the song fluently, you will then move on to the next level.
With a little practice, you can go from here...

To there...

II

Allegretto scherzando
Amazing Composers & their Piano Exercises

What better way to learn the piano then to study with the greatest composers of all time?! Both people who’s names you know well, to those you’ve never heard of before, but will love getting to know, have written plenty of piano exercises to keep you busy for years.

The most difficult exercises will be a challenge for even a concert pianist, but many are as useful for teaching music today as they were centuries ago. This list is by no means all that is available; it simply represents a select few collections, from a select few composers.

If you find the music too challenging to play at this time, you can still listen to these works, for inspiration.

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)** *Fifty-One Exercises* are pure exercises, not performance pieces. Of course, with Brahms as the composer, each piece has a musicality all its own. This is a real workout! (Published by G. Schirmer)

**Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)** Chopin wrote two books of Etudes, *Opus 10* and *Opus 25*, which covers a full range of technical skills. (Published by Henle)

**Muzio Clementi (1752-1832)** *Gradus ad Paranimsum* *(The Art of Playing the*
Pianoforte) is a wide variety of pieces, in a range of forms and styles. These exercises are from beginners to advanced pianists. (Published by Kalmus)

Karl Czerny (1791-1857) Here is someone who studied with Beethoven and Taught Franz Liszt—now that’s an impressive feat! He wrote hundreds of lessons for all levels. Some of the volumes include, Study Pieces for the Beginner, 24 Studies for the Left Hand and The School of Legato and Staccato. (Published by G. Schirmer)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) These 12 Etudes include two volumes on studies For Repeated Notes and For Octaves. (Published by Durand)

Enrique Granados (1867-1916) Six Expressive Studies are for intermediate level players but the music is so beautiful, you won’t even feel like you’re working! (Published by Masters Music Publications)

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) Truly a showman and performer in his day, Liszt not only performed but composed some technically complicated and musically challenging exercises. Transcendental Etudes are difficult to play, but easy to listen to. (Published by Edition Peters)

Edward MacDowell (1861-1908) His Twelve Studies are fun to practice and fun to simply listen too, as well. (Published by G. Schirmer)

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) Piano Music for Young and Old has something to offer everyone – the 24 short pieces are filled with tons of exercises for hands in five-finger position. Not too long and not too hard, perfect for every level. (Published by Wilhelm Hansen)
**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)** His *Etudes-Tableaux* show off top notch technique, with complex and highly expressive exercises. (Published by Boosey & Hawkes)

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**Inside an Upright or Vertical Piano**

**Musical Styles**

There are as many different styles of music as there are personalities who want to play the piano. A quick exposure to the many different types of music will give you more choices of music to play, as you progress in your piano education.

**Ragtime:** A favorite piano style that pianist and composer Scott Joplin made popular. Ragtime is dance oriented and the rhythm is syncopated, with a unique beat. Ragtime became popular during the early 1900’s and was one of the forerunners of jazz.
**Jazz:** This is a musical style many are familiar with; from free-form to Dixieland and Big Band, the smooth sounds of jazz come in many forms. In jazz, you must learn some jazz elements to give your music that distinctive flavor. Study and practice the chromatic scale and jazz lines for the right hand.

**The Blues:** The Blues and jazz are very similar, although the blues are generally slower and more somber. The melodies can be haunting, while the lyrics speak about the troubles in this world.

**Boogie Woogie:** If you love to dance, chances are that this style of music will get your toes tapping! This style began in the 1930’s and continued strong into the 1940’s when the big band sound was becoming popular.

**Country:** While most country music is associated with Nashville TN and parts of rural America as Appalachia, country has its roots in Ireland, England and Scotland.

**Rock ‘n’ Roll:** Fun to listen to, dance to and play – popularized in the 1950’s, Elvis Presley made ‘n’ roll famous. Jerry Lee Lewis was an early performer who enjoyed sliding his fingers up and down the keys, to great effect during his performances. You can practice this technique yourself – the gliss (short for glissando) is touching all of the white keys, going up and down the keyboard, using just your four fingers, but not your thumb. Turn your hand over, so that the front side of your fingers (the knuckles) are face down on the keys.

**New Age:** This is one of the newest styles of music, giving the listeners a feeling of calm, a meditative feeling. While some of the music sounds abstract, New Age is really a blend of musical tunes
Finding Your Own Style

Now that you’ve been introduced to some of the different styles of piano music, you can decide if there one in particular that appeals to you. Or you can create your own style with improvisation. When you create your own version of a song, without directly copying the original melody, you’re improvising. To improvise, is to take the original combination of notes and chords that make up a song and play around with the tune, changing it as you see fit. This is a good way to have fun with making music and you may invent your very own signature style!
A Collection of

Famous Piano Compositions

Chopin—Polonaise in A flat major op. 53
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFvqvZOtCF0

Brahms—Lullaby This classic tune is known and loved by all

Debussy—Claire de Lune, “moonlight”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIsQPdC9YnY

Beethoven - Fur Elise
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mVW8tgGY_w

Schumann - Traumerei
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq7ncjhS qt k

Mendelssohn - Spring Song Famous piano solo

Bach - Prelude No. 1 in C major
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0egJr6nvCQI

Satie - Gymnopedies No. 1
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBiPQKK1upk
Chopsticks—this easy, two-hand children’s piece dates back to the mid-nineteenth century

Dvorak - *Humoresque No. 7*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4yUeb06QfY
The Scheme of a Grand Piano

1) Frame
2) Lid, Front Part
3) Capo Bar
4) Damper
5) Lid, Back Part
6) Damper Mechanism
7) Sostenuto Rail
8) Pedal Mechanism Rod
9) Pedal Mechanism Rod
10) Pedal Mechanism Rod
11) Pedals—Right Sustain/Damper, Middle Sostenuto, Left Soft/Una Corda
12) Bridge
13) Hitch Pin
14) Frame
15) Sound Board
16) String
Inside a Grand Piano

1) Key
2) Capstan
3) Wippen
4) Regulating Screw
5) Jack
6) Hammer Flanges Screw
7) Drop Screw
8) Hammer Shank
9) Repetition Lever
10) Hammer
11) Back Check
12) Damper Lever
13) Damper Tray
14) Spoon
15) Damper
16) String
17) Plate
18) Agraffe
19) Tuning Pin
20) Pin Block
Glossary of Musical Terms

**accent** – a sharp, flat or natural note that is added to a note

**accidental** – a note that is not in the diatonic scale, or the sign (sharp, flat or natural) that is used to signify it

**articulation**—the way in which notes are played and connected (for example, smooth and signing, or short and abrupt)

**chord**—more than two notes played together

**chromatic scale**—a scale made up all the notes on the piano, one after the other, in a series of half steps

**contrary motion**—two hands play mirror images of each other; when the left hand descends, the right hand ascends and vice versa

**crossing over/under**—the technique of moving your fingers over and under each other

**dynamics**—changes in volume

**flat**—lowering a note by a half step

**half step**—the distance from one note to the very next note on the keyboard
**interval**—the distance between notes

**key**—the tonal center of a piece of music

**key signature**—the number of flats or sharps in a key

**legato**—playing notes one after the other with a smooth, connected sound; the first finger does not leave its key until the second note has sounded

**measure**—notes grouped in a repeating number of beats according to the time signature

**metronome**—a device that ticks to help the musician keep strict time

**natural sign**—an accidental indicating that a note that would normally be played sharp or flat is to be played without the sharp or the flat

**octave**—a note that is eight notes above a note and has the same name

**pentascale**—a five-finger pattern consisting of the first five notes of any given major or minor scale

**pentatonic scale**—a five-note scale consisting of the first, second, third, fifth and sixth notes of the major scale (major pentatonic); or the first third, fourth, fifth and seventh notes of the natural minor scale (minor pentatonic)

**progression**—a series of chords

**scale**—a group of notes that supply most of the melodic and harmonic material
in a song

*sharp*—raising a note by a half step

*sostenuto pedal*—the middle pedal that holds down only the notes that are played when it is pressed

*staccato*—an articulation indicating that the note is to be played short, as if touching a hot stove

*step*—two half steps; a distance between two notes; also called a whole note

*sustain pedal*—the pedal on the far right, which lifts all the dampers so that the strings are free to ring

*tempo*—the speed in which a piece is played

*time signature*—the fraction or sign at the beginning of the piece that indicates how many beats are in a measure

*una corda*—the pedal on the right, also known as the quiet pedal
Here you are at the end of one journey, but at the beginning of another – may the knowledge and information you have gained from this e-book be an inspiration for you always...