

The Parents Guide for Beginning Piano Students

By Eric Rinehart of Eric's Piano School

Welcome to the delightful world of piano learning! As the parent of a beginning piano student, you play a vital role in your child's musical journey. This guide aims to provide you with professional, yet friendly advice on how to best support your child as they embark on this exciting adventure.

The Piano Setup

1. *A Communal Space:*

I have heard from many families that placing a piano in a communal space leads to more piano practice. If your living room tends to get distracting, finding a smaller room with less interruptions can be best. Invest in some headphones if you need a quiet living room.

2. *Piano Bench Height:*

Ensure the piano bench is at the correct height for the student. A student should be sitting at the front half of the piano bench. When their hands are on the keys, their forearm should run parallel to the ground. Height should be adjusted using something uncompressable like the books in the image, rather than a throw pillow which will compress when a student sits on it. Additionally, their feet should be flat on the floor. If a student is too short to be able to reach the ground, a bathroom foot stool should be used to ensure that a student can maintain their posture.

[Here is a great option:](#)

3. *Quality Piano Lamp:*

The importance of a quality piano lamp cannot be underestimated, even during well lit parts of the day. This assists with focusing on the sheet music and reducing eye strain. [Here is a great option you could get for your piano.](#)



Practice Recommendations

1. Set a Schedule:

Regular, consistent practice is more effective than sporadic, lengthy sessions. Consider 15-30 minutes daily for beginners at a consistent time of the day. Use a timer. As a student progresses through their piano journey, piano practice demands will increase to reflect the growing number of responsibilities they have to their studies. It's easiest to move to this intermediate level having built a strong habit of practicing at shorter intervals first.

2. Create Goals:

Discuss with your child's teacher to see what they should be working towards each week, and how to best use their practice time.

3. Review Old Material

In addition to their weekly assignments, students should play through their active repertoire once a week. A good target is to have at least 3 pieces a student can play at any given time. It's okay to give some pieces a rest, while also valuing the hard work they put in to so many pieces.

Learning Timeline: From Beginner to Advanced

The journey of learning piano can be divided into distinct phases, each with its unique characteristics, challenges, and rewards. Here's a glimpse of what you and your child can expect: Challenges to Anticipate.

Phase 1: Early Beginner (Year 1)

In this initial phase, the primary focus is on:

- Understanding Basics: Learning the notes, basic rhythm, and hand positioning.
- Building Foundations: Building the habit of regularly playing in-between classes. This will become especially important as the child gets more advanced.
- Enjoying Music: Playing simple songs and melodies to foster a love for music.
- Parental Involvement: Regular encouragement and interest in practice sessions.

Challenges:

- Adjusting to the discipline of regular practice and understanding that progress comes with time.
- Self-directing their practice sessions with quality.

Phase 2: Intermediate (Year 2-4)

This phase signifies growth and more nuanced understanding:

- Exploring Genres: Introduction to various musical styles like classical, jazz, or pop.
- Piano Examination: After a healthy foundation has been established, for those that are interested, Eric's Piano School is a member of the Royal Conservatory of Music, and our students are invited to participate in piano examinations to validate their hard work in their piano lessons.
- Performance Opportunities: Encourage participation in school talent shows or recitals. At EPS we have 2 recitals every year. A fall and spring recital.

Challenges:

- Handling Increased Complexity: Managing more complex pieces and rhythms which greater levels of demand on their time to practice.
- Consistent Practice: Balancing practice with other activities, increased social obligations, increased academic demands as the child grows older.
- The newness of the pursuit of piano has waned, giving rise to an understanding of the process of the learning process not being a linear process.

Phase 3: Advanced (5-8 Years)

As the student matures, the advanced phase represents preparation for professional paths:

- Mastering Repertoire: Focus on challenging pieces from different musical periods.
- Technical Proficiency: Perfecting technique, expression, and performance skills.
- Preparing for Auditions: If interested in a professional path, preparation for auditions at collegiate conservatories or music schools.

Challenges:

Technical Mastery: Overcoming the technical difficulties of advanced pieces.

Artistic Expression: Developing a personal style and emotional expression through music.

Preparing for Professional Auditions: Managing the stress and expectations of preparing for auditions at a high level.

By understanding this timeline, you can better support your child in each phase, aligning expectations and efforts to cultivate not just a skilled pianist but a true lover of music.

Recommended Softwares and Tools

Technology can enhance the learning experience, and here's a list of recommended tools:

Educational Software

1. [Piano Marvel](#): Piano Marvel is a piano learning software designed to enhance a student's ability to read sheet music. As a student of Eric's Piano School we will happily provide you with premium account upon request.
2. [Piano Adventures Player](#): This app accompanies the Piano Adventures Series, providing amazing backing tracks for all the method book material, enhancing the experience and making it more enjoyable to learn their foundations!
3. [Note Rush](#): This is a great visually appealing app for kids that reinforces note recognition.

Piano Examinations through the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM)

The Royal Conservatory of Music offers a structured system of examinations that are recognized worldwide. These exams provide students with valuable benchmarks in their musical journey and can lead to accredited certifications. Here's what you need to know:

The Importance of RCM Examinations

- **Standardized Assessment:** RCM exams provide an objective evaluation of a student's progress by seasoned examiners.
- **Goal Setting:** Working towards these exams can instill a sense of purpose and direction in the student's learning path.
- **Recognition:** Achieving different levels of RCM certifications can be prestigious and helpful in academic applications or professional pursuits in music.

Levels and Grading

RCM examinations are divided into different levels, ranging from preparatory levels to advanced (ARCT) diplomas.

- Preparatory to Level 4: Suitable for beginners and intermediate students.
- Levels 5 to 10: For more advanced students, with increasing complexity in technical skills and repertoire.

- ARCT Diplomas: The pinnacle of RCM's program, with a focus on performance, pedagogy, or composition.

Exam Components

The examinations generally consist of several components, including:

- Repertoire: Performance of selected pieces from the RCM syllabus.
- Technical Requirements: Scales, chords, and arpeggios.
- Ear Tests: Assessing listening skills and musical perception.
- Sight Reading: Reading and playing music at sight.
- Theory Exams: Separate written exams to assess understanding of music theory (required at certain levels).

Preparing for Exams

- Syllabus Review: Obtain the RCM Piano Syllabus to understand specific requirements for each level.
- Professional Guidance: Consider engaging an RCM-certified teacher to guide the preparation process.
- Timely Registration: Keep an eye on registration deadlines and examination dates on the RCM website.

Participation in the RCM examination process can be a rewarding experience that brings structure and prestige to a student's musical education. Whether aiming for personal enrichment or professional aspirations, these examinations offer a well-defined path towards musical excellence.

Conclusion

Embracing your role as the parent of a piano student is an enriching experience. With the proper placement of the piano, a balanced practice regimen, and the right tools, you can create a supportive and joyful learning environment for your child. Should you have any more specific concerns, don't hesitate to consult with your child's piano teacher or a piano professional in your area.

Happy music making! 🎵

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