

Piano lessons with Jane Ogilvie

Things I encourage and expect from students and how you can help at home:

1. **Practice habits.** I cannot stress enough the importance of developing consistent practice habits. Daily practice is recommended. At least 5 days a week is essential for students to progress and develop the ability to work through new challenges. Students who consistently practice less than 4 days a week will have trouble progressing and tend to lose interest. It is helpful to build practice time into a routine (right after school, right before supper, before going out to play). Please make sure you have an appropriate chair or bench so that your instrument can be played properly and consider how you can minimize distractions nearby during practice periods. During periods of heavy studying, older students may find they need to break their practice session into shorter periods during the day. A 10 - 15 min block of piano practice is a great break from extensive homework and studying.
2. **Recommended daily practice lengths.**
 - 1st year or children aged 5 & 6: 10 - 15 min
 - 2nd year and older beginners: 20 - 25 min
 - Piano grades 1 to 5: 30 min
 - Piano grades 5 to 8: 45 min
 - Piano grades 9 and above: 1hr minimum, splitting this into 2 sessions can be helpful
3. **Keeping track of practice.** Students are provided with an age appropriate method of keeping track of their practice during the week. It's important that the student learn to keep track of their own progress and I encourage them to be honest and to track their practicing themselves. We will often do this at the lesson and you can greatly assist by gently reminding them to mark their chart at the end of each practice day (as opposed to at the end of the week). Please do not fill the chart out for them, either to save time or as a way of monitoring them, as this defeats the overall purpose of helping them to become responsible learners.
4. **Being responsible for lesson materials.** I encourage students to dedicate a bag for bringing books to the lesson and to create a space at home that is uniquely for piano materials currently being studied (leaving them in the bag when not practicing is an easy solution). A simple cloth bag is the best, as complicated binders and folders with pockets often damage books and take a lot of time to pack up. If you have a pile of other piano books at home, please encourage your child to keep their current books separate so they don't get lost in the shuffle.
5. **Taking care of your books and books I lend out.** I cover all of my books to protect them as they do get a lot of use. Some wear and tear is expected so please don't worry if one day the cover falls off and please do not repair my books yourself with tape or staples as this can do more damage than good. Students are encouraged to be gentle with all music books and to only ever use a pencil when making marks inside them. This practice then carries through when borrowing books from friends or the library. Always having a pencil and eraser handy to your instrument is essential at home.

Piano lessons with Jane Ogilvie

6. **Taking care of the instrument.** All students are required to wash their hands upon arriving at their lesson. I often do this with children to reinforce the idea that it is a regular part of approaching the piano. I take very good care of my piano and clean the keys regularly with a microfibre cloth. The practice of washing hands immediately before playing the piano prevents the spread of germs and promotes respect for the instrument. You can make a rule of never allowing food or liquid on the piano as this can cause an incredible amount of damage if it spills inside. **Please note, students should not attend their lesson in bare feet.** This is not only unhygienic in an area that all students share, it also destroys the finish on the piano pedals. In the summer when sandals are often worn, a simple solution is to leave a pair of socks in the practice bag.
7. **How much assistance to give.** I prefer that parents do not stay during the piano lesson. If your child is more comfortable having you there for the first few lessons then I ask that you use the waiting area so you are a minimal distraction for your child. As soon as possible it is preferred that the students are given their independence to be responsible for their own learning. This includes packing their required books for their lesson, working through their practice material on their own, trying to find a way to answer their own questions and remembering to check their homework books so they know what to focus on each week. Of course you may help your child if they need help understanding my instructions but I prefer if you lead them to find the answers themselves and as much as possible encourage them to practice on their own.
8. **Questions or concerns about your child's progress.** If you have any concerns about your child's progress please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email. It is preferable to begin the discussion between parent and teacher before involving the student. If you are wishing to speak to me in person regarding other matters, please do so at the beginning of your child's lesson so as not to take time from another student's lesson.
9. **About keyboards.** Keyboards are a perfectly good starting instrument for a beginning student. Their two main downfalls are that the keys are much easier to press than a piano and therefore finger strength is not developed as rapidly, and they often do not have the functionality of touch response that allows the performer to control the volume of sound by the strength of finger pressure. These are two problems that eventually need to be addressed if a student is to progress. I usually recommend no more than 2 years of lessons on a keyboard that doesn't have touch response and weighted keys. Another more hidden problem that can arise with keyboards is if the student is allowed to practice with headphones on. I really discourage this practice. Though it can be nice not to be disrupted with the noise of someone practicing and headphones can block out sounds around the student while they play, ultimately I have found that students who regularly practice with headphones on eventually develop problems in the long run. Often their practice habits decline, and many become uncomfortable playing in front of others. The most damaging result is it fosters the idea that practicing or playing the piano is an annoyance for those around them. The best thing is to promote the idea that there is a welcome place for the practicing and playing of music in your home and your lives.