

# McLelland Piano Studio

## Practice Expectations and Recommendations, Revised July, 2017

Regular, concentrated, daily practice plus regular lessons and group classes will lead to a student's progress. Each student will progress as quickly as the assigned material is sufficiently mastered. Learning how to practice correctly is a *process* and requires dedication, diligence and consistency from both student and parent. Students are expected to observe the following guidelines to enable advancement and ultimate enjoyment of music.

- Pre-college students of all ages will need parental guidance to help them develop the practice habits which will ensure success.
- Quality of practice is much more important than quantity. If you find that you are losing concentration and making too many mistakes, take a quick (20 second or 1-minute) break. Get a snack. Stretch.
- It is important to practice immediately following each lesson, the next day at the latest.
- Generally speaking, it will take a *minimum* of the following in order to successfully master each week's assignments – it is possible, and sometimes advisable, to divide the practice session up into shorter segments scheduled throughout the day:

Expectations for student's practice are reasonable and vary according to the experience of the student. Students will be taught how to have a "quality" practice session and set both short and long-term goals for themselves.

Level	Length Of Study	Practice Recommendation
Young Beginner	first 3 months of study	10-20 minutes daily
Beginner	6 to 9 months of study	20-45 minutes daily
Early Intermediate	2nd year students	30-60 minutes daily
Intermediate	3rd year students	45-60 minutes daily
Advanced	4th year +	one hour+ daily

### Assignment Notebook and Practice Record:

- It is helpful for students to keep a weekly practice journal. Pre-college students are required to fill-in a weekly practice chart which a parent or guardian must initial.
- Refer to the weekly assignment sheet which includes goals and objectives for the week and additional reminders of upcoming events.
- Students should refer to the current week's assignment sheet at the beginning of each session to help organize the practice.

- Parents of pre-college students should also refer to the assignment sheet several times throughout the week.
  - ✓ Current assignments have a date at the top of the music. Once the assignment is mastered, “off” is written over the date. At this point, the student is no longer responsible for practicing this assignment however it is always fun to go back and play-through older repertoire.
  - ✓ Continual re-assignment of a piece would suggest the need for more effective practice. (Long term “polish pieces” for recitals and festivals being an exception).

## Metronome:

- ✓ **All students must own a metronome.** Metronomes can be purchased at Alabama Piano Gallery and Ellis Piano (both on Hwy 31 in Hoover), online, or other music stores. It is not necessary to have the most expensive model but students should be able to work the metronome on their own (eventually). **It is now possible to download metronomes on cellphones and tablets and some of the apps are free. Students are required to use the METRONOME and COUNT ALOUD while practicing.** Counting silently can only be mastered after years of counting aloud. There are also wonderful metronome apps available (some for free) such as “ProMetronome” for your iphone or ipad or tablet. Additionally, the “Piano Maestro” app will be free for students because of the teacher’s subscription payments. There are other apps which you can purchase such as “MusicLock”, “Whack-a-Note”, “Dragon Scales”, “Note Rush”, “Dust Buster”, “What Note”, “Piano Star”, “Flashcards” and new apps appearing almost every day which are highly recommended for your home practice.
- ✓ **Please make sure that your metronome is working properly, supplying with new batteries as needed.**
- ✓ Clap difficult rhythms while counting aloud before playing.
- ✓ Always choose a tempo which is SLOW ENOUGH to avoid stops, stumbles, and mistakes.
- ✓ Always “pre-count” with the metronome (aloud) before playing.
- ✓ Gradually increase the speed of the metronome, 2-3 notches at a time max.
- ✓ Once a piece is up to performance tempo, continue to include practice at slower and medium speeds.

## Keyboard Theory and Technic:

- ✓ Students begin each practice session with their required KT&T for the week. (Example: If C Major and A Minor are assigned for the week, practice all required scales, chords, arpeggios, intervals for these keys.) Students should also continue to review previously mastered scales/chords, rotating keys each day.

- ✓ **KT&T portion of each practice session will easily constitute at least 5-15 minutes.**
- ✓ Requirements, based upon age and level, can be found in assignment notebooks, online, and/or in AMTA Theory book.
- ✓ Students should also include several minutes in EACH practice session, focusing on the development of proper technic. At the top of each week's assignment sheet there will be a specific technic challenge -- students should practice this item several times in each practice session, always carefully examining their form and motions.
- ✓ Developing proper technic is just as important as mastering the correct notes. A MIRROR placed by the piano and VIDEO cameras or cellphones/tablets are useful tools for students to examine their alignment and movements.

## Proper Seating:

- ✓ **SIT CORRECTLY:** Good piano playing is only possible if we are comfortably seated at the piano. Therefore, at the beginning of every lesson, recital, audition and practice session, we arrange our piano bench so that it's the best height for playing and the best distance from the piano.
- ✓ A **home visit** to assist the student in determining the proper seating position may be required if deemed necessary by the teacher. Here are photos of students sitting correctly so that it is possible to balance and rest down in 3 places -- feet, sit-bones, fingers on keys:



- ✓ **Correct bench height** is achieved when the bottom of elbow is level with, or *slightly higher* than the tops of white keys when the arm is hanging freely from the shoulder (elbow not holding out, shoulders not raised). Most benches, even adjustable artist benches, are not high enough. Please make sure that your bench can be adjusted as necessary – appropriate benches should be able to be raised as high as 18.5" to 22" high.

**Purchase locally:** Ellis Piano in Hoover, AL carries some wonderful benches – just make sure it is adjustable to the appropriate height.

Additionally, there are some wonderful benches available at [www.PerfectlyGrand.com](http://www.PerfectlyGrand.com)



Hydraulic adjustable bench – Code #G5569

[http://www.perfectlygrand.com/piano\\_benches\\_and\\_stools.html](http://www.perfectlygrand.com/piano_benches_and_stools.html)



\$269.99 – Code #10220

<http://www.perfectlygrand.com/Low%20Price%20Modern%20Artist%20Bench-pg-10220.html>

If you cannot afford a bench that adjusts to the proper height, then use foam squares,



(such as the interlocking gym/play floor mats available at local stores, or camp pads for sleeping bags (cut into individual squares), magazines, carpet sample squares, phone books, folded blankets or any item which is somewhat firm. Soft pillows do not allow for proper balance and torso weight shift.

- ✓ **Where to sit on the bench:** We sit on the front 1/3<sup>rd</sup> or 1/2 of the bench to allow balancing forward toward the instrument, not feeling “perched” on edge of bench, and not sitting with too much thigh on the bench which prevents the torso from moving freely from the hip joint. To TEST for correct balance: try to lift your feet. If you have to fight not to tip forward, then you're balanced correctly.
- ✓ **Correct Bench Distance:** The bench should be the correct distance – be careful not to position the bench too close to the piano. To test: sit on front part of bench, make a fist with both hands, then straighten the arms. You should be able to reach the piano fallboard, yet not have to lean back significantly.
- ✓ Use a **foot stool** or pads/phone book if the feet do not easily reach the floor – with feet and heel flat on the floor.



The feet should never dangle, nor should the legs be crossed or tucked under the bench nor extended out in front of the body.

## How to Organize Practice Session:

During the lesson, students are taught how to practice at home until the next lesson. If in doubt, remind student to “practice at home just the way we practiced in the lesson.”

- At home students will then master all of the assignments listed in the Assignment Notebook prior to the next private lesson.
- EACH practice session should include:
  - ♫ Keyboard Theory and Technic (scales/chords etc.)
  - ♫ Sight-Reading and/or Flashcard Drill
  - ♫ Repertoire (old and new pieces)

### ♪ Written Theory Assignments

- It is suggested that students **DIVIDE** each assignment and spread throughout the week. For example, if there are 2 pages of written theory assigned for the week, complete 1 or 2 questions in each practice session, (don't wait to complete the assignment in the car on the way to the following lesson etc.). If there is a new piece, concentrate on a few measures or lines each day plus review the sections previously learned.

## **Sight-Reading:**

Each practice session should contain at least 5-10 minutes (a couple of minutes for younger students) of sight-reading. Ideally this is at the beginning of the session. Sight-reading can include flashcard drill, specific assignments in books such as Faber's "I Can Read Music" or Bastien's "Line a Day". It can also include ANY MUSIC that is at least 1-3 levels easier than current reading level. For example, go back and read pieces from easier method books that were not completed the first-time-around OR even go back and read pieces which were completed, yet not memorized and polished. Intermediate+ students can sight-read ANYTHING they can get their hands on .... (hymns are fabulous!)

## **Isolating Difficult Passages in Music - "Target Practice"**

- ✓ Drilling small, difficult sections extra is the most important step in productive practice and enables you to accomplish the most success in the shortest amount of time!
- ✓ Keep a pencil at the piano. Study the music score silently BEFORE playing, observing corrections and suggestions made by composer and teacher. MARK the score with pencil (fingering, counting, circle a rest, add a sharp etc.)
- ✓ Isolate difficult sections and past mistakes for extra drill. Repeat this SMALL section (1-2 measures or less) several times UNTIL THE MISTAKE IS CORRECTED. Trick: At a slow enough tempo to be able to "think in terms of words" and analyze, play a few notes before the mistake, STOPPING on the corrected mistake. Repeat 8 times.

**For additional suggestions** on how to practice successfully, please visit articles at [www.McLellandPiano.com](http://www.McLellandPiano.com), [PracticeSpot.com](http://PracticeSpot.com), or browse materials and periodicals available at the Hoover studio. At any time during the year, please feel free to contact me if you experience frustrations with managing and organizing home practice sessions.