HOW TO MOTIVATE

Teenagers (especially boys)
To play the piano!

1. **Ask your teenage students what they want to play.** I know this sounds simple, but it’s surprising how many students are never asked what music they would like to play. Now I’m not saying you should let them have free reign to choose everything they play (but that sometimes works as well). I am saying that students will likely show more interest in playing something they want to play, and may want to put more time and effort into practicing the piece because it is their idea. They have great ideas and should be listened to. They do know what they like and don’t like and should be allowed to voice their opinions on the subject.

Every piano student is different! Find out what makes them unique and that will make all the difference in how you teach them and also in how they learn!
2. **Teach jazz, blues, ragtime, new age, show tunes, and popular pieces of today or in the same style, that the students want to play because they choose to play them.** If they don’t want to play the music, everyone will be miserable. Have them play their music with fun, cool minus tracks if possible (minus tracks are audio backings of additional instruments where the piano part has been removed). Teach the theory of the piece they are playing.

3. **Once a piano student can play a song as it is written, teach them how to change the style of music.** As an example, I challenge my own students to come up with 10-20 variations or arrangements of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”, “Mary Had a Little Lamb”, or any other simple piece. Then you can teach them the many fun left hand patterns that can be used with any song of their choice *(there are hundreds)*. You can visit this link on my website to see a few ways to improvise “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”: musicmotivation.com/blog/how-improvise-twinkle-twinkle-little-star-piano.

4. **Teach with technology (use digital recorders, computers, camcorders, the internet, phones, tablets, apps, etc.).** Watch YouTube videos with your students, use music notation software to compose and notate the students’ original compositions and arrangements (I prefer Finale for music notation, but there are many great notation software programs out there), and have students learn to add other instruments with a recording software program (I prefer Logic Pro, but, again, there are many options). Mix up piano lessons to include technology training.

5. **If students begin to lose interest in the pieces they are working on (it happens to everyone), it’s not a bad thing.** Simply choose a new piece and start over. There is no need to keep playing something the student doesn’t enjoy and the teacher can’t stand listening to any longer. Move on! A fun idea is to have the students turn their music upside down and have them play it that way. The bass clef becomes the treble clef and the treble clef becomes the bass - great for sight reading!
6. **Ask students to learn the piano music from their favorite video game** (this is a great link to get started: [www.ninsheetmusic.com](http://www.ninsheetmusic.com)), **and also their favorite movie, or television sitcom**. Students enjoy learning music they like and know. It can be something they have heard on their i-pod, the internet, seen on a YouTube video, or something they love listening to. Familiarity is fun! They also enjoy playing cool music for friends - especially when their friends recognize the music and like it.

7. **Teach composition and arranging.** I have found that students are intimidated at first because it is new and they have never done it before. Once they get past the initial intimidation of the unknown, many actually thrive and excel at composing and arranging on the piano. Playing the “notes on a page” is a wonderful talent to develop and a great gift to share with others. But I tell students it should not be the end all and be all of playing the piano or any other instrument. Reading music is just the beginning, not the end. Challenge your piano students to compose one new piano solo per month (see number 4 for notating their music).

8. **Have a piano “Jam Session” with your student.** Do a dueling piano duel with your piano student. Invite others to attend. It can be a home concert with family and friends. Ask their friends who play instruments to accompany them (with guitars, bass, violin, cello, saxophone, clarinet, etc.). Getting them to perform in a cool, laid back setting is the ticket!

Your piano students want and need a personal piano teacher. It’s okay to be a little informal and have FUN with students. Don’t be all business when teaching. Connect with the students on a meaningful level. Be professional, but be a friend and mentor to your piano students.

Themed recitals are great for younger children. Having “Cool Concerts” or Jam Sessions is the way to connect with teenagers. Invite them to ask their friends who play other instruments or sing to perform with them. That helps them all work together and feel a sense of shared success with their friends. It is also a great incentive and motivator for them to share their music with their friends. They’re hanging out and having fun! When that happens it’s magical!
I hope these ideas give you some fun ideas to help motivate and inspire your teenage piano students! Have fun and enjoy making musical memories!

Have a beautiful day! Smile all the while and **BE HAPPY!**

Keep up the great work everyone!
Thank you for continuing to inspire me.

JERALD (your *Music Mentor™*)

First and foremost, Jerald is a husband to his beautiful wife, Zanny, and a father to his wonderful children. Jerald Simon is the founder and president of *Music Motivation®*. He is a composer, author, poet, and Music Mentor™/piano teacher (primarily focusing his piano teaching on music theory, improvisation, composition, and arranging). Jerald loves music, teaching, speaking, performing, playing sports, exercising, reading, writing poetry and self help books, and spending time with his wife, Zanny, and their children. Jerald created musicmotivation.com as a resource for piano teachers, piano students, and parents of piano students. He is the author/poet of *"The As If Principle"* (motivational poetry), and the book *"Perceptions, Parables, and Pointers."* He is also the author of 18 music books from the *Music Motivation® Series™*. He has also recorded and produced several albums and singles of original music.