The Best Practice Habits for the Piano by Jerald Simon

Some people just naturally have a knack at excelling in all areas of life, or so it would seem. These individuals seem to instantly pick up and retain new information, as well as learn new foreign languages, instruments, skills, hobbies, and more. It can appear that they must have some magical formula for doing everything. In truth, it all boils down to developing the ability to start something, follow through with it, and finish whatever it is. This is as true of learning to play the piano as it is with any other skill, hobby, or speciality. Learning to play the piano is all about learning how to practice and train the eyes, ears, mind, fingers, and body to work together to make music. This

“There’s nothing remarkable about it. All one has to do is hit the right keys at the right time and the instrument plays itself.” – Johann Sebastian Bach
entails everything from learning to identify, comprehend, and play the notes (and knowing all of the note names, values and positions on the piano), to understanding the articulations, dynamics, technique, and personal artistry. Here are 12 helpful ideas for practicing the piano:

1. Have a set time each day to practice the piano (i.e. you could practice for 30 minutes every morning at 7:00 A.M.) By having a set time each day, you develop a habit for practicing/playing the piano every day because that is your PIANO TIME. It’s the same each day and you know every morning when you wake up that you have a designated amount of time that is set aside solely for practicing the piano. It could be first thing in the morning or it could be the last thing you do before you go to bed. You may prefer practicing when the sun is shining in the sky or you may be a night owl and don’t actually get going until two in the morning. The key is to have the same time every day. It is better to be consistent and frequent than inconsistent and infrequent. If you don’t have a set time you may try to “play” or “practice” whenever you have a free moment - which will never happen. Everything else will come first and take priority over the piano. To avoid this, simply have a set time each day. The more you practice the piano, the better you become.

2. When you practice the piano, have an idea of what you will be practicing. Know what you will practice on the piano. Better yet, have an outline breaking down your piano practicing schedule. You can visit this link on my website to download an outline idea of what to practice: [http://musicmotivation.com/a-simple-practice-schedule-for-piano-students](http://musicmotivation.com/a-simple-practice-schedule-for-piano-students)

3. It’s a good idea to stretch out, do jumping jacks, pushups, or work out a little before practicing the piano. By doing so, you get your blood flowing through your body and stimulate the neurons in your brain and will do a better job of paying attention and...
focusing on your piano practicing. You should also have had something to eat and drink. If you can, take a big drink of water before you practice.

4. When practicing the piano, make sure you actually practice what you are working on. Some students may have a tendency to spend much of the practicing time looking at the ceiling or floor, or even looking at the clock or timer to see if somehow it will magically speed up. Focus on your practicing and don’t worry about the time.

5. It is better to spend 30 minutes to an hour playing in one setting. If you would like to practice several hours a day, break it up so you are not spending the full time in one block chunk. It is best to do several smaller practice sessions than trying to practice for hours on end with no break.

6. Break the piece down into sections. If there are six lines (stanzas) in a song, break down your practicing and only play one line per day, but perfect that one line. Try playing the right hand (5 - 10 or more times), then play the left hand (5 - 10 or more times), then play both hands together (5 - 10 or more times). Sometimes this can be helpful, and at other times you won’t need to play the same line over and over again. But always remember that repetition, when done correctly and frequently, is the recipe for success. The more you practice something, the better you will become as you develop muscle memory, dexterity, control, skill, confidence, and improve your overall ability.

7. Practice smarter, not harder! Playing something for hours on end will not necessarily make you a musical master. You need to practice your piece in an intelligent and practical way as well.

8. Tell your family and friends to check up on you and help you practice the piano. Sometimes we have difficult days and need a little more encouragement. Let your family and friends help motivate and inspire you.

9. Set little practice goals each day, week, and month. Give yourself a simple checklist or to-do list to help keep you on track of where you currently are and where you want to go with your piano playing. A little direction can go a long way.

10. Have a home concert where you invite your family and friends to hear you perform a piece. It does not need to be a big event and you don’t need to make a lot of fuss over it. Think of it as practicing in front of others. Just invite a few friends over and have a piano playing party. It’s fun and encourages you to keep focused with your piano practice. You can even practice with friends or siblings and encourage and motivate each other to be better!

11. Make time to just play around on the piano. Practicing the piano and working on your theory, repertoire, form, technique, etc., is good and all, but you need to make time each day to just sit down and play for fun on the piano. It could be anything from improvisation, to composing, to playing the latest and greatest pop piece. Whatever makes you excited to sit down to the piano is what you need to do!
12. Have fun. Don’t forget that even though practicing the piano is a lot of work, it should also be a ton of fun! Make music and have a good time!

If you will follow these simple suggestions when you practice each day, and make it habit to practice every day, you will see yourself gradually improve and gain more confidence as you become better at playing the piano.

Here is something I tell all of my piano students:

If you come to piano lessons each week and walk away only having learned about music notation, rhythm, and dots on a page, then I have failed as a Music Mentor. Life lessons are just as important, if not more important than music lessons. I would rather have you learn more about goal setting and achieving, character, dedication, and personal improvement. To have you learn to love music, appreciate it, and play it, is a wonderful byproduct you will have for the rest of your life – a talent that will enrich your life and the lives of others. To become a better musician is wonderful and important, but to become a better person is more important.

As a Music Mentor I want to mentor students to be the very best they can be. If you choose not to practice, you essentially choose not to improve. This is true in any area of life. Everyone has the same amount of time allotted to them. What you choose to do with your time, and where you spend your time, has little to do with the activities being done and more to do with the value attached to each activity.

I believe it’s important to be well-rounded and have many diverse interests. I want students to enjoy music, to learn to be creative and understand how to express themselves musically – either by creating music of their own, or interpreting the music of others – by arranging and improvising well known music. In addition, I encourage students to play sports, dance, sing, draw, read, and develop all of their talents. I want them to be more than musicians, I want them to learn to become well-rounded individuals.

Above all, I want everyone to continually improve and do their best. I encourage everyone to set goals, dream big, and be the best they can be in whatever they choose to do. Life is full of wonderful choices. Choose the best out of life and learn as much as you can from everyone everywhere. I prefer being called a Music Mentor because I want to mentor others and help them to live their dreams.

Your life is your musical symphony. Make it a masterpiece!

Visit the link below to read a blog post I wrote listing 20 ways to motivate teen piano students to play the piano (and have fun doing it):

http://musicmotivation.com/how-to-motivate-teen-piano-students-to-play-the-piano/