

## MINI ESSAY 3: WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A BEGINNING LEVEL PIANO LESSON?

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### Length of Lesson for Beginners

I believe the standard American 30-minute piano lesson is much too short, even for beginners. I do not know who invented the 30-minute lesson, but probably no other activity in a child's life requires such a short commitment. Ballet, soccer, Scouts, etc. all last at least 45 minutes and usually require even more time. Parents seem to generally be invested in activities that require more contact time with a teacher in the form of a lesson or class.

With a 30-minute lesson, in the winter especially, a scenario like the following is quite likely:

The student arrives **5** minutes late because of parking problems, takes **3** minutes to get out of her winter coat and snowy boots. She takes **5** minutes before she feels warm and able to focus after a long day at school and being out in the cold. She takes **2** minutes to tell you she is sorry she is late and to tell you about the snowball fight she had at recess. Then at the end of the lesson, she takes **5** minutes to put her coat and boots on. Then the mom comes in and tells you she is sorry they are late, which takes another **2** minutes. That is **22** minutes worth of non-music time out of a **30**-minute lesson. That leaves **8** minutes for instruction. This may be a bit extreme, but not out of the realm of possibility! What is more likely is that the parent will think, "Yikes, it's icy and snowy out and we might be a bit late. Maybe we'll just skip the lesson today, since it is such a hassle to go out in this weather for just a 30-minute lesson."

Because there are so many concepts to cover, and because young brains may take more repetition and time to ingest new concepts, longer lessons are better. With proper balance between focused instructional time and off the bench activities, even a 5-year-old child can have a 45-minute lesson. I am even finding that even 45-minutes seems short! I prefer an hour. (One of my 9-year-old students even asked if he could have a two hour lesson, because the hour seemed too short. I told him that once he started practicing two hours everyday, then we would talk about it!)

In the future, I would like to experiment with having the children come in groups every day, which would be logistically difficult but pianistically much more effective than the weekly lesson.

For very young students who cannot handle a 45-minute lesson, two 30-minute lessons per week is preferred.

## Activities in the Beginner's Lesson

Here is a general outline for the activities that should be included in a beginner's 45-minute lesson. The order of activities can be revised as needed.

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	TIME
<b>Pleasantries.</b> How was your day?	Preciousness of the child	1 min.
Hearing and working on <b>In Progress Pieces</b> (pieces not yet passed) (3-4 pieces)	Polishing pieces	10 min.
<b>Patterns.</b> The teacher plays a short pattern on the piano, and the student copies. This can be done with the student looking at the piano, and then by ear. The patterns increase in difficulty as the student progresses.	Ear training	2 min.
Introducing new pieces ( <b>Rote, Reading, Folk</b> ) (2-4 pieces depending on the student)	New pieces	10 min.
<b>Improvisation</b>	Creativity. Ear Training	2 min.
<b>Sightreading Flashcards</b> (2-3 cards)	Reading notation	5 min.
Performance of <b>Review Pieces</b> (These have already been mastered but continue to be practiced.) (2-4 pieces)	Performance	5 min.
<b>Rhythm</b> tapbacks on the drum	Ear Training	1 min.
<b>Interval</b> practice activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing up a 2nd, down a 2nd, up a 3rd from a given note</li> <li>• Naming intervals on flashcards</li> <li>• Writing interval melodies on the whiteboard and playing them on the piano</li> </ul>	Reading notation	5 min.
<b>Listening</b> to music played by the teacher or recording	Music history	2 min.
Reviewing the <b>assignment</b> for the next week	Clarity in expectations	1 min.
Putting <b>stickers</b> on the chart. <b>Accountability</b> for practice from the previous week	Motivation	1 min.

This chart is a guide for students in **Piano Safari® Repertoire Book 1** and **Piano Safari® Sightreading Flashcards for Book 1**. As the student progresses, some of the aspects of the lesson would change.