

152 Strategies for Effective and Efficient Piano Teaching

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Introduction

Most piano teachers would agree that in order to teach well, a teacher should:

- Be an artistic pianist
- Understand how children learn and relate well to children
- Understand how to teach and sequence various concepts that students need to learn
- Be well versed in the available piano methods and repertoire available for students.

Books have been written detailing these concepts, which form a piano teacher's knowledge base. However, most of the development of a piano teacher takes place through observing master teachers and by teaching many students. Only through vast experience will teachers develop the expert sixth sense that alerts the teacher to what each specific student needs at a particular time.

Until now, a comprehensive list of specific teaching strategies used during a lesson by excellent teachers has not been codified. *Strategies for Effective and Efficient Piano Teaching* presents such a list.

These Teaching Strategies are designed to introduce pedagogy students and new teachers to a concrete list of Teaching Strategies to master, as well as to provide experienced teachers with ideas to increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and variety of their teaching methods. I hope these Teaching Strategies will enrich your teaching as you begin to practice incorporating them into your teaching toolbox.

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General Teacher Qualities

From my observations of teachers around the country, the following have emerged as some of the qualities of excellent teachers:

- They maintain high standards for all students.
- They exhibit care and empathy for students and for their pianistic progress.
- They involve student's parents in the learning process through having parents videotape lessons, take notes, help students practice at home, and take responsibility for student practice.
- They hold students and parents accountable for progress at the piano.
- They require disciplined and extensive practice time from all students.
- They have developed a well-thought out curriculum that works for the individual teacher. They teach this same beginning curriculum (or method) to all their students, because they have mastered the teaching of that particular method.
- They have excellent pianistic abilities.
- They have a clear understanding of how to sequence concepts and how to teach each concept to children.
- They understand children and work with each child in an age appropriate way.
- They enjoy working with children.
- They assign worthwhile repertoire and have a purpose for each piece and exercise they assign.

- They have developed the ability to “read the student” by a sixth sense gained through experience in teaching piano to children.

The 152 Teaching Strategies presented below are meant to supplement these general qualities.

152 Teaching Strategies

These strategies are listed in alphabetical order and deal with many topics, including working with children, repertoire management, effective use of lesson time, technique, rhythm, correcting mistakes, and many other topics. Some strategies are very specific, and some are broad. Because many of the strategies could fit into several categories, I have decided to list them alphabetically.

I have used the pronoun, “he” throughout for ease of reading, although I am quite aware that many students are female. “You” refers to the teacher. Words in bold are Teaching Strategies.

1. **Accompaniment.** Play the teacher accompaniments! Accompaniments are for more than just making the piece sound more interesting. They help the student play with solid rhythm and in a steady tempo, and they support the musicality and dynamics of the piece. Being able to play with accompaniment comfortably is a good indication that the piece has been mastered by the student. There are three levels of **Steps in Accompaniments**:
 1. Playing the student part with the student in a different octave (also termed **Playing Insurance**).
 2. Playing an accompaniment that includes the student part and a teacher part.
 3. Playing the written teacher accompaniment that is separate from the student part.
2. **Again.** Allow the student to repeat a passage several times in the lesson. “What is my favorite word?” “Again!” Repetition is necessary for making a physical motion automatic, for aural remembrance and understanding, and for confidence in the

- ability to execute a passage. Much of the lesson in the first several years should be spent teaching the child to practice. Repetition is a crucial part of practice.
3. **Allow Creativity.** Efficiency in the lesson is not always the goal. Sometimes the roundabout way is the best way to teach. If a student is struck by a sound and wants to experiment creatively, let him. This shows you that he is listening and developing musical skills. Although it may take five minutes of the lesson for him to experiment with the sounds, it is well worth it to encourage his creative initiative.
 4. **Analogy.** The use of analogies of all kinds will help a student understand the music. You may need to experiment to find the right analogy for a given student.
 5. **Analyzeplayanalyzeplay.** Instead of explaining a whole piece to a student (aaaannnnnaaaaallyzzzeeeee play), analyze one small phrase or section, and then have the student play it. Repeat this process with other small sections, working through the piece.
 6. **As Long As It Takes.** If a student has a habit of playing well but never completely up to your standard, either because of listening that is not careful enough or bad habits formed in earlier study, determine that you will not be concerned with how much repertoire you cover in the lesson. Instead, for a period of lessons, choose a piece and work on the first phrase for **As Long As It Takes**, until it is perfect. Explain to the student that you are polishing the piece into a fine work of art and that you are going to work on perfecting each phrase for as long as it takes in order to help him take his playing to the next level. This kind of careful listening and practicing will carry over into other phrases and other pieces. Count how many measures you can polish in a lesson, and see how this compares to future lessons. The hope is that you can start to polish more and more measures in future lessons in the same amount of time as the student begins to work at a higher level in terms of listening and polishing the music. This works especially well with older students playing advanced pieces.
 7. **Ascertaining Understanding.** Have the student explain a concept to you to gauge whether the student really understands a concept or not. If you ask, "Do you understand?" some children will say yes even if they do not understand,

because they think it is expected of them. Teachers need to be able to read their students to gauge a student's grasp on the information.

8. **Assignment Organization.** Some students enjoy looking at Assignment Sheets and marking the days they have practiced. Others would prefer to have the pieces to practice marked with page marking tabs, without an assignment sheet. Some students prefer to know exactly how many times to play each piece each day. Other students work best practicing without this kind of rigid expectation. Find what works best for the student and parent, and hold the student accountable for practice in the way that works best for each student. Students may change what they prefer as they age. Having many accountability systems to choose from as a teacher is helpful when students need a change. **Practice Ladders, Practice Boxes**, prize charts for **Extrinsic Motivation**, or changing the look of the Assignment Sheet all can be used as the student needs a change.
9. **Attainable Little Chunks.** Break a piece or a practice spot into manageable units. Usually, if a student cannot play a section successfully, it is because not enough **Steps** were utilized, the chunk is too big, or the tempo is too fast (**Slowly**). Once an Attainable Little Chunk is learned, move on to the next one. Then combine sections.
10. **Aural/Visual Balance.** Strike a proper balance between playing a new piece for a student and having the student read the notation. Music is aural, not visual. Playing a piece for a student or allowing a student to listen to a recording is valuable, as it provides the student with a sound model for the finished product and is very inspiring. On the other hand, learning to read musical notation is also important. Be sure both of these components are in evidence in your lessons, and tailor them to the student.

Providing certain pieces as Reading Pieces and others as Rote Pieces at the early levels will balance the ear and eye and provide pieces for developing both reading and aural skills. Also, by providing variety in how students learn pieces, students who are stronger in either eye or ear will be using their strengths and building on their weaknesses simultaneously.

11. **Brain Break.** It is not necessary to remain focused on learning a piece every second of the lesson. Little breaks to regain focus and have fun will create a happier and more excited student and allow for deeper learning in the long run. For example, it is fine to take a whole minute to allow the child to choose just the right sticker to put on a piece. Or in terms of deep learning, if a student wants to take two minutes to draw a picture of a kangaroo next to a “Kangaroo rhythm” in his music, it is worth taking the time to do so. He is taking initiative in his learning, and he will remember what he is learning. These extra minutes of seemingly “off task” activities may be just the brain break a student needs to regain his focus and cement his learning.
12. **Brain Juice.** In a difficult spot or in a place the student consistently misses, tell the student “Squirt out some extra brain juice.” In other words, he should concentrate more intently to play the spot correctly. Mark the spot in the score by drawing some brain juice.
13. **By the Clock.** If you find yourself not having enough time for certain segments in a lesson, make a plan of how long you will take for each portion of the lesson. Stick to the plan. You will be surprised at how much more efficiently you will teach!
14. **Catch What You Can.** You play the piece up to tempo, and the student plays along whatever he can catch of either or both hands on a second piano. This gives the student a tactile and aural representation of where he is in the learning process and a sense for the final tempo. This works especially well with intermediate and advanced students who think they are closer to performance level than they actually are.
15. **CD Ears.** Pretend you are listening to a CD performance of the piece, and compare what your **CD Ears** hear to what the student produces. Make a list of priorities for corrections (**One at a Time**), and break the teaching of each correction into **Steps**. There is never an end to the corrections if you have well-developed CD ears. All children are capable of playing pieces at CD quality if the pieces are of the correct level and if the child has a good technical foundation.
16. **Chameleon.** You will find that each student needs a different type of approach. Some students need a playful approach. Other students need a more serious

approach. Some need faster pacing in the lesson to keep their attention. Others need to digest concepts in a slower manner in the lesson. Some students like to joke around loudly with you. Others need you to be gentle and quiet. Change your teaching style to match what the student needs.

17. **Coaching.** Verbally coach the student through a piece by singing, using reminder words like, “Here comes a two-note slur,” playing along, and conducting.

Coaching is a more advanced form of **Insurance**.

18. **Colors.** Some children think in colors when they hear music, and all children love using colors. Mark the score with colored pencils. Color code various concepts. You could use red for right hand, blue for left hand, yellow for rests, and green for slurs. Using colors is a fun way to analyze music.

19. **Conscious Pacing.** As you think through what you will accomplish in a specific lesson, note that you will work through some pieces slowly and in detail, while you will move more quickly through other pieces in the lesson. Some pieces are being prepared for performance (in depth work), others are to explore creativity (“I wonder how it would sound if you played the piece in G Major while I play it in A Major?”), others are for learning quickly to provide reading opportunities. Consciously know which pieces you will work on more slowly and carefully in the lesson and which pieces you will work through more quickly. This change from fast to slow makes the lesson more interesting for the student. If every piece is worked through at the same pace (especially if the work is all slow and in depth), the lesson can seem very long to both student and teacher. Varying the pace based on the purpose of the piece will have students saying, “What? My lesson is over already?”

20. **Contour Stories.** In Sight Reading Cards, draw the student’s attention to the contour of the phrase.



In this example, even though you may point to each note with a pencil to help the student track the notes, also point out the larger contour of the phrase. “This

melody is like a person who climbs up a hill with his friends. Then he has a picnic at the top of the hill and then goes back down the hill to his home.” Creating stories will make even the simplest melodies come alive for students. They will be more apt to recognize patterns in other melodies and think creatively about the contour of a phrase.

21. **Control the Tempo.** Children often play too fast. They have trouble controlling their tempo. As a teacher, be mindful of what tempo you think a student should be playing a piece based on how well it is learned. You can control the tempo by playing along on a second piano, playing in another octave, singing, clapping, or playing an accompaniment. You should be in control of all tempos. When a child plays too fast too soon while working on a piece, mistakes will occur. When a child resists playing slower, saying, “It’s easier for me to play it fast,” that is a sign that the child lacks control of the coordination necessary to play a piece. Explain that when a piece is really well learned, he should be able to play it fast, slow, medium, quiet, loud, or with eyes closed.
22. **Counting.** Children love to count things. Saying, “How many two-note slurs can you find in this piece?” and having the child count is an appealing way to analyze aspects of a piece.
23. **Da Da Articulations.** Use different syllable names based on the type of articulation, such as “Da” for a *tenuto* notes or “Taka Taka” for *staccato* notes. This provides a verbal representation to the length and style of the various articulations.
24. **Da Da Da Da Runs.** Having the student say “da-da-da-da” or “ta-ka-ti-ka” aloud while playing a passage of sixteenth notes can help the student hear each note and feel each note in the fingers, achieving greater evenness and clarity.
25. **Demonstration.** “A picture is worth a thousand words,” it has been said. Music is sound. Save time by demonstrating more than you talk. Use words as an adjunct to demonstration, not vice versa.
26. **Direct Instruction.** We spend much of our teaching in **Direct Instruction**. We tell the student what to do and how a piece should be played. Although creative exploration has become more and more discussed in recent decades and is important, Direct instruction is crucial. In piano playing, there are right ways and

wrong ways of playing that are based on sound technical principles and correct stylistic practices. Especially in the early years of playing, you, as the teacher, are required to transfer knowledge to the child.

For example, asking a child how a passage in a Classical piece should be articulated when the child has no stylistic knowledge of Classical articulation is setting the child up for failure. The child may choose an articulation that is completely unacceptable due to lack of knowledge of stylistic traits of Classical era music. You should require specific articulations. After the student has absorbed this knowledge of Classical style through playing many pieces with similar articulation, the child will develop a sense of the correct stylistic interpretation. He can then make informed creative decisions. If children do not have a body of knowledge in their brains, they will not have the tools necessary to make artistic decisions. Children like knowing what is expected of them, and this transfer of learning through **Direct Instruction** has been a mainstay of piano teaching for centuries.

27. **Directional Pointing.** For students who are still learning to read intervals, point to the notes with a pencil as the student plays. Play in such a way that you are moving the pencil up and down with the contour of the intervals to reinforce the up and down direction of the intervals. At other times, point in a straight line on the page so the student has to think harder about the direction of the notes. Be sure you are pointing from above the note to allow the student to be able to see the music clearly.
28. **Duets.** A sign of a well-mastered piece is when two children can play the same piece together with good ensemble. In Partner Lessons, the students should play alone until a piece is well learned. When it is mastered, they can play together in different octaves. You can also vary the dynamics, transpose the piece, add a teacher accompaniment, have one student play the drum while you and the other student play the piano, etc. There are so many possibilities for fun and creative ensembles.

29. **Dynamic Quantification.** If a student cannot produce the right amount of *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, softer, or louder, ask the student to quantify the sound concretely with *f+*, *mp*, *ff*, *mf+*, *p-*, *pp*, etc.
30. **Encourage.** Be encouraging. It will mean a lot to a student if you tell him that you enjoy his lessons, that you are very proud of him for the work he is doing, and that he is becoming a really good pianist. Do not assume the student knows you feel this way. Because we give so many corrections during piano lessons, it may be easy for the student to feel that he is not doing well unless we specifically use encouraging words.
31. **Exaggeration.** Play the student's mistakes in an exaggerated way to allow him to hear how phrasing or articulating a certain way does not make musical sense.
32. **Excerpt Performances.** For a student who suffers from extreme performance anxiety, have the student perform four measures of a piece in a group class. Then ask the student if he was focused for the entire performance. If he was not, ask him what he was thinking of instead. Train him to focus on the music and the sound coming from the piano rather than allowing other thoughts to intrude. Gradually increase the amount of the piece being performed as his concentration increases.
33. **Extrinsic Motivation.** Practice charts, stickers, festivals, grades, candy, and other forms of extrinsic motivation are controversial, and yet the fact is, they work! Intrinsic motivation may be innate in some students, or it may develop later, but it cannot be the sole motivating factor for students.

Levels of repertoire are also motivating. Moving from one level to the next provides the student with concrete proof of progress. This is one of the main reasons why using some type of graded method series is important and why a teacher needs to have a firm grasp on the leveling of repertoire (since not all publisher's leveling systems are the same). Telling the student, "Last year you were playing Level 3 pieces. This year almost all your pieces are Level 4, and I think you are ready to work on this Challenge Piece, which is Level 5," is very motivating. This helps the student see that he can progress in piano and that piano study is not just a long stream of never-ending pieces.

34. **Fallboard First.** Have the student play a passage on the fallboard and listen to the clear and even thumps on the wood. Then play on the piano. Playing on the wood helps the student feel firm fingertips and evenness in runs. It also reinforces which fingers are to be played by isolating the fingers from reliance on the ear. This focuses the student on the physical aspects of playing. The thumping should be audible on each finger when played firmly but with a loose hand and arm. If there is no thump sound, the student may be pressing too hard on the fallboard. Ask the student to relax the arm and listen for the thumps.
35. **Fallboard Keyboard.** Have the student play one hand on the fallboard above the keyboard, and the other hand on the keyboard. This will solve problems of coordination between the hands. Start with just a small portion of a piece.
36. **Fingering First.** As a student advances to intermediate and advanced repertoire, there are more varied fingering choices. You will find yourself spending a good bit of the time in the lesson deciding on fingering. It is vital that you decide on fingerings before the student goes home to work on a new piece. Taking the time to decide on fingering first will save time in the lessons later.
37. **First Impressions.** Plan carefully how you will present a new concept or piece. First impressions are important. Be sure that you give an impressive performance of a new piece when you play it for a student. If you present a concept or piece with enthusiasm, the student will be excited too. It is a myth that children, for instance, do not like contemporary music or that all children think scale practice is boring. Much has to do with how it is presented.
38. **Flexibility.** Be ready to be flexible in your presentation, materials, or lesson order. Different children require different teaching methods. Be careful not to squelch a child's questions, thoughts, or ideas. You may learn something new from your student!
39. **Flip and Play.** Use page marking tabs, rather than listing page numbers, to mark where the student's assigned pieces are in the book. The student can then just "flip and play." This will prevent the "forgetting" about a piece or not being able to find the correct page number and deciding not to practice a piece. Especially if a

young student does not have much parental support in practicing, not being able to find the piece in the book can be a major deterrent to practicing.

40. **Focus.** It is necessary to teach children to attend to what they are doing. Remind the student to look at his hands when practicing for a performance of a memorized piece, rather than looking at the teacher, audience, or out the window. Be sure the student focuses at the end of the piece to finish it completely, put his hands in his lap when finished playing, and give his best bow. It takes extra focus to end a piece well. If the student learns to focus early on, he will have an easier time focusing when he is older and the pieces become longer.
41. **Follow the Leader.** Play a short motive with correct notes, technical motions, and shaping of sound. The child copies exactly. This is useful when teaching Rote Pieces and also when teaching technical or musical gestures. In this way, the notes, gesture, and sound are all learned at the same time, rather than learning notes first with the wrong gesture. Learning a certain phrase correctly the first time, with all applicable gestures, articulations, and coordinations, generally leads to a better outcome than learning the notes first and adding other aspects later. Follow the Leader also trains the ears.
42. **Force the Eyes Forward.** In sight reading, if the student does not look ahead enough in the score, use a piece of paper and move it along the score to cover up what has already been played. Use this sparingly, as research has shown that good sight readers look forward and backward when playing.
43. **Freeze.** Tell the student you are going to do a freeze. The student plays. Stop him by saying, "Freeze." He stops playing with the key depressed. You can then check for thumb, arm or wrist looseness. It takes time for a student to develop a feeling for a loose thumb, non-playing fingers, arm, and shoulder while playing. Finding this looseness while stopped is the first step toward being loose while playing. To get the thumb to relax when the student is in freeze (depressing another finger), wiggle the thumb gently with your hand. It should be easily movable. If it is not, ask the student to "Relax the thumb," "Drop it," "Go to sleep, thumb," or other words that work until the student finds what a relaxed thumb feels like.

44. **Fun Repeats.** If you would like a student to repeat a passage or simple piece a certain number of times, provide variations to make the repetitions fun. For example, the child can play in different octaves, fast, slow, or at different dynamic levels. This gives the child choices about the repetitions (**Teacher Happy Choices**), which not only makes practicing more fun but also engages the student in thinking and listening. This prepares the child for more advanced listening and practicing skills as the student progresses.
45. **Go for a Ride.** Put the child's hand on your hand and play a passage to allow the student to feel the movement of a gesture.
46. **Go to the Source.** If the child is discouraged, misbehaving, or not practicing, it could be for any of a number of reasons, such as laziness, family busyness, family problems, disliking one or more pieces assigned, too much work assigned, not enough work assigned, pieces are too hard, placement of the piano in the house, inadequate or ineffective parental supervision of practice, etc. Ask the child directly about the causes of the misbehavior. Sometimes the child can and will verbalize the reason, and it may not be what you expected.
47. **Goldilocks and the Three Bears.** If the student is playing a disproportionate amount of *crescendo*, play the passage three ways for the student: with too much *crescendo*, just the right amount of *crescendo*, and too little *crescendo*. The student tells you which is too much, too little, and just right. Then the student plays while you say, "Too much, too little, just right." This also is very helpful with technical gestures.
48. **Groups.** Piano study can be lonely. Find ways to involve students in making music together and in social events, like partner lessons, group classes, duet playing, chamber music, parties, and outings to concerts.
49. **Growth Chart.** Create a growth chart to show parents, similar to the chart given to parents in the pediatrician's office. Parents are investing a lot of time and money in lessons, and they will appreciate seeing the progress their child is making compared to the norm in the areas of reading, technique, and the levels of pieces. Although every student may progress at a slightly different pace, a child who has, for example, had five years of lessons and can only play Level 2 pieces is well

behind the norm. Parents deserve to know how their child is doing, and this information may encourage parents and student to take piano study as seriously as other school subjects. It is all too easy for the teachers to tailor the piano study to each student so completely that they do not notice if a child is progressing much slower than he should be. Look for a Piano Safari growth chart in the near future at www.pianosafari.com.

50. **Hand Grabbing.** If a child starts playing without thinking about your instructions, gently grab his hand from the piano. Quietly ask him what he forgot, and let him try again. Hand grabbing becomes a deterrent to playing without thinking.
51. **Hands On.** This is in two forms. 1. Hold the hand as necessary to show the student correct gestures or to check for loose thumbs or strong fingernail joints. You may also touch the shoulder if it is tense to make it relax. 2. Another form is for you to play on the student's arm to help the student sense the amount of attack or lightness needed for a specific passage.
52. **Harder than It Needs to Be.** Make up a harder version of a problem passage for the student to practice. For example, the student could play a *legato* passage *staccato*, practice with various rhythms in sixteenth note passages, etc. After the harder version is mastered, the passage will seem easier as written.
53. **Harmonic Banana Peel.** Great composers use many harmonic surprises. For example, a harmony could move from V to vi instead of the expected V to I. When a composer uses an unexpected chord, it feels like you have harmonically slipped on a banana peel. Demonstrate this for the student. Show the harmonic progression the composer could have used, and then show the harmony that the composer actually used. This will show students the meaning behind the composer's choice of harmony. The term "Harmonic Banana Peel" is courtesy of
54. **Harmonic Skeleton.** Play the harmonic structure while the student plays the piece to show the structure of the phrasing and harmony. Then have the student play the harmonic skeleton for greater understanding of the harmony and phrase structure.
55. **Harmony.** Analyze chords with the student whenever possible. Being able to recognize chords quickly takes much practice. Students who can recognize chords

become better sight readers and have a better understanding of how the music is constructed.

56. **Humor.** Tell a joke to lighten the mood, or use a funny **Analogy** to help the student understand an abstract concept.
57. **I Play, You Play.** Play through a piece a phrase at a time. The teacher plays a phrase. The student then plays the same phrase. The teacher plays the next phrase, and the student copies that phrase. Then switch parts, with the student leading and the teacher copying. This allows the student to hear the phrase at performance level one phrase at a time and to come closer to imitating the correct sound of each phrase. It also gives him a chance to be in the lead and to hear you copy him. Children love this. If he changes the rhythm or tempo in some way, copy it exactly. This can lead to a fun improvisation session as he explores sounds and rhythms and hears what he plays echoed back by you.
58. **Imagery.** Before the student, help the student imagine a good performance in his mind. He should imagine that he is walking on stage, bowing, playing his best, and bowing at the end of his performance. Imagining the idea performance develops confidence and concentration.
59. **Immediate Correction.** If a student makes a mistake that you know will continue throughout a piece, such as in a basic rhythm or gesture, stop the student immediately to correct it instead of letting the student play through a whole piece incorrectly. If you let the child repeatedly play a gesture or motive incorrectly, the child is in effect practicing it wrong repeatedly in front of you. This can be compared to a child banging his head against the wall repeatedly while you stand by idly without intervening. Of course, there is a time to let the child play through a piece uninterrupted, but there is also a time when **Immediate Correction** is the most efficient use of time.
60. **Inspire.** Play for your students. Expose them to recordings of great pianists. Attend concerts. This is so inspiring to students who may not listen to classical music in their everyday life.
61. **Insurance.** It is the teacher's job to insure that when a student learns a new piece, he experiences success most of the time. Letting a beginner dive into a piece with

no help is a generally a recipe for disaster. You will have to make many corrections, saying, “No, not that way,” or, “Oops, you missed another note.” This is demoralizing to the student. Instead, you should insure that the student plays correctly by using a variety of types of **Insurance**, such as:

- **Counting Insurance.** Count along while the student plays. It is not necessary to count every beat. Counting only the long notes is usually sufficient. (See **Long Note Insurance**, which is listed separately.)
- **Playing Insurance.** Play the student’s part in another octave while the student plays.
- **Pointing Insurance.** Point at the notes on the score with a pencil to help the student track with his eyes. (See **Directional Pointing** for tips about good pointing technique.)
- **Singing Insurance.** Sing the melody while the student plays.

Using a combination of these types of insurance will provide the scaffolding and support a student needs to prevent unnecessary mistakes when learning a piece. The student is not allowed to play by himself until you are confident that he is capable of playing alone with correct notes, rhythms, gestures, articulation, and phrasing. This is especially important in the beginning stages of study, where the foundation of all future playing and practicing is laid.

62. **Kind Corrections.** If a student tries and fails in playing a passage on the piano, avoid the extremes of saying, be kind. Work on being patient and constructive rather than impatient, annoyed, or overly critical. If a child is really trying and fails repeatedly, the teacher, not the child, is to blame. Perhaps the teacher did not use the right **Steps**, is allowing the child to play too fast, or chose a piece that was too difficult.
63. **Layers of Colors.** Have the student choose a color of the week to mark corrections in the score. Then, if something is not fixed in subsequent weeks, he can circle it in the new color of the week. This gives you concrete and colorful proof for your argument, “I told you to fix this spot for the past three weeks.”
64. **Learning Process Questions.** When you are unsure of the way a student learns best, ask him! For example, you may be in the habit of pointing to the notes with a

pencil to help a beginning student track the notation. Asking, “Do you want me to point or not point?” can help you determine the best way to help a student read a new piece. In my experience, I have found that natural readers generally prefer that the teacher does not point. These students see the notation in groups of notes, so the pointing makes reading more difficult. But for children who are not natural readers and have trouble tracking on the page from left to right, pointing may be a lifesaver. They need the extra scaffolding to be able to keep track of where they are.

Other **Learning Process Questions** might relate to the assignment, “Is this enough to practice, or do you want another new piece?” “Should we just learn this much of this piece, or do you want to keep going?” “Do you think you understand this enough to practice at home, or would you like to play it again?”

These types of questions give the student a say in the learning process and provide valuable information to the teacher about how to pace study. I have found that students generally will give you a truthful answer about what helps them learn best and that they appreciate you asking. It shows that you care about their desires and needs. This shared control is important in working with children.

65. **Levels of Repertoire:** Students should work on pieces from multiple levels of difficulty at the same time in order to gain the most from their musical education at the piano. For example, at the beginning stages, students should play Reading Pieces (to learn to read notation), Rote Pieces (more difficult than reading levels) that are taught by imitation, and Challenge Pieces (harder than Reading Pieces, but learnable by the student with aid from a few judiciously placed finger numbers or by teaching parts of the piece by rote).

Standard method books typically present a very one-dimensional approach to playing, one where only Reading Pieces are provided. These Reading Pieces increase in difficulty based solely on the student’s reading ability.

Although learning to read is essential, music is aural, and studying only Reading Pieces omits the all-important ear. This stifles a student’s musical creativity and does not allow the student to play a variety of interesting sounding pieces until he can read them, even if these harder pieces may be well within his technical grasp.

A student who plays many different types of pieces will gain a multi-dimensional approach to piano that involves their eyes, ears, and technique. Advancing students should also play a variety of levels of pieces. Some pieces may be learned quickly (1-3 weeks) to expand a student's reading ability and knowledge of the whole piano repertoire and to work on refining details of articulation and phrasing. More challenging pieces will be studied for a more prolonged period of time.

Each teacher should have a concrete leveling system in mind, since all publishers use different leveling systems. I suggest Jane Magrath's *Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Repertoire* as a resource for learning how to level repertoire. Telling the student what level each piece is can be very motivating for the student, as he can see his progress through the levels in a concrete way.

66. **Long Note Insurance.** For the first year or two of study, you can train the student to hold the long notes the appropriate length by always counting aloud in the long notes. It is not necessary to count every beat. Instead, you (or the student) can count aloud in the long notes (half notes and longer), "Ta - 2."
67. **Look at the Student.** Avoid becoming buried in the music score while a student is playing. You can gain much information about how to help a student if you watch how the student is using the body, head, arms, wrists, hands, fingers, eyes, and foot. Note any awkward movements and how they relate to the sound. This is a prime reason why you as a teacher need to know the music you are teaching thoroughly. The less you need to rely on the score, the more attention you can give to how the student is playing.
68. **Magic Assignment Writing.** It is sometimes difficult to write the assignment for the next week while teaching the lesson. Write the assignment a little at a time whenever you have a free moment. You might write part of it while the student previews a Sight Reading Card, or when he is performing a piece. Write as fast as you can, and keep the assignment general and brief. More instructive **Practice Strategies** or corrections should be written directly in the music while working on a specific piece, either by you or by the student (**Student Marking**). In this way, the

student does not have to wait at anytime during the lesson for you to write out the assignment sheet. Instead, it appears to the student that the assignment has magically written itself by the end of the lesson.

69. **Maps.** Have the student draw a map in any notation he likes to outline the themes, moods, key areas, and dynamics of a piece.
70. **Mark the Leaps.** If a student needs to leap quickly to a new position, especially if both hands are leaping simultaneously, place a Fuzzy (or page marking tab) on the keys the student will leap to. This will provide a visual guide that allows the student to leap to the new position securely. The Fuzzy can be removed once the student is confident with the leap.
71. **Metacognition.** Tell the student why you are assigning him certain things, what type of pieces you are assigning (short term, long term, reading, performance), and other things that will help him understand the plan you have for his pianistic growth. If the student understands the reasoning behind certain things, he will understand your teaching trajectory and be more willing to work hard. For example, instead of just nagging about collapsing finger joints, tell the student why it is important to play with strong fingertips and a good hand shape. "I am not just nagging you all the time to make you mad. I am concerned that we fix your floppy fingertips now, because I want you to be able to play really cool Beethoven sonatas when you get older. If you play with poor technique, there is no way you will be able to play harder pieces."
72. **Metronome.** In order for a student to be successful with playing with the metronome, it is important to take small **Steps**. First have the student tap with the beat at various tempos. Then he can practice playing scales with the metronome. Eventually he can play sections of pieces with the metronome. Always have a goal for why the student is playing with the metronome. Rarely is playing a piece all the way through with the metronome a valuable use of time. Here are some ways you can use the metronome in working on pieces include:
 - Check tempos for the beginning of each section of a piece with the metronome
 - Work the tempo of a section incrementally faster using the metronome

- Check for problem spots or memory. If a piece can be played accurately with the metronome at various tempos, it is well learned. Any mistakes will alert the student to spots that need more work. The metronome highlights these spots.
73. **Music History.** Talk about the history of composers and pieces the student is studying. This helps the student develop an understanding for the context of the piece. Create a time line of composers, and relate the times they lived with events the student may have studied in school. For example, Mozart and George Washington lived during the same time period.
 74. **Music Mountain.** Draw a mountain on a whiteboard. Ask the student to think of all the elements that go into perfecting a piece for performance. Put basics like notes and rhythms at the bottom of the mountain and concepts like phrasing, articulation, pedaling, and tempo up higher on the mountain. This shows the student that just because he can play all the notes and rhythms correctly does not mean he is finished studying a piece. Notes and rhythms are only the beginning, at the bottom of the mountain. There are many more elements that contribute to a polished performance.
 75. **Musical Jump Start.** If a student comes back weekly not having practiced a piece enough, instead of belaboring notes and rhythms, sometimes it is helpful to ignore the stumbles and concentrate on musical concepts instead. Through doing this, the student's interest in making a piece sound right musically may be reignited enough that the student will work out the basics of notes and rhythms at home. This is especially helpful with intermediate and advanced students.
 76. **Musical Osmosis.** Play a phrase along with the student to help the student understand the phrasing without verbal explanation.
 77. **Non-Verbal Teaching.** Think about how you use your body to communicate non-verbally in the lesson. An audio recording of a lesson would miss all these non-verbal cues we teachers use to communicate. We may conduct, tap, move in certain ways, step away from the student to give him space, look at him when he makes a mistake. All of these things communicate to the student without words. They save time in the lesson.

78. **Occupied Hands.** In Partner Lessons with small children, let the non-playing child hold a stuffed animal while the playing child plays. This keeps the non-playing child occupied and calm.
79. **One at a Time.** While listening to a student play through a piece, make a list of the problems in the piece in order of importance. Address the most important problem first, working with the student to solve the problem. Then move on to the next most important problem. In assigning corrections to be practiced at home, it is best to first assign one problem per piece per week for the student to correct. If the student is successful at fixing this problem in practice, increase to two problems per piece per week, then three etc. Eventually, the student should be able to make multiple corrections in a week.
80. **One-Handed Duet.** When learning a piece or working on a section, the student plays one hand while you play the other. Then switch parts. This shows the student what the piece will sound like hands together before he actually plays hands together. In Partner Lessons, one student can play one hand while the other student plays the other hand and you point, sing, etc. (See **Insurance**).
81. **Orchestrate.** Some pieces, likely Classical sonatinas, lend themselves well to being orchestrated. You can talk about the melody as clarinet, the bass notes of an Alberti bass pattern as the cellos, and the inner fast notes of the Alberti bass as the violas. Have students listen to orchestra music to hear the different timbres. Broadening the aural palette allows for better voicing and balance between hands on the piano.
82. **Parental Support. Parental Support** is necessary at all levels, especially with practicing. With young children, teaching a lesson in which the child and parent both learn the pieces will aid the parents in achieving better practice times at home. Also, these types of lessons promote rapport amongst child, parent, teacher, and piano. As the student ages, parental help in practicing may be tapered off. The parent then becomes the student's encourager and supporter in music study. The most successful teachers do not select students based on the child's talent. Instead, they look for a dedicated parent that they feel they can work with.

83. **Partial Play.** The teacher plays portions of a piece while the student plays other portions. For example, if a piece has the form, ABAB, the student could play the A sections and the teacher the B sections. Then you can switch parts. Or if a recurring melody returns often, the student can play this melody while you play the rest of the piece. This allows the students to hear the whole piece while focusing on playing only a portion. This works very well in Partner Lessons as well, because both students stay involved in playing and listening.
84. **Patterns.** From the beginning of study, analyze pieces and sight reading exercises for patterns to help the student avoid reading note by note. Finding the patterns will also make the student more aware of how the piece was constructed. Children love to find patterns.
85. **Pay Attention.** What you give your attention to in teaching is what the students will excel in. If you stress sight reading, your students will become better sight readers. If you stress harmonization, your students will be good at harmonizing. Be aware what you need to pay attention to in a student's development. Your focus will change over time.
86. **Peer Evaluation.** In Partner Lessons, ask specific questions of the non-playing student regarding the playing student's performance. For example, you could say, "Rachel, I want you to watch to see if Veronica has a bouncy arm when she plays this exercise." Veronica plays. The teacher asks, "Rachel, was her arm bouncy?" This keeps both students engaged, provides incentive for Veronica to try her best, and helps both students think critically about playing.
87. **Performance Etiquette.** Teach the student to approach the piano with confidence and intent when practicing for a performance. Coach the student in his performance etiquette, insisting on proper behavior from the beginning to the end of his time on stage.
88. **Performance Opportunities.** Provide frequent performance opportunities. Playing frequently in group classes, recitals, church, festivals, and other venues helps students develop confidence in performing. To practice performing daily, a student can record himself or play for his family, friends, pets, or stuffed animals.

Performing well takes practice. The semester recital will not provide enough performing experience to learn to perform well under stress.

89. **Personification.** A humorous way to give a correction is to personify a note or finger. For example, you can say, “What happened to this little guy over here?” in reference to a missed note. Or you could say, “Notice how Finger 5 does not play in this passage. Finger 5 is on vacation in the Bahamas.” This takes any sting out of the correction of the student and puts it on the note or the finger in a humorous way.
90. **Pickiness.** The best teachers are picky teachers. Be picky by insisting that students play correctly, and work to produce CD quality playing in all your students (**CD Ears**). When making a correction, judge carefully whether the child has actually made the correction in sound and gesture successfully. Do not settle for less than the student’s best work. In certain cases, the “best work” will be a matter of **Shaping**, but in many cases, a student can make a correction to perfection immediately. It is up to you to insist on this perfection. Use a book that is several levels lower than the core level to keep working on perfection, especially for intermediate and transfer students.
91. **Play Along.** Play a piece with the student on a second piano. You can either play his part or create an accompaniment. This drives the student through the phrases and helps him refine his rhythmic pulse, phrasing, rubato, and tempo fluctuations. This works best when a piece is well learned and you are putting the finishing touches on it. It can be very inspiring to play along with your teacher!
92. **Play While Marking.** Ask the student to mark all the two-note slurs, for example. As the student is marking, you play each slur. The student can then hear the slur while marking, in preparation for playing the slur himself.
93. **Playful Engagement.** For young children, have an attitude of playful engagement, so that you are learning the piano in a fun and engaging way. Think of the lesson as play time at the piano. The teacher can still maintain high standards for skill and discipline, but this should be done through a playful attitude, **Humor, Props**, and funny **Analogies**, and fun rather than through serious criticism or grouchiness. Children learn through play.

94. **Playing Over the Student's Hand.** The student puts his hands in the correct position, and you play a small section of the piece over the student's hands. You are depressing the keys, but he feels which keys you are playing. This provides the student with an aural and kinesthetic sense of the piece before he reads it. This can also be an aid in correcting a section in a piece where the coordination is difficult between hands.
95. **Point to the Keys.** Point to the key to be played next from slightly above the key. This is especially helpful for very young students or beginning students, especially in teaching Rote Pieces.
96. **Practice Boxes.** If a beginning student does not practice a piece enough, have him draw boxes on the page. At home, he will play it, check off a box, play it again, and check off another box, etc. With the boxes, he can fill up as many boxes as he wants in one day and make up for skipped practice days by completing extra boxes on a different day. Some children thrive on this, and others detest filling in the boxes, so only use this technique if it works for the specific student.
97. **Practice in Your Brain.** Before playing a sight reading example or a phrase in a new piece, ask the student to "Practice it in your brain." The student looks through the passage and may silently finger the surface of the keys, but he may not play. When ready, you allow the student to play. This prevents "poking and hoping" at the keyboard and develops the habit of thinking before playing. It also builds the student's confidence that he can do work on his own without the teacher's constant **Insurance**. You can **Step Away** and drink some coffee while he is practicing in his brain.
98. **Practice Ladder.** Create a **Practice Ladder** chart with incremental minutes listed by each rung of the ladder. Parents fill in the number of minutes the student practiced on the ladder each day. The goal is to reach the practice goal (100 minutes, 120 minutes, etc.) during the week. Provide prizes for completing the **Practice Ladder**. Gradually increase the minutes required as the parent and student consistently complete the **Practice Ladders**.
99. **Practice Strategies.** Have the student write a certain Practice Strategy in their music. Each Practice Strategy should have a catchy title to make it more

memorable, just as these Teaching Strategies have titles. Students are more likely to practice a section if they know exactly what strategy to use. See www.pianosafari.com for Practice Strategy Cards.

100. **Praise.** **Praise** a student for a job well done. The praise must be specific, such as, “Wow. Your change from *forte* to *piano* in this measure was just great!” And praise must be deserved. Do not praise if something is not good. Reserve praise for something that is well done. Also, it is helpful to praise for effort (controlled by the student) rather than praising the student for innate intelligence (not controlled by the student). Praising for intelligence actually is counterproductive, as it makes the student afraid of conquering challenges if he might fail.
101. **Preemptive Insurance.** Play the beginning of a piece, and verbally remind the student of a correction from the last week’s lesson before allowing the student to play it. “Oh yes! We were working on crisp *staccato* in this piece!” This reminds the student of your expectations and trains the student to think before playing. This also works well with students who may not respond well to verbal commands. Instead of saying, “Can you play ‘Twinkle’ next?” to a student who tunes out verbal commands, you can just play the beginning of “Twinkle.” He will likely refocus and begin to play.
102. **Proactive Confrontation.** Always be assessing how things are going with each student, and fix problems that you find. These can be problems with learning to read, technical problems, musical problems, attitude problems, or practicing problems. The teacher who is proactive about confronting and solving problems at their inception shows his care and concern for a student’s piano education. Do not hope a problem will go away. It usually will not disappear unless you address it.
103. **Props.** Props can be used to make your teaching come to life. One of the most useful props is a stuffed animal. You can use a stuffed animal to bring levity and interest to the lesson and to redirect **Praise** and criticism. For example, Zechariah Zebra may listen carefully as the child plays and then may jump around happily when the student plays a passage with perfect articulation. If some articulations are missing, the zebra may look sad. At times, children may be more willing to

work for a stuffed animal than for you, the teacher, if the student feels that you are a “constant mistake corrector.”

104. **Purpose of Pieces.** As you choose repertoire, think about the purpose for assigning each piece. Reading Pieces may be assigned to work on reading. Rote Pieces will expand a student's aural understanding of music and work on technique and memory. Challenge Pieces can expand a student's playing level and provide him with an opportunity to demonstrate diligence over the long term. A Perpetual Motion Etude may be assigned to work on a specific technique and to build the student's confidence, endurance, and concentration. Each piece should have a specific purpose for being assigned.

You should also have an idea of how long a piece will be studied.

Reading Pieces might be worked on for two weeks, while Challenge Pieces may be studied for several months. Communicating the types of pieces and duration for study of each piece to the student will help the student understand that there are different purposes for learning different pieces. Students, especially as they get older, like understanding why they are studying certain pieces.

105. **Questions.** Ask questions often to engage the student in thinking. With small children, the questions should be easy to answer and concrete. As the student grows as a musician, the questions can become more abstract and interpretive.
106. **Readiness Quantification.** If an aspect of a piece is good but not great, quantifying it in specific terms can be helpful. For example, you can say, “80% of your two-note slurs were perfect in this piece. Did you notice which ones you did not play correctly?” Or “This is only 70% memorized, since you had some stops here and here” (Mark the spots). “Let's aim for these two lines to be 100% by next week.”

Or you could grade each piece with a sad face, medium face, or smiley face for how well a student practiced. Explain to the student by drawing on a whiteboard how pieces all start at the beginning with a sad face since he doesn't know the piece yet. Then as he practices and practices and gets more comfortable with the piece, it becomes a medium face. And then as he practices even more

and gets very comfortable with the piece, it becomes a smiley face. Concrete quantification is very helpful for students.

107. **Realistic Expectations.** Be careful to make reasonable demands upon students that are tailored to each child. For example, requiring a child to play one piece ten times each day perfectly is unrealistic for a six-year old with a short attention span. This sets the child up for failure, antagonizes the parent who is practicing with the child, and starts a cycle of the student and parent not taking your instructions seriously, since they are unattainable. The parent and child need to know that you say what you mean and mean what you say. For this to happen, you need to make realistic and attainable assignments and demands.
108. **Reiteration.** It has been said that it takes eight weeks of giving a correction before the child will consistently make it a part of his playing. So when you correct a problem one week, and the student does not transfer the correction to another piece, do not become discouraged. Say it again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again! Don't give up!
109. **Repeating Marbles.** When working on repetition in the lesson with young students, put 5-7 flat marbles on the low end of the piano. The student plays a piece and then moves a marble from the low end to the high end of the piano. The student plays the piece again and then moves another marble from the low end to the high end. He keeps repeating until all marbles are moved. You can make up a story for each marble also. "Green marble is going from his house to the grocery store to buy some carrots." "Blue marble is going to the donut shop." "Purple marble is going to the library." Keep it playful and fun. Repetition is part of piano practice. Involving the imagination in the repetition makes it more interesting to children.
110. **Repeating Pictures.** For young children, draw a part of a picture for each repetition of a piece. Or take turns drawing part of the picture after each repetition.
111. **Repeating Zone.** If the student starts to correctly repeat a passage and is intent on this work, do not interrupt him from his **Repeating Zone**. It may take time in the lesson, but this repetition builds good practice habits and confidence in playing ability, because the student experiences repetition followed by security and

success. He is also demonstrating initiative, diligence, and discipline, all character traits we are striving to instill in our students. Celebrate when students enter the

Repeating Zone!

112. **Repertoire List.** Keep a Repertoire List for each student, along with a list of performances. This provides a portfolio to the student and parents to gauge progress from year to year.
113. **Reprimand.** Sometimes children are lazy or misbehave. A gentle reprimand with **Parental Support** can be helpful.
114. **Rhythmic Osmosis.** Tap the rhythm of the piece while the student plays. The student will sense your rhythm peripherally. Or play along rhythmically. Rhythm is transferred by osmosis more than it is taught by counting.
115. **Rhythmic Words.** If a student is having a problem with a rhythm, rather than counting, make up a sentence that fits the rhythm. This will be more memorable than counting.
116. **Say it Differently.** If what you say is not working, change the way you are saying it. Use a different **Analogy, Humor, Props, stuffed Animals, or Demonstration.** Do not expect every child to respond to the same style of explanation.
117. **Sevenize.** Practicing in the lesson is necessary in order to teach students to practice on their own at home. Teach the student the discipline to repeat a small section seven times (“Sevenize it!). If students do this consistently in the lesson, they will hopefully transfer this discipline for repetition to their practice time at home. Seven is a good number of repeats because it is usually enough to master a small section without losing focus.
118. **Set Structure.** The lesson should follow the same sequence of activities every week. For example:
 1. Sight Reading Cards
 2. Technique
 3. Working on pieces in progress
 4. Introducing new pieces
 5. Improvisation

Having a set structure that never changes allows the student to know what to expect. Knowing what will happen and in what order is very reassuring to children (and all humans). Ballet classes are structured in this way, and knowing that in class there will be barre work, stretches, and floor work, always in that order, is reassuring to the student and develops discipline. As the student grows, the structure might change from year to year. But having a set structure for an extended period of time is more effective than changing the order of the lesson every week. Having a **Set Structure** is helpful in Group Classes and Partner Lessons also.

119. **Several Second Silence.** When playing a teacher accompaniment, train the student to listen carefully for your cue to start playing (either verbally or with a sniff) by giving several seconds of silence before you give the cue to begin. The silence will calm the student and prepare him to play. This will also allow him to experience the silence that occurs right before performing in a recital. This silence at recitals can be unnerving if the student is used to diving into playing without the **Several Second Silence**.
120. **Shadowing.** You play a section (either in a different octave or on a second piano) while the student plays the same section on the surface of the keys. This allows him to hear a passage and practice the coordination without making aural mistakes.
121. **Shaping.** This strategy is used to teach concepts that will not be perfect the first time a child attempts it, but will need time and practice to become comfortable and automatic. First, decide what the final product will look or sound like. Then divide a concept into **Steps**. Then over the course of several weeks, use the **Steps** to gradually shape the student to closer and closer adherence to the finished product. For example, the concept of having a good hand position takes time to develop. It will not happen in one lesson. If the final product is a piano hand that has a raised hand bridge, relaxed thumb playing on its corner, firm finger nail joints, and relaxed non-playing fingers, you can break this into **Steps** to shape the student's hand over the course of several weeks or months. It will not be perfect or consistent immediately. At first, the simplest thing, like having a raised bridge, may

gain your praise. As the student progresses, you will expect more and more elements of his good piano hand to be in evidence before he will receive your praise.

122. **Slash the Rhythm.** If a student has problems understanding a rhythmic subdivision, put colored slashes exactly through the beat from top to bottom of the staff so the student can see where the beats are and how the notes line up.
123. **Slowly.** As you use the Teaching Strategy of **Steps**, be sure **Slowly** is one of your **Steps**. If a student makes mistakes when attempting a passage, either a step has been skipped or the tempo is too fast. When a student is required to play slowly first, playing fast becomes a fun reward. When you insist on a tempo that is too fast, the student may develop a phobia towards playing fast because of his many failures with playing at fast tempos. Also, if a student is forced to play at fast tempos when he is not ready, he will likely compensate by using incorrect or tense technique.
124. **Speed Bump.** To solve a problem spot in an otherwise well-played section, have the student play at tempo, slow down at the problem spot to think harder (**Brain Juice**), and then speed up once past the problem spot. It is not necessary to play the whole piece or section at a slower tempo. Just as you slow down to carefully drive over a speed bump in a car, slowing for a difficult spot in music allows for more concentration and coordination to master a problem spot. Coming to a complete halt will not fix the spot as well as slowing down gradually and speeding up again. Gradually, the slowing can be eliminated as the student has conquered the problem spot.
125. **Speed Up.** Rather than stopping the student and saying, “Can you play that faster?” just start playing along at a faster tempo. This will increase the student’s tempo without words.
126. **Spot Checking.** After the student performs a piece, focus on making corrections in a few sections. Mark the corrections with a colored pencil. This is different from **Systematically Through Forward** or **Systematically Through Backward** in that the whole piece is not covered. Instead, you are focusing on a few spots. For transfer students who may not be used to your teaching style, **Spot Checking** is

the best way to work on a piece. It provides a few corrections per week. As a student grows in his ability to master corrections from week to week, he may graduate to the more sophisticated strategies of **Systematically Through Forward** or **Systematically Through Backward**.

127. **Subdivision.** While the student plays, you play the subdivisions of the long notes to keep the student from rushing.
128. **Surprise Ups.** For *staccato* notes that are not short enough, use your hand to bounce the student's hand up from underneath without warning. The student then understands how much motion and energy are required to make a certain *staccato* sound.
129. **Stages of Competency.** When teaching young children, research has shown that children around ages 6 and younger learn through play. The purpose of an activity is the activity itself and the pleasure gained from the activity. Ages 7-10 are characterized by the phrase, "I can do it." Students find satisfaction in being competent. At ages 11 and above, playing the piano becomes personal, as an expression of self. Keep these phases in mind when teaching. (For further reading, see Benjamin Bloom's book, *Developing Talent in Young People*. These age categories are general and may vary by several years depending on the student.)
130. **Step Away.** If you tend to hover over the student waiting to correct his every move, consciously take a step back away from the piano now and then, and allow him to work on things on his own. He needs to develop the confidence that he can do the work necessary to conquer a challenge in his music rather than always waiting for you to rescue him or looking to you for approval.
131. **Steps.** Use a series of **Steps** to introduce or practice a piece. For instance, one series of steps could be the following.

Step 1: You play the piece to allow the student to hear the finished product.

Be sure you give a stellar performance.

Step 2: Student and teacher tap the rhythm of a section.

Step 3: Analyze a portion to find intervals or notes.

Step 4: The student plays a phrase or section **Slowly** while you play the

student's part up an octave and point to the notes (**Playing and Pointing Insurance**).

Step 5: You sing and point to the notes while the student plays alone (**Singing and Pointing Insurance**).

Step 6: The student plays alone several times without you singing or pointing.

Step 7: The student plays while you play an accompaniment that includes the student's part.

Step 8: The student plays while you play the written accompaniment.

Using **Steps** is especially crucial in the beginning stages, because steps prevent mistakes and teach good practicing skills. If the student is making mistakes, it may be because you have skipped a step the student needs. If the student is bored, he may not need as many Steps. Tailor the number and type of steps to where the student is in his learning.

Steps are also important when fixing a problem section. Break the section down into small steps for the student. The eventual goal is for the student to be able to think of steps to fix a problem himself.

132. **Stop While You're Ahead.** The student performs a piece in the lesson, and you stop the student when the performance starts getting shaky. This saves time, rather than having the student struggle through the rest of a piece. Also, the student is rewarded at later lessons by being allowed to play through the entire piece without being stopped.
133. **Story Repeats.** A more specific form of **Fun Repeats** is to create a story and have the student play the piece repeatedly in different ways. For example, if playing the piece "Charlie Chipmunk," you could make up a story about how the chipmunk goes out for a walk (child plays the piece at normal tempo) and comes across his baby sister playing in the forest (student plays it again higher and faster for Sister Chipmunk). Then they hide from mom (play slowly and sneakily). They then run home and have lunch with grandpa (play it low for Grandpa Chipmunk). Loud, quiet, fast, slow, high, middle, low concepts can all be reinforced in this way while creating more opportunities for repetition.

134. **Student as Teacher.** Let the student be the teacher. For example, the student can check your hand position and make corrections, or you can let him check your hand for a relaxed thumb.
135. **Student Involvement.** The child, especially the older child, should work harder than the teacher does in the lesson. This means involving the child in answering **Questions** about the music, engaging the child in critical listening through **Which Way?**, developing the discipline to **Sevenize**, having the child open the music books, **Student Marking**, etc. It is the child's lesson. Teach him to take initiative and to be disciplined and diligent by making sure he is working harder than you are in the lesson.
136. **Student Marking.** Whenever possible, have the student, rather than you, mark corrections in the score, list practice steps, or write their assignment. Especially for the student who enjoys writing, he will remember better when he writes, and he will take more ownership of his learning (**Student Involvement**). This also allows you to gauge his understanding of corrections and assignments. However, for the student who has trouble writing or who is stressed by writing, it is best if you write for him.
137. **Systematically Through Backward.** The student performs the piece, and you work through the piece by starting with the end section. This can build confidence about playing the ending, since most students usually spend more time working on the beginning of a piece. Once the student has experienced the strategies of **Systematically Through Forward**, **Systematically Through Backward**, and **Spot Checking**, ask which strategy he prefers.
138. **Systematically Through Forward.** The student performs the piece. Work through the piece from the beginning, stopping to make corrections where necessary.
139. **Tapping.** Tapping has many applications. You can tap the rhythm of a piece, tap a steady beat with the metronome, or tap a steady beat to music. Tapping is a useful **Step** in developing a sense of pulse in a piece. Tapping is preferred to clapping, because tapping is a pianistic movement. Young children may have trouble with clapping, as it involves more coordination to know whether the beat is on the clap

or on the rebound. Tapping is much preferred. Playing on a drum is even more fun if one is available.

140. **Teach Mom.** When learning a Rote Piece, have the student teach his parent to play the piece at the lesson. This allows the parent to be involved and makes the child feel great that he can teach his parent to play! It also reinforces the child's mastery of the piece, as we learn better when we teach someone else.
141. **Teacher Happy Choices.** Provide the student choices to allow some shared control of the lesson. All choices you give the student must be acceptable to you as teacher. For example, say, "We are going to play this piece two more times. Would you like to play by yourself first, or both times with me playing the accompaniment?" Do *not* say, "Do you want to play this piece again?" If the student says, "No," then you are put in the position of having to contradict the student's choice if you want the student to play it again.
142. **Teacher Practice.** Practice your student's music. You will gain new insights into the musical and technical aspects of the piece as you practice. If possible, take lessons yourself. Keep growing as a pianist!
143. **Technical Osmosis.** Play a technical motion with the student so he can see your hand execute the movement in his peripheral vision. Or, just move in a certain way without playing. For example, in scales, move side to side to remind the student to lean to reach the upper and lower registers. This reminds him of the motions without words.
144. **Technology.** Use video recording to help you teach. Send home videos of Rote Pieces to remind the student how to play them. Send appropriate YouTube videos of performances to inspire the student. There are many uses of technology that can be helpful in teaching.
145. **Two for One.** Instead of assigning one piece in its entirety, assign the first eight bars of two or three pieces simultaneously. In this way, the student will be working on more repertoire at once and will probably learn three pieces in about the same time it would have taken him to learn one assigned in its entirety. The student will cover more of the vast piano repertoire, and he will have more variety in his practicing. Elementary level students should learn at least 40 pieces per year.

Some can learn upwards of 100 pieces. As the student becomes more advanced and the pieces become longer, fewer pieces will be learned per year. At no time should a student (especially at the early levels) be only learning 2-4 pieces in a year. Learning many pieces at the proper levels of difficulty is much preferred to learning two pieces extremely difficult pieces. Students who are limited to a few pieces a year may have major deficiencies in their reading ability and in their understanding of music.

146. **Uh Oh.** If the student plays something wrong, say, “**Uh, oh,**” instead of nagging.
147. **Walk Around the Bench.** If a child is not focusing, get up and move around for 30 seconds. Or ask the child questions about his day or his pets. Or have the child walk around the bench three times. This gives him a brain break.
148. **Watch, Listen, Learn.** In a Partner Lesson, the non-playing student watches and listens carefully, because a student can learn as much from watching and listening as from playing. Watching provides an extra step before playing is attempted.
149. **What’s My Favorite Thing to Say?** When you find yourself repeating the same correction to a student often, such as playing with a tall pinky, sometimes ask, “What’s my favorite thing to say to you right now?” The student will likely say, “Tall pinky.” You can respond, “That’s right. You are working on a tall pinky right now, so that is my favorite thing to say to you. Other students have different things they are working on, but for you, my favorite thing right now is, ‘Tall pinky!’ When you conquer that, I won’t say it anymore!”
150. **What’s Wrong?** When the student makes a mistake you have corrected before, ask him, “**What’s Wrong** with the way that sounded?” Have him come up with the correct response rather than always giving him the answer. How the student responds will provide valuable information on how well the student understands what you have tried to teach. Is he just mindlessly adjusting his playing until he gets a good response from you, or does he really hear and understand the sounds he is creating at the piano?
151. **Which Way?** Play a passage two ways, right and wrong. The student listens and chooses the right way. Then the student plays for you, and you choose the right way.

152. **You Can't Do It All.** It is generally not possible to cover everything on the student's assignment every week. Prioritize from week to week what you will work on in the lesson. Be careful that you do not rush through the lesson and try to cover everything. Instead, actually teach! Make progress on the pieces you do work on. Save the other pieces for the next lesson. If you do always make it through everything on the assignment, it is likely that you are either teaching too fast and need to work more in depth, or the student should have a longer assignment. Especially for younger students, the more pieces on the assignment, the longer the student will spend at the piano.