

## Introducing Piano/Keyboard for Adults

Welcome to the Introducing Piano/Keyboard for Adults course at Waltons New School of Music.

This course is designed to teach you the fundamentals of keyboard technique – as well as basic music theory, sight-reading and chordal accompaniment – while you also learn varied and interesting pieces. We ask you to keep two important things in mind as you begin:

1. **The more you put into the course, the more you will get out of it.**
2. **Communicate with your teacher** if there is an area you're having difficulty with or something you don't fully understand. Your teacher is here to help you, so don't hesitate to approach her/him if you're having difficulty with anything.

### General Practice Tips

Practice is an essential aspect of any music course, and we all know the phrase 'practice makes perfect'. Yet even the most eager learner might cringe when told to practice daily. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of learning a musical instrument is developing a healthy, productive approach to practice. Your teacher will give you guidelines on how and what to practice, but the real work is up to you, and mostly on your own time. Here are a few tips:

- **Aim to practice every day.** Even a small amount of daily practice is much more effective than a long practice session the day before your next class. Make practice a part of your daily routine. Determine when is the best time for you to practice. If you like practicing in the morning, get up 30 minutes early so that you won't be late for work. If you're an evening person, do your practice before going to bed or before you become sleepy.
- **Make your practice area comfortable.** Is the room well ventilated? Is there proper lighting? Is your mobile switched off or on silent? Make sure that your practice area is comfortable and free from distractions so that you can concentrate when practicing.
- **Practice for at least 20 minutes.** Why 20 minutes? We find that this is a manageable time for beginners. Note that 20 minutes refers to work on the course material itself. Devote 5 minutes for warm-ups and 5 minutes for cool downs, just as you would for other physical exercise. That means you should try to set aside at least 30 minutes a day for practice sessions – a reasonable length for most adult students. As your interest and skill level grows, you will find that your daily practice time will also increase.
- **Focus on your practice.** Effective practice requires concentration and focus. If you are rushing to do it or are distracted by other things that need doing, you won't get much out of it. Try spending a few minutes in silence before you begin in order to take a few deep breaths and clear your head of other concerns.

### Piano Practice Tips

Here are some tips that can help you make the most of your piano practice time:

- **Get organised.** Practicing the piano efficiently is really about how to organise yourself to get the best results from the effort expended. It's essential to be very clear about your daily practice objectives. Many students find that writing a daily practice plan helps them to focus on their most important practice tasks and gives them a feeling of accomplishment as they complete each one.
- **Work on one task at a time.** Discipline yourself to complete each practice goal before moving on to the next. In the long run, you'll save enormous time by completing the day's work on one piece or exercise, rather than bouncing back and forth between different ones. While you might not get that new piece note-perfect today, you can indeed 'finish' a given passage with musical polish at a slow tempo. The great pianist Sviatoslav Richter's way of building his enormous repertoire was to finish each line of music before moving on to the next.
- **Only practice with full concentration.** In his autobiography, Daniel Barenboim cites this as a fundamental rule for practicing. If your practicing does not demand full concentration, then you're not practicing properly. Five minutes of concentrated practice is far more valuable than five hours of moving your fingers while your mind wanders. The mind must be active at all times, since it is first and foremost the mind that must play the piano.
- **Always warm up first.** Properly warmed-up hands will allow you to accomplish the physical tasks demanded with greater ease and with fewer errors. Most pianists find that scales and arpeggios make for the best warm-ups.
- **Practice slowly.** It is a known psycho-physiological fact that the brain cannot absorb musical information in detail when playing fast. It is therefore essential to work slowly and carefully at all times. Never try to force speed!
- **Don't allow yourself the 'luxury' of mistakes.** Mistakes cost far too much time to repair and only create uncertainty, whereas your practice ought to build security. Remember, your performance is a direct result of how you practice, and efficient piano practice means playing correctly. If you start making mistakes, it means either that you're going too fast to learn the music or that your brain is tired. If that's the case, it's best to take a break and do something else.
- **Practice short passages.** The brain absorbs musical information much more readily when it is not overwhelmed by quantity. Each day, practice just one passage, and practice it extremely carefully and thoroughly. This makes for far more efficient piano practice in the long run.
- **Keep a practice journal.** A practice journal is a log of your practice sessions, including what you practice and for how long. It can be a notebook or even a spreadsheet. At the end of each practice session, write down what you worked on and the time spent on each task. Timing yourself like this forces the mind to focus, and the clock doesn't lie!