



# *12 Tips for Joyful and Effective Piano Practice*

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**1. What are your goals?** You're sitting at the piano. Now what? Do you ever start playing without a sense of where you are going? Does practicing seem more haphazard than organized? Decide what you want to accomplish for each practice session. This could include learning the notes in a new piece, perfecting a tricky rhythm or memorizing a piece. The possibilities are infinite. And guess what? *You* get to decide!

**2. Set realistic expectations.** Do you ever look at a new piece and want or expect to play it "perfectly" right away? If so, congratulations! You are human. Perhaps you look at the piece and it looks so overwhelming that it seems impossible and you avoid beginning it at all. To get anywhere, you need to take into account your skill level, your comfort level, the challenges of the piece, and the amount of time you are willing and able to spend with it. Decide what your expectations are. Cut them in half. Cut them in half again. Now, you are ready to proceed!

**3. How is your posture?** How far away are you sitting from the piano? Can your arms reach all of the keys *comfortably*? Do you feel a sense of being centered on the bench and grounded? Are your feet planted, **uncrossed**, on the floor? Do you feel a sense of stability and comfort, able to reach all of the highest and lowest keys with ease of movement? The correct answer to this last question is "Yes".

**4. Fingering.** 1. Have a sharpened pencil with a big eraser handy. 2. Now, go to work. If you want to enjoy the scenery as you walk through the woods, without tripping or falling over the cliff, you need to clear away the obstacles so that you have sure footing. Your job is to follow the suggested fingering on the written page or modify it as needed- *the first day*- so that all subsequent days will yield easier and more secure "footing". With adequate practice, your fingers will know where to go automatically and you will then be able to immerse yourself and enjoy the music. Isn't that the point?

**5. Practice Success!** Play as **slowly** as you need to, in order to play *accurately*. Let me repeat. Play as **slowly** as you need to, in order to play *accurately*. I am talking **slow**, as in **glacial**. Create a **solid foundation of accuracy** with notes and fingering and rhythm. You can then build on that. Find the tempo or speed at which you can play that passage or piece with *complete accuracy*, whether it be with one hand or both. Would you want to live in a house if the foundation shifted every time the wind blew?

**6. Listen!** What are you hearing as you play? Are you even listening? What do you *want* to hear? What is the piece about? Play with the sound. Hear the sound you *want* first, your body will respond.

**7. Look!** What do you see? Be a detective. The written music is like a treasure map. The music you *hear* is the real treasure. Everything on the page, from the musical symbols to the descriptive words, is a clue. What are they telling you? What do the words mean? Do you (ahem) have a music dictionary? Or do you just sort of look past the words you don't know, figuring they're not important?

**8. Feel!** How does your body feel? Are you even aware? Does it feel relaxed or tense? Are your fingers all twisted up as if they are doing acrobatic maneuvers or are they moving easily? Look at them. How can you do things more easily? Try different ways. Start with the suggestions in the music (fingering, hand positions) and then explore other possibilities. There is almost always more than one way to achieve the musical and technical goals. What works best for you?

**9. Who's in charge of your fingers?** Yes, there are 10 of them and only one of you, and sometimes it seems as though they have their own minds. They can be awfully unruly and stubborn at times but you are still bigger than they are. If you have clarity of purpose and focus, they will respond accordingly. If you just "send them out to play", believe me they will, any which way they want. They will take *you* for a ride instead of behaving properly. Be in charge! Convey to them what you want *through what you want to hear* - they are waiting for your *clear* instructions!

**10. Celebrate mistakes!** If you are prone to feeling badly and berating yourself every time you make a mistake, try this..... the next time you make a mistake, exclaim "Yay!" I'm not kidding. It actually works. No, it doesn't erase the mistake nor is it a magic wand to play better ....but it does make you feel better! And if you feel more positive you are apt to be more successful as you encounter challenges. Why beat yourself up for every tiny or seemingly big boo-boo .... Why not try a positive spin.... You can't say "Yay!" without smiling.....

**11. Be patient with yourself** and with the learning process. Were you born running or did you crawl first? Where's the fire? Whether you are a beginner at the piano, or advanced and learning a new piece, there are no shortcuts. This is a process. Appreciate every success, and challenge however big or small, and know that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step..... and the next step and the next step. Who won the race- the tortoise or the hare?

**12. Enjoy this special time, just you and the piano.** When things get frustrating, which they will at times, remember why you are doing this, why you are engaged in learning music. There is so much pleasure and joy to be derived from playing the piano. It is an investment in time and energy which will reward you with an increasing ability to express your deepest self. "Music is enough for a lifetime, but a lifetime is not enough for music."  
Sergei Rachmaninoff