



Piano Lesson Policy Handbook

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Piano Lesson Policy Handbook

Greetings

Welcome to the Bill Butler Piano School. The purpose of this document is to introduce you to myself as well as layout need-to-know information concerning lessons, practicing, tuition, other costs, and requirements I have for students. This policy handbook (also referred to as “agreement”) is also a contract that must be read thoroughly and, if agreed to, signed by the student or parent/legal guardian if student is under 18 and myself.

My Background

Starting at age ten, I have been playing pianoforte for most of my life. I had two excellent teachers who both gave me a positive experience of piano playing. The first strongly emphasized the need to play in public and with that I was accompanying a middle school choir after only two years of playing, as well as playing special music during church services. My involvement in accompanying choirs grew, and by high school I was the primary pianist for the Blair County Chorus, a culmination of the best singers of the high schools in the county. My second teacher was active in the National Piano Guild and involved her students in the guild program. From the guild I received one of their highest national achievements, a Diploma in Social Music. My piano playing has led me to other instruments including euphonium, organ, and keyboards. While my teaching experience is quite limited, my playing experience is broad. Moreover, my love for the instrument and for music drives my desire to help others find the joy of piano playing.

Methodology

While I have been trained in classical music, I also have developed skills “playing chords” for contemporary church ensembles. Therefore my primary areas of teaching can either be in classical piano or chord methods, or both for that matter. For young beginners, I highly recommend the classical piano track, at least until the student is in late middle school. For late beginners, such as teenagers or adults, your goals in playing the piano will determine what method you would prefer to learn.

A La Ka Zaam!

No matter what a student's age, s/he should understand that there is no overnight magic available that will make him or her a pro. With the exception of students who have an ability to “play by ear,” progress in piano playing will seem slow for the first few years. Those who “play by ear” will also have their own challenges to overcome, including sight reading and observing the technical marks necessary to play a particular piece of music. If a student wants to play the piano with any proficiency, even for social enjoyment, it will take a long term commitment. If a student wants to play better faster, practicing frequently and carefully is the only known solution.

Disclaimer

It is important for me to note from the beginning that since I have no advanced education in piano myself, I cannot take any student past an early-intermediate stage of piano. Should a student reach this point, I will work with the student to find the best teacher possible that will help the student advance. For most beginning students, it could take anywhere from three to six years to reach that point, depending on age, commitment, and natural talent.

Number of Lessons

A full year of lessons is 36 lessons, September through May. At least three lessons will be held over summer months as well so that the student does not backslide in this time period. During the regular year, lessons will be scheduled at a regular time. Currently, the following three days are available to schedule lessons:

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Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 3:00pm to 5:30pm.

The student's weekly lesson time is considered their time, and I will not schedule anything else during that time without proper notice given to the student. See more below on absences and tardiness.

Tuition and Other Expenses

I will discuss with you from the start the cost of lessons. For those students 13 years and under, I recommend only a half hour lesson. For those over 13, I recommend at least 45 minutes. I will not regularly teach more than one hour with any student on a given day unless there are special circumstances—for instance the student has an audition piece for an ensemble; arrangements could be made for extended lessons in such a case.

Along with tuition, the student is also responsible to acquire an appropriate piano or keyboard for home practice—or make arrangements with a friend or relative to use their piano. What is appropriate depends on the commitment and skill level of the student. This can be discussed with me at any time. The student is also responsible for the cost of lesson books, printed music, recordings, and other learning devices (such as a metronome, flashcards, or software) that I may require. As the student progresses, s/he will eventually need to purchase a metronome (approximately \$20). I will inform the student when I think one is necessary.

An invoice for a full month's lessons will be given to the student at the first lesson of the month. The bill must be paid by the first lesson of the next month, or a \$2 late fee per month will apply. For music materials and teaching devices I buy for the student, the student will be loaned the materials for one month then given the option to buy them. If loaned music is returned damaged (as determined by me), the student is responsible for buying it. Insofar as the regular lesson books, the student will need to buy them on their own. See the section on "Lesson Books." The student can pay lesson bills via credit card on-line using Paypal; however, a service fee of \$0.39 plus 2.9% of the bill will apply. To pay via Paypal, you will need to login to the Piano School Website with the login and pin I assign you at your first lesson or interview.

The following are my current tuition rates, valid through May 31, 2008. I reserve the right to change tuition between lesson years (i.e. Between June and August). The student will be notified in writing by August 15 if there is a raise in tuition.

Half-hour lesson	\$8.00
Forty-five minute lesson	\$11.50
Hour lesson	\$15.00

Lesson Books

For standard beginners (over 8 years old) I prefer to teach using Alfred's Basic Piano Course. For younger beginners Alfred's publishes a more appropriate course, Alfred's Preparatory Piano Course. The basic course is broken into six skill levels, each level having up to 6 books. Generally five of the six are required: The Lesson book, the Recital/Solo book, the Technic book, the Theory book, and the Ear Training book. Other books are optional and will add to the student's learning experience. The books range from \$5 to \$8 each. I will purchase books for the student as needed *or* the books can be purchased at most music stores, including Forte Music on Mountain road in Linglestown. Anticipate buying a new set of books every four months.

For older students there are books better suited for faster learning. I have little familiarity with these resources, but am more than willing to review a book series upon the student's suggestion. Also, if the student owns a series of books already published after 1986 (a 20+ year cushion) that's not Alfred's Basic Piano (e.g. Bastien's), the student should bring those to the first lesson and I will see if they will work out. I make no guarantees that I

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will teach from the student's pre-owned lesson curriculum. I reserve the right to require purchase of the Alfred's curriculum materials.

Missing Lessons and Tardiness

If the student is aware that s/he will miss a lesson, the student must notify me within five days of the lesson. If the student notifies me by that time, the student is not responsible for cost of the lesson. However, if the student cancels less than five days before the lesson, s/he is still responsible for paying for that lesson—whether or not it is taken. If I call off a lesson, the student is *not* responsible for paying for that lesson. If I should fail to show without notice (hopefully not), the student will receive two free lessons as a result of my shortcoming. Please note that I may be downstairs doing pastoral work in my office. The student should make a reasonable attempt at being sure that I am at the church before assuming I am not present and then leaving.

If the student is tardy for a lesson, the scheduled end time of the lesson does not change and the student will still owe the full amount for that lesson. For example, a student has a 45 minute lesson from 3:00pm – 3:45pm. He arrives at 3:15. The lesson will still end at 3:45pm, and the student is still responsible for the cost of a 45 minute lesson. I will be slightly flexible in this area, but will not take abuse. If I am tardy, I will make my best effort to give a full lesson (unless I have other commitments scheduled—in which case I will make up time in following lessons). Furthermore, if I am more than 10 minutes late, the student will receive a free lesson, plus I will make up time missed at a time agreeable by both myself and the student/student's parent.

Inclement Weather

In the event of inclement weather, the student will not have a lesson when Central Dauphin School District has canceled school for that day or released early. Also given the poor topographical location of the church facility where I teach, minor inclement weather may be enough to make travel to and from the church dangerous. In such cases I will call the student or his/her parent with at least a half hour prior notice that the lesson is canceled. You will not have to pay for a lesson canceled due to weather, nor will any additional free lessons be given.

Practicing at Home

Students who establish good practice habits from the beginning will progress more rapidly and find piano practice and lessons more enjoyable. The amount of time required for good quality practice will vary depending on the student's age and playing level. More importantly, however, is that practice is done on a *consistent* daily basis with a clear goal in mind. I will be keeping notes for the student during the lesson in a notebook that I will provide as part of the lesson fees. This notebook is both the student and myself to track progress and a tool for the student to practice at home—it will help the student remember things we discussed at the lesson. The student must bring it with him/her for every lesson, and furthermore the student is to refer to it often while practicing throughout the week. I include specific practice instructions based on the areas of study and pieces they are working on. There are seven basic reasons that a student does not practice.

I am responsible for the first three:

1. The student does not know *how* to practice.
2. The study pieces are either boring (too easy) or frustrating (too hard).
3. The student is required to work exclusively on music that is unappealing.

Parents (if student is a minor) are responsible for the next three (I give detailed helps below):

4. Practice sessions are not specifically scheduled into the day and monitored by parents.
5. Practice is scheduled when other family members or friends are engaged in distracting activities.
6. The instrument is not in reasonable condition and/or the practice room is not comfortable.

The student is responsible for the most common reason:

7. The student must develop a character quality – discipline – in order to learn to schedule priorities and to

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understand that there is not always enough time in the day to do everything. Piano practice must become a priority for the student him/herself.

Additional Practice Advice For Parents

It is important that you make piano practice a positive experience for your child. This can make or break the student's love and commitment to the instrument. Be firm about practicing—you play an important role outside the classroom in your child's musical development. Should difficulties and conflict occur with your child over practicing, try negotiating shorter practice “snippets” such as 10 minutes now, and 10 minutes a little later, and 10 minutes later yet if the longer practice time becomes a burden.

Also do not get annoyed with or upset at your child practicing—even if it is painful to listen to—in fact be encouraging while they play. If you like something they play, express your joy to them and ask them to play it again for you. If your piano is loud and student sounds like they are pounding, please notify me and we will work this out at lesson time—complaining to your child that they are playing too loudly may be seen as your dissatisfaction with your child's efforts and may make practice time and piano playing a negative experience.

If your piano is in the same room as the main television of the house—consider moving either the piano or the television. Often the family will be watching TV while the child may want to play. Moving the TV and piano to different rooms will avoid conflict over space.

Finally, reward good practice habits with more than kind words. Unfortunately for many children (and adults), the satisfaction of well-practiced and played music is not enough incentive to practice regularly, nor is the fact that you are paying for lessons (they usually won't care about this detail). Some ideas to get you thinking: “bonuses” to allowances, going to the student's favorite restaurant, taking him/her to a movie, or other small gifts. Be creative and there's no need to get too expensive.

To help your child succeed well, please adhere to the following advice:

- Providing a quiet and undisturbed time for practice.
- Providing a proper, tuned and well-maintained instrument.
- Assisting your child in making and keeping a regular practice schedule.
- Providing support, encouragement and discipline for regular and consistent practice.
- Reviewing weekly assignments and helping your child follow through specific practice steps.
- Reading and upholding all Studio Policies in this handbook and being on time for all scheduled lessons and recitals.
- Paying for tuition and music books by the first lesson of each month.

Live Concerts and Musical Events

Being in Harrisburg, there are more opportunities to see live classical concerts than one may realize. Any student taking the “Classical” method should plan to attend at least one concert every year where a pianist is being featured. Exposure to the professional world of piano playing will enhance the student's appreciation of classical music and the skill it takes to be an excellent pianist. Locally, the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra and Hershey Symphony Orchestra often invite skilled pianists to play piano concertos, and local colleges such as Messiah, Lebanon Valley, and Elizabethtown also have concerts featuring premier pianists. Also within a one to two hour drive there are opportunities to see the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Kennett Symphony of Chester County, the Altoona Symphony Orchestra, the Schuylkill Symphony Orchestra and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. A simple Google search will provide web sites for all these venues and should give a schedule of events. Most even provide online ticket booking. I will make an effort to stay on top of opportunities that become available, and will let students know about them at their lesson. In the event of free concerts at local colleges, I may even attempt to organize a trip of all my piano students to see the performance.

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Playing in Publicly

I encourage all students to actively seek ways to play for others, whether in church, at school, or for extended family. While some students will take piano solely for personal enjoyment, your development as a student will be enhanced by overcoming nerves and insecurities through playing for others and in highly public venues. Should I have enough students under my instruction, I will attempt to host an annual recital in May each year, where students can exhibit their top repertoire.

Piano Hygiene

To prevent excessive collecting of dirt and spreading of germs, it is recommended that students wash their hands before playing any piano. I require all students to wash their hands before each lesson.

Fingernails, which are too long, preclude development of proper piano technique. Please be certain they are trimmed very short. They should never extend beyond the tip of the finger. If your nails “tap” they keys as they are being played, they are too long; or, if you are compelled by the length of your nails to play with the pads of the fingers as opposed to the tips, your nails are probably too long.

Concerning the Piano Lessons

Piano lessons are held in the Sanctuary of the United Church of God (1211 Fairmont Drive, Harrisburg 17112). Please enter the large wooden doors at the front the church and make an immediate left into the Sanctuary. If you know you are the first student of the day, you may need to go to the lower level doors (under the green awning) and knock. I am probably doing pastoral work in my office.

Students who arrive early or siblings who come along should bring something quiet to occupy themselves, such as a book or homework. If I am teaching another student upon arrival, please remain in the church vestibule until I am finished.

In an age of child abuse scandals I must protect myself from any false accusations. Therefore I require an adult (over 18) to accompany and remain at the church during the piano lesson of any minor. While it tends to create an awkward environment for the student if a parent remains in the teaching room, I will leave the Sanctuary doors open and the parent/adult accompaniment is encouraged to sit in the vestibule where he/she can safely monitor the lesson.

Piano students and any who come with them (siblings, parents, etc.) are *not* permitted to roam the church building freely. The only rooms that may be occupied are the Sanctuary (for the person taking a lesson), the vestibule, and the bathrooms adjacent to the vestibule. No one at the church for piano lessons should be in the classrooms, fellowship hall, basement, or upstairs rooms. You may sit at the welcome center to do homework. Should you move any items on the desk to free space, please return them to their proper place when you are finished.

It is a privilege both for me as a teacher and the student to use this church facility for piano lessons. It will be a shame and greatly disadvantageous if we lose our privilege have piano lessons here because of misuse of the church facility.

Dismissal

If any of the following situations persists after I have notified you and provided time to correct the problem, I regret that I will have to dismiss the student: This is not an exhaustive list of reasons for dismissal.

- The student consistently demonstrates a lack of willingness to participate during lesson time.
- The student consistently fails to show diligence and determination in home practice.
- Lack of dependability and commitment exhibited in persistent absences or chronic lateness.
- Failure to pay a bill within two months of due date, or a consistent failure to pay bills on time.

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- Constant disruptive or disrespectful behavior before, during, or after lessons and recitals.
- Repeated failure to prepare assigned material.
- Any damage or theft caused at or on the lesson premises.

Miscellany (i.e. the small print)

This agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. If for any reason a court of competent jurisdiction finds any provision or portion of this agreement to be unenforceable, the remainder of the agreement will continue in full force and effect. Any lawsuit filed by either party to enforce or construe any right granted under this agreement or to assert any claim arising from the services provided by the Bill Butler Piano School shall be filed exclusively in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Dauphin County. This agreement must be signed in order for any student to take piano lessons from the Bill Butler Piano School. Terms in this contract may be changed at any time without prior notice given the student and/or his/her legal guardian.

This agreement is for the student _____.

Student's or Parent's/Legal Guardian's (for students under 18) Signature Date

Printed Student's or Parent's Name

Piano Teacher's Signature Date
William H. Butler

Agreement Revision: 10/23/07 04:58 PM