

Yes, You *Can* Play the Piano!

by Anne Elliott

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I am a firm believer that the piano is one of the most useful musical instruments a child can learn. I know I'm biased, since I taught private piano lessons in our home for several years before while our first children were still small. However, since beginning to teach my own children, I've become steadily more convinced that *anyone* can learn to play the piano – even mom! The piano is excellent preparation for any other type of music that your children may want to someday enjoy.

So, if you already have a piano teacher, rejoice! Mom's job then is to communicate weekly with your teacher so that you'll understand exactly how your children are supposed to practice each day. No matter how good of a teacher you've hired, your children simply won't progress unless you consistently require them to:

- Practice every day!
- Play their songs correctly!
- Play their songs enough times each day to get better at them!

As one parent speaking with another, I want to highly recommend that you read *A Parent's Guide to Piano Lessons*, by James W. Bastien. It will tell you how to select a teacher and purchase a piano (we found ours in someone's basement, ready to be demolished, and the home owners *gave* it to us). It will give you concrete ways to help your beginner succeed and show you how to help them practice each day. Plus, the back of the book contains brief outlines of musical facts, a brief dictionary or musical terms and other invaluable hints for parents. It is available here:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0910842051/anneshomeyplace>

All parents should also take time to bookmark this helpful website:

<http://pianoeducation.org/>

If you cannot find a teacher, or you cannot afford one, please don't give up on piano lessons. I am firmly convinced that you can teach your children enough to get them started, although without an experienced teacher, they may not develop the polish that will set them on the road to musical stardom. Regardless, you can provide them with a firm foundation in music and assure them a lifetime of musical enjoyment.

If you want to teach your children, I highly recommend that you first teach yourself. Stay about half a book ahead of your children. It only takes 10 minutes a day to play through the beginning songs, so just make it a ritual in your day, right after breakfast. You'll be much more confident of your abilities to teach your children if you first teach yourself.

How old should your children be to start learning to play the piano? I suggest that your oldest child be at least in kindergarten, already knowing a few letters of the alphabet and

some numbers – and willing to learn from *you*, his or her mother. Let your oldest child get at least half a book learned before starting the next youngest sibling. Very small children certainly *can* learn to play the piano; however, you might want to be a little more “experienced” as a teacher before attempting it. Even my youngest children, at the age of 18 months or so, start to desire to “practice” each day. I let them sit on the bench and push the keys for a few minutes. Three years old is the youngest I’ve started to teach my own so far. (Note: If piano keys get sticky or dirty from little fingers, use a baby wipe to clean the keys.)

Let’s talk about what “textbooks” to use. Every teacher has her favorite, but if you’ll be teaching your own children, I recommend that you buy *Piano Adventures*, Primer Level (<http://www.pianomusic.com/> which contains four small, purple books:

Lesson book
Performance book
Theory book (a workbook – consumable)
Technique & Artistry book

After the primer level, you will move on to Level 1, which also has four books. At the pace of about 4-6 months, your child will continue to progress, until he has finished all five levels. You can expect each level to cost around \$20, so save your money accordingly.

In addition, CDs are available for each level so that you can hear what the songs are supposed to sound like, plus your child can play along with the CDs for fun. I make it a rule to never listen to the CD, however, until after at least 3 days of practice with a new song. Otherwise, some children will memorize the sound of the song and never learn to read the notes on the printed page.

These materials can be purchased most inexpensively from <http://www.pattimusic.com/>

Below you will find a schedule for progressing through these books. Take at least a week on each lesson. Using the “Practice Record” at the end of this guide (or keeping his place in the book with his own color of paper clip), expect your child to:

- Practice *every day* (with one day off each week).
- Play each song *at least* 3 times correctly.

(I often allow my kids to play any songs they wish once they have first practiced their lesson for the week.) If your children do not play the week’s lesson confidently, or they have not practiced according to your expectations (every day, 3 times each song), then require them to play that lesson for another week.

Learning Schedule for the Primer Level:

Week	Lesson Book	Performance Book	Technique & Artistry Book	Theory Book
1	3-7 ¹	--	3-5	2-3
2	8-9	2	4-5	4
3	10-13	--	--	5-6
4	14-15	3	6-7	7
5	16	4	--	8
6	17-19	5	8-9	9-10
7	20-22	6-7	10-11	--
8	23-25	8	12-13	11-14
9	26-27	9-10	14-15	15
10	28-29	11	16	16-17
11	30-33	--	--	18-20
12	34-35	12	17	21
13	36-37	13	17	22-23
14	38-39	--	--	24-25
15	40-41	14-16	18-19	26-27
16	42-43	17-18	--	28-32
17	44-45	19	20	33
18	46-47	20-21	21	34-35
19	48-49	22-23	--	36-37
20	50-51	24-25	23-25	38-39
21	52-55	26-27	26-27	40-43
22	56-59	28	28-29	44
23	60-61	30	30-31	45-46
24	62-63	32	32	47-48

Please note that the “Lesson” Book tells you which pages to schedule in the accompanying books. You’ll see these instructions in tiny print near the center of the book.

¹ These are page numbers.

This Week in Piano

Name _____

Date _____

What to Practice:	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Lesson Book -						
Performance Book -						
Technique and Artistry Book -						
Other Songs -						

Remember, play each song 3 times a day!

- Tuesday -
Do Theory book, pp. _____

