

Overview

Introductory Handbook

Piano Instruction with Tess Luhmann

Thank you for reaching out regarding piano instruction. This handbook is designed to be a getting-started guide and provide a reference for key information. I'm excited to work with you (or your child) to discover this new connection to music.

Learning piano unlocks opportunities for sharpening cognitive skills, applying self-discipline, cultural appreciation, and life-long enjoyment. My teaching goal is to share with you the same satisfaction that piano has afforded myself.



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Lesson Policies

Lesson Policies

Lesson Scheduling

We will establish an initial lesson cadence following the introductory session. Weekly lessons are recommended. Recommended lesson duration is dependent on skill level, and increases alongside skill. See below for recommended lesson length based on skill level:

Skill Level	Years of Experience	Recommended Lesson Length
Novice	0 - 3 years	30 minutes
Beginner	1 - 6 years	45 minutes
Intermediate	2 - 8 years	1 hour
Advanced	4 - 12 years	1 - 2 hours

If you would like to adjust your lesson cadence or timing, please email me at tluhmann.pianist@gmail.com.

Lesson Cancellation

If you need to reschedule a lesson, please email tluhmann.pianist@gmail.com at your earliest convenience. If you need to cancel a lesson, please reach out at least 24 hours in advance. If a lesson is cancelled within 24 hours of the scheduled time, 50% of the lesson fee will be charged to account for preparation and reserved time.

Fees & Rates

Pricing is set by lesson duration, and rates are designed to encourage advancement. See below for flat rates by lesson duration:

Lesson Duration	Flat Rate
30 minutes	\$35.00
45 minutes	\$50.00
60 minutes	\$60.00
1.5 hours	\$75.00

Payment

Invoices are charged monthly, and shared by email. Invoices contain charges itemized by lesson date and duration. I aim to share invoices for the previous month no later than 1 week into the new/current month. You will be asked to confirm your contact email for billing during the introductory session, but can always change by emailing tluhmann.pianist@gmail.com.

I take payment in Zelle (preferred), PayPal or cash. For digital payment platforms, my account information is:

- First Name: Theresa
- Last Name: Luhmann
- Email: tlucyluhmann@gmail.com
- Phone Number: (415)-680-4838

Location & Attendance

I offer primarily in-home instruction. If you are seeking after-school instruction for your child, I am happy to coordinate with their school to secure a practice room for lessons on request.

For in-home instruction, I aim to arrive 10-5 minutes before the scheduled lesson time. For on-site instruction, you or your child will be expected to arrive within 10 minutes of the scheduled lesson time.

Holidays and Rescheduling

While I do take time-off, I aim to schedule it around major holidays and school breaks.

These include:

- The week(s) of Christmas and New Years Day
- The week of Thanksgiving
- The week of the 4th of July
- Scholastic Spring Break

If I am unable to cover a lesson for personal reasons, I will aim to inform you no later than 24 hours in advance. If the reason is sickness, I will aim to inform you no later than 10am PST the day of the lesson.



In order to participate in lessons, you will be provided or required to bring certain materials outlined in this section.

In order to practice, you will also need a suitable instrument. Keyboards vary widely in type and quality. Below you'll find tips for selecting, upgrading, and purchasing an instrument.

Sheet Music or Instruction Booklet	Ruled Sheet Music Notebook	Pencil
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Instruction Booklets and Exercise Books are loaned to beginner students.

Sheet music can often be found and read online ([including the classical canon virtually free of charge](#)).

If you prefer physical sheet music, I will loan the material if it is in my library. If not, I can facilitate purchase on request and invoice the cost.

A blank sheet music notebook will be provided to you at your first lesson. This notebook will be used to record your progress, notes for practicing, and exercises.

You will need a pencil to take notes on the lesson and in your music. Musicians should avoid using pens in case other students re-use music.

Here are some of the other accessories you may want as a piano student:

- A metronome (can be [purchased](#) or [found online](#))
- A ring binder for loose sheet music
- A [clippable music stand light](#)
- A tablet (for digital music)
- Headphones and jack (for digital keyboards)

The right keyboard for you can vary wildly by skill level, cost, footprint, and (even) genre. A piano student might also find themselves ‘graduating’ instruments as they advance. This is an overview of keyboards to

understand what could be the best fit for you
now, and in the future:

Digital Keyboards

Digital keyboards vary the most in cost and quality. An excellent digital keyboard is defined by the touch of keys, which is controlled by a weighting system designed to mimic the touch of an acoustic piano. This allows for expression of dynamic and tone, but also drives up prices. Look for keyboards that have weighted keys, keeping in mind the prices generally start at \$400.

Cheaper digital keyboards will also sometimes have fewer than the standard 88 keys. This might be acceptable for a novice student, but will need to be replaced if you advance.

You should also check before purchasing that the keyboard either has or can attach a music stand. In addition to purchasing the keyboard, you will need to purchase a keyboard stand, bench and a sustain pedal. You may also wish to check that there is a jack for headphones. These often require an additional adapter, but can be worth it to practice in silence.

Overall, these keyboards can be excellent if you are a novice for their relatively low cost and small physical footprint. But don't cut corners in quality, or your musical experience will be underwhelming. Be also prepared to buy the additional accoutrements that won't come with the keyboard alone. Because being able to practice with headphones can be, let's say, a relief to your household, investing well in a digital piano early on means you may keep the instrument to practice on, even after you purchase an acoustic instrument.

Upright Pianos

Upright pianos take many of the components of a grand piano, and rearrange them vertically. As such, the great benefit of an upright piano is that they require much less space than a grand.

To achieve the design, there are sacrifices made to the hammer mechanism and pedals. You will notice that you have to press keys harder and lower the pedal much less on an upright to get the same effect as a grand piano. As such, it can be difficult for an intermediate student to get the right effect on a grand piano if they practice on an upright.

What upright pianos do offer is the enjoyment of an acoustic instrument, without the costs of a grand piano. Perfectly good used pianos can be found from \$2K - \$6K. If you later do upgrade to a grand piano, many dealers will allow you to trade-in. As for any acoustic piano, ensure you (or that you ask someone to) play the instrument to check its sound quality is to your liking.

Overall, an upright piano can be ideal for any beginner or intermediate pianist, especially if you have limited space in your home. They are also excellent stepping stone pianos to buy used, and trade-in should you decide. Still, quality of the sound, touch and pedaling can vary instrument to instrument, so peruse widely to ensure you invest in an instrument you'll enjoy.

Baby Grand Pianos

Baby grands are the smallest range of grand pianos, which is any piano less than 6 ft long. At this level, you get the mechanisms of a grand piano, and a larger instrument.

However, the length of the strings and the soundboard (the wood against which the sound reverberates, like the hollow body of a guitar) is smaller, generally resulting in a poor quality of sound. Despite this, they often retail at the same price (or higher) than an excellent upright.

Overall, I don't recommend baby grand pianos. If you're looking for an excellent instrument above all else, a salon grand piano is a savvier investment. If you like the idea of a grand piano, but just don't have the space, opt for an upright instead.

Grand Pianos

The grand piano is the gold standard of home pianos. They generally measure between 6' - 7.4' feet, and, at this stage, the only thing you get from a larger instrument (i.e. a concert grand) is louder sound. These pianos offer the better quality of sound, touch and pedaling that make pianos unique musical instruments. At the same time, the quality (and aesthetics) of the instruments can range. Here, too, ensure that you play widely while shopping to find an instrument that you love, and research brands to understand their best models or years of production.

Here are some additional quick tips when purchasing an instrument:

- **Used vs. New:** Don't be afraid to try used pianos. Not only are they more cheaply priced, but pianos' sound can mature as they're played to become warmer over time.
- **Know the lifecycle of a piano:** Most pianos have an expiry date between 100 - 120 years, depending on the brand and conditions they've been kept in, as the wood begins to warp. Be wary of purchasing centennial pianos.
- **Manufacturing Brands:** While you may recognize certain piano brands (for better or for worse), don't be afraid to try brands you've never heard of before. Some Steinways were made with plastic parts that won't last, and some hand-made Yamahas can be phenomenal instruments. And smaller piano manufacturers you've never heard of could be hidden gems.
- **Regions and sound quality:** While there's no hard & fast rule, generally there are certain types of quality that different regions of piano makers have cultivated. Knowing these can be a shortcut to understanding what piano would be the best musical fit for you:
 - American pianos tend to be booming powerhouses, built for powerful sound and hefty resonance. They are generally preferred by virtuosic pianists, and can be enjoyable to play anything from Beethoven to Contemporary Jazz.
 - East Asian pianos tend to be more percussive in their hammers and strings, resulting in plucky touch and 'metallic' sound. I find these pianos work best in the extremes: either taking advantage of an almost harpsichord-like Baroque style, or to bang out pop-rock anthems.
 - European pianos are a more traditional style of manufacture which focuses on a 'sweetness' of the wood and hammers. These instruments can have gorgeous 'singing' resonance, making them perfect for Classical Romantic music or pop ballads.
- **Know your space:** Be sure to take measurements of the space you have available for a piano, as well as measurements of any doorways or clearances.

When purchasing a piano, keep in mind that pianos are a musical investment, and not so much a financial one. A new

piano's value depreciates significantly once they are 'used'. So consider critically while purchasing if you will keep a new piano in the family for generations, or if you're looking for something used to resell in the future.

Acoustic Piano Maintenance

If you do purchase an acoustic piano, here are some tips for maintenance:

- Tuning:
 - A brand new piano will need to be tuned within the first couple months of moving as it adjusts to the change.

- Tunings can then become less frequent, generally between 6 - 12 months.
- If your piano does start to go out of tune, don't wait to call a technician: listen for a 'buzzing' sound in lower keys, sound that resonates without the sustain pedal depressed, or the 'thunk' of a hammer without pitch.
- To get the most out of a piano's lifetime, avoid placing it in direct sunlight. Know, too, that wood responds poorly to changes in temperature and humidity.
- If your piano has a lid, lower it between practicing to reduce dust or debris falling inside.

Lesson Structure and Practice Tips

Lesson Structure and Practice Tips

What to expect from your lesson

The content of lessons will vary depending on skill level and student goals, but a standard lesson will include:

Activity	Description	Average Time Spent during Lesson (%)
Exercises	Warm-up exercises, ranging in skill level from 5-finger scales to pedagogic exercise pieces (e.g. etudes, preludes, etc.).	10%
Repertoire	Repertoire is selected based on skill level and the student's selection preferences. Depending on how quickly a student reads music, they may be assigned between 1 - 3 passages to study between lessons.	50%
Music Theory	Music theory is the backbone of piano, and the most transferable skill in music, and across disciplines. Students will receive theory workbooks: lessons will be covered during our session, and exercises will be filled out between sessions.	20%
Sight Reading	Sight reading is maybe the hardest musical skill, but is the most impactful at developing cognitive skills. Sight reading will be taught alongside theory, with short passages to develop this skill.	20%

Repertoire is flexible, and depends on your musical goals. Here is a rough outline of the standard repertoire you might learn at each stage:

Skill Level	Repertoire Categories		Example Pieces
Novice	Beginner's exercises and short pieces.		
Beginner	A guided chronological progression through an album of beginner piano pieces (I enjoy starting with this album).		Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart - Rondo in C Major Dmitri Kabalevsky - Little March
Intermediate	Collaborative selection of repertoire by major piano categories.	Early Keyboards and Baroque	Johann Sebastian Bach - Invention No. 8 in F Major, BWV 779
		Early Piano and Classical	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart - Sonata in C Major, K. 545
		Romantic Period	Frédéric Chopin - Prelude in E Minor, Op. 28 No. 4
		20th Century Transition	Claude Debussy - The Little Shepherd (from Children's Corner)
		Jazz Classics & Theory	George Gershwin - Prelude No. 1 from Three Preludes

		Contemporary & Composition	Yiruma - River Flows in You
Advanced	Project-driven studies: we will collaborate to outline a program of repertoire focused on a theme or skill.		Theme: 'Pedagogic Piano Music' Example Program: Johann Sebastian Bach - Invention No. 1 in C Major, BWV 772 Muzio Clementi - Sonatina in C Major, Op. 36 No. 1 (1st Movement) Robert Schumann - "Wild Rider" from Album for the Young, Op. 68 Philip Glass - "Opening" from Glassworks

Practicing: Setting Yourself up for Success

In order to advance in piano, it is fundamental for students to practice. Practicing is a skill in its own right, and the benefit of developing self-discipline (especially from an early age) is a powerful transferable skill. Time spent practicing piano is dependent on skill level, but, for any level, it is recommended to try practicing daily. 'Practicing' includes preparing any of the standard activities cited above, including exercises, repertoire, theory exercises and self-practicing sight reading. Here is my recommendation for time spent practicing:

Skill Level	Recommended Practice Goal	Daily recommended
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Novice	35 minutes / week	5 minutes / day
Beginner	1.75 hours / week	15 minutes / day
Intermediate	7 hours / week	1 hour / day
Advanced	14 hours / week	Minimum 2 hours / day

The unfortunate truth for many students (and at-home listeners), though, is that practicing is tedious and repetitive. During your lessons, I will work with you to outline a practice agenda, but here are some extra tips to stick with it:

- Try to reduce distractions: don't have windows or TVs within view when positioning the instrument in your space.
- If you have a digital piano, use headphones to focus sound and attention.
- Speak up during your lessons about what you do and don't like, so we can tailor your lesson plan to what you're able to focus on.
- Be flexible in your practice and learning goals: take a break to sight-read something completely new, or to listen to a jazz piano playlist. Any exposure to piano music counts as practice, and can help to keep your interest in learning active.
- If you are a parent, your child might become frustrated during practice. Encourage them to take breaks or step away for the day.

Contact Information

Contact Information



Tess Luhmann

Pianist, Organist, Accompanist

Email: tluhmann.pianist@gmail.com

Phone #: (415)-680-4838

Mailing Address:

1525 Clay St., Apt. 16

San Francisco, CA, 94109

I am always delighted to be referred for concerts, accompaniment or piano lessons.

**While I will try to accommodate all inquiries, please note that my schedule may not
always allow me to take on new contracts or students.**

I aim to respond to all inquiries within 24 – 48 hours of receipt.

Resources &

FAQ

Resources & FAQ

Digital Resources

[IMSLP.org](https://imslp.org): Library of free sheet music. A great resource for any classical pianist.

[Piascore](#): Recommended tablet app for digitally reading sheet music.

[Musicnotes](#): Purchase copies of copyrighted scores.

[IMSLP.org](https://imslp.org): Library of free sheet music. A great resource for any classical pianist.

[Sheet Music Plus](https://www.sheetmusicplus.com): Online retailer of sheet music. Excellent for urtext copies and collections.

[musictheory.net](https://www.musictheory.net): Online resource of free music theory lessons.

Spotify playlists:

- [Classical Piano](#)
- [Jazz Piano](#)
- [Piano Ballads](#)

[Pianote YouTube Channel](#): Videos on everything piano, from how-to-play to the artist series 'Hearing Songs for the First Time'.

Offline Resources

[R. Kassman Piano](#): Piano dealer in Berkeley, CA. Great dealer to find hidden gem pianos and brands.

[Piedmont Piano Company](#): Piano dealer in Oakland, CA. Excellent and reputable dealers in pianos, and expert technicians.

[San Francisco Symphony](#): First class pianists regularly performing recitals and symphony concerts.

[In a Landscape](#): Touring pianist Hunter Noack performing outdoor recitals in breathtaking spaces like the Crissy Field in the Golden Gate Presidio.

[Sunset Music](#): San Francisco retailer of sheet music and instrument accessories.

Onboarding FAQs

1. How much daily practice is recommended?

It depends on the student's level. Novices should aim for 5 – 10 minutes a day, while more advanced students may practice an hour or more. The key is to try to get even a small amount of practice in daily. [More information can be found here.](#)

2. Do I need a piano at home?

Yes, access to an acoustic or digital piano with weighted keys is essential for consistent practice and progress. See the offline resources above for dealers I recommend. [You can find more information and tips on purchasing a piano here.](#)

3. What happens if I miss a lesson?

If you provide more than 24 hours' notice, we can try to reschedule. For cancellations within 24 hours, 50% of the lesson fee will be charged.

4. How will I know what to practice?

During each lesson, I will share a practice outline in your notebook for the following week. This will include passages to study, notes to focus on while practicing, and exercises in technique and theory.

5. What's the best way to contact you?

Email is preferred for non-urgent communication:
tluhmann.pianist@gmail.com. For urgent matters, you can text me directly at (415)-680-4838.

6. What books or materials do I need?

You will be provided with a notebook free of charge. Sheet music and work booklets will be loaned. You will only be charged if books are not returned, or if you request to study music which needs to be purchased. Please bring your own pencil. You may also prefer to use a digital tablet to organize music and notes, which is completely acceptable. [You can find more information here.](#)

Introductory Session Checklist

Introductory Session

Before starting lessons, I like to have a free 30 minute introductory session. This is an opportunity for us to meet, chat through your music goals, and assess your entry level. After this session, please follow-up by email to let me know if you'd like to schedule recurring lessons.

Checklist

To be prepared for our session, please review this checklist:

- ☐ Ensure you have an appropriate keyboard or piano installed.
- ☐ Prepare any sheet music you've been working on yourself or with a previous teacher.
- ☐ Confirm email for billing information for future lessons.

- Any concerns or questions (e.g. scheduling, pricing, expectations, etc.).

Agenda

Here is a rough outline for the introductory session:

- Introductions & About Me.
- Getting to know you and your goals.
- Review any music you may have previously worked on.
- Sight-reading and music theory placement assessments.
- Q&A.
- Final thoughts and goodbyes.