

33 Tips to Becoming a Great Pianist

Are there really secrets to becoming a really good piano player? Or is it just a matter of practice, practice, practice?

Practice is necessary, of course, but you could practice until the cows come home without understanding what you're doing at the piano, and all you would end up with is fingers that behave obediently to whatever the sheet music or score tells them to do.

Understanding how music works in terms of form and content is the key to productive practice. Then you are not just playing mechanically by rote like a machine, but you can get "inside" the music and eventually let it flow out of your brain and heart as well as your hands.

"There are at least 33 elements that contribute to becoming a good pianist," says Duane Shinn, pianist and owner of Keyboard Workshop in Medford, Oregon. "There are probably more, but without these 33 principles a pianist cannot hope to rise to the level of his ability."

So yes - there really are secrets to becoming the piano player of your dreams. It's not that anyone is purposefully trying to keep a secret from you, but it's a rare teacher who has the ability to not only play well but to be able to explain music theory - chords, melody, rhythm, dynamics, and all the other elements that contribute to playing the piano well and with feeling.

In our piano teaching studio at Piano University we have identified 33 distinct skill that must be developed if a person wants to play up to the limit of her or his potential. Here they are:

1 - Hand & Body Position -- Should you look down at your hands? How to use "eye flips"

2 - The key to productive practice -- Spaced repetition

3 - Attitude -- how it affects your learning

4 - How & when to pedal. Using explosive dynamics

5 - Exposure: why it's critically important

6 - Ear Training -- Intervals from 2nds to 13ths

7 - Fingering -- which finger do you use when?

8 - Chord substitutions that create fantastic sounds

9 - Chord recognition -- how to recognize what chord is being used

10 - Musical vocabulary: tempo words, form words

11- Arranging: how is your "bag of tricks" coming along? "Head arrangements"

12 - Melodic sense: how does the melody relate to the chords?

13 - Sight-reading: 7 fundamentals you just cannot ignore

14 - Key orientation: Can you think in the key you're playing in?

15 - Scanning the score before you start playing

16 - Mental practice -- how to learn music in bed

17 - Repertoire: Why you need one to be prepared for any opportunity

18 - Goal setting: How good can you get? Is there a limit?

19 - Rhythm awareness -- samba, bossa nova, bolero, etc.

20 - Why knowing music history is important to you

21 - Idea stealing -- how and where & from who

22 - 12-bar blues; creating a motif; "blue notes"

23 - Extended chords: 6th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, suspensions

24 - Technique acquisition: rubber balls, fingering drills

25 - Harmonization: Using I, IV & V to harmonize

26 - Key identification: Recognizing key signatures

27 - Voicing: Open, closed, registers, color tones

28 - Improvisation: Making music right out of your head

29 - Harmony & theory: How much should you know?

30 - Stylistic devices: Western, boogie, jazz, etc.

31 - Analysis: How to understand what you're hearing

32 - Riffs & runs & fills: How to develop them

33 - Cross-pollination: The best of all worlds!

While reading music is important, the individual who develops these 33 basic skills will be light years ahead of the person who simply plays sheet music the way it is written. There is no longer any reason to be "tied to the written music" when you can master these techniques that allow you to play from the heart.

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About the Author

A complete list of the 33 essentials of exciting piano playing can be found at <http://www.playpiano.com/33-tips.htm> The 4-CD and 33-card course titled "33 Tips For Becoming a Great Piano Player!" is being used by pianists around the world.