

## Five Great Practice Ideas I Learned From My Piano Students

Sometimes the teacher learns more from the student than the student does from the teacher. Hopefully, not too often, but today I would like to share with you some great practicing ideas that have come from my piano students over the years:

1. A Colonel in Virginia that I taught for several years got up at 4AM every weekday morning and practiced on an electronic keyboard with headphones so he wouldn't disturb anyone at that time of the morning. "I love the early morning", he said, "because it's so quiet and peaceful and I'm fresh and raring to go. No phones are ringing, no people walking into the room, no disturbances at all. I practice for a half-hour, have breakfast, and then hit it for another half-hour -- all before I have to show up for work. When I get home in the evening, if I'm too tired to practice, I don't feel guilty because I've already got my licks in for the day. And if I'm up to practicing some more -- well, it's a bonus!"

2. An elementary school teacher in Indiana told me she took each piece I assigned her and transposed it into all 12 keys -- not written out, but at the piano -- in her head. She said "It doesn't always sound so hot, but I find that if I keep at it day after day, I can at least get by in the most difficult keys, and it makes the easier keys seem real simple. And it gives me a perspective that I just wouldn't get it I just played it in one key -- the key it is written in. I've learned that each key has it's own "feel", and some keys are bright (like "D") and some keys are mellow (like "Db").

3. Another piano student with a similar idea, who was the Minister of Music in a Catholic church, said he took one whole month of the year and devoted it to mastering just one key. Since there are 12 months in the year and 12 Major keys, that works out perfectly. So in January he played everything he could find in the key of C, and transposed anything that wasn't in C into C. In February he went up 1/2 step to the key of C# (also known as Db enharmonically) and played everything in Db and searched for pieces written in the key of Db, and so on. By the time the year was up, he had a pretty fair grasp on the 12 Major keys. I suggested that he devote the next year to the 12 minor keys, and the next year to the modes, and the next year to polytonality, etc., etc. -- but as I recall he decided to just recycle through the 12 major keys, since he used them so much more than the ones I suggested.

4. Still another piano student took an idea from me and twisted it a bit. I suggested that she play along with pieces she liked on tapes and CD's, so she would get a feel for the motion of the song. (I used to do that by the hour when I was a teen-ager, and it paid off big time for me!). She took the idea and tried it and liked it so much that she started getting videos of people playing the piano. She arranged her TV and video player so that she could be at her piano while the video was playing, and she would play along with the pianist on the screen, following her/his hand motions and arm motions and finger position and thereby getting a feeling for the flow of the music. (Patterning). Her creativity is paying off for her -- she is advancing rapidly. (And by the way, don't think she is "copying" the person she is watching -- not at all. It's the same principle as watching Michael Jordan moving toward the basket, or watching Sammy Sosa swing a bat -- it just gets you in the right groove before you apply your own style to it.)

5. A doctor I have taught for years makes a idea file of things he has learned about piano playing over the years. He notes where in a given book or tape or video I discuss such and such a topic, and files that alphabetically. Then later when he needs to refer to that idea, he simply looks up the idea in his file, locates the video or cassette or book, and presto -- he can review that idea or concept almost instantly. It's like a card catalog in the library -- makes finding things so much faster than flipping through endless books trying to find that idea you saw long ago.

With the advent of the computer a person could store and categorize ideas such as this very quickly.

Hope this gives you some ideas of your own!

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### About the Author

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