A Teaching Toolbox for Optimal Technique and Practice at the Piano
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10 Tools for Optimal Technique

1. Begin with a Total Body Warm Up Everyday
   - Tai Chi and Deep Breathing
   - Aerobic Exercise
   - Full Range of Motion and Thera-Band Exercises
   - Technical Exercises at the instrument

2. Incorporate Physical Exercise and Complimentary Activities
   - Alexander Technique
   - Aerobic Exercise
   - Body Mapping and Andover Education
   - Physical Therapy/Occupational Therapy
   - Strength Training and Conditioning
   - Yoga, Stretches, and Isometrics for flexibility

3. Keep a Wellness Journal
   - Pain related to playing/practice
   - Ease of movement during playing/practice
   - Pain related to other activities, incl. time spent on computer, phone, tablet, driving etc.

4. Be Fussy about Posture
   - Bench Height
   - Distance from Keys
   - Head Alignment
   - Hand Position
   - Systemic Support: feet, sitting bones, abdominals

5. Teach 3 Movements for Facility
   - Rotation: “Rolling” of the forearm from the elbow, towards the thumb
   - Lateral Movement: Side to side horizontal movement (across the keys)
   - Linear Movement: vertical movement in towards the fallboard, or out

6. Exploit Playing with Weight
   - Joints as hinges activate the large levers; hinges act as “shock absorbers”:
     i. Relaxed arm resting on teacher (Kadlubiski)
     ii. “Letting go” (Shaak): Long sock exercise
     iii. “Arm as Unit” (Shaak): Eraser end of pencil exercise
     iv. “Follow Through” (Shaak): Dart throwing exercise
     v. Larger and smaller levers (Weckstrom)
vi. Four Note Ornament Exercise (Weckstrom)

7. Sequence Scales and Arpeggios for Success, and Utilize Variety
   - Where to start:
     - Pentascales in contrary motion
     - Group II Scales (D flat, G flat and B Major)
     - Cross Hand Arpeggios (L, R, L, R, 2nd finger, reverse)
   - How do we make scale practice interesting?
     i. Andrzej Jasiński Scale Exercise

8. Include Enticing Études instead of Mindless Technical Exercises
   - Elementary: Edna Mae Burnham: A Dozen a Day
   - Royal Conservatory Development Program: Etude books at every level
   - Intermediate: Ingrid Clarfield, Studies Selected for Technique and Musicality, Books 1-3

9. Find Functional Fingering
   - Max Pirani’s (1898–1975) rules for fingering, Ahrens and Atkinson, For All Piano Teachers

10. Use the Metronome & Eurhythmics to Develop Rhythmic Control and Fluency
    - Metronome Plus (+) App
    - Dalcroze Eurhythmics/Conducting

10 Tools for Optimal Practice

1. Set a Goal for each Practice Session
2. Use Post-Its for Reminders and Distracting Thoughts
3. Keep a Practice Journal
4. Utilize Score Study and Mental Practice
5. Avoid Hands Separate Learning
6. Add Musical Details as Early as Possible
7. Address and Correct Errors Immediately
8. Repeat Target Passages with Variation until Errors are Corrected, then Practice in Context
9. Practice at a Variety of Tempi
10. Take Advantage of Technology and Props
Selected Sources and Resources

Technical Exercises

Elementary–Intermediate Études

Études at All Levels

Books and Other Resources

Articles Related to Injury

Articles on Practice

Wellness Websites and Forums
http://www.pianowellnessseminar.com/sheila.htm
http://www.wellbalancedpianist.com
http://www.mtna.org/member-resources/annotated-bibliography-on-musician-wellness/
http://bodymap.org

Practice Apps
Metronome+
Music Journal Pro
Musiclock
Practice+
Practice Center
Sheet Music Reader “piaScore”
SpeedTube
Tempo SlowMo Pro