

these have been learned and expressed by means of verbal communication. An adult student has arranged much of this knowledge into categories that have then been evaluated and analyzed. He or she may even be an acknowledged specialist in a certain area, appreciating intricate relationships among myriad details and exhibiting consummate proficiency in the performance of specific acts. As the adult functions in most daily situations, he or she rarely does so as a neophyte. Therefore, most adults find the experience of being a "beginner" unsettling, rather than exhilarating. They may compensate for this by standing back to observe, or they may discuss the new situation before they allow themselves to act or feel. They frequently analyze and dissect before they do or try.

Generally speaking, the younger the adult, the greater the willingness to experience something unknown. It is easier to take a chance at fifteen than at fifty. The younger adult, therefore, may respond well when asked to improvise in a group setting and may be cheerfully willing to discover what works, rather than be told what works. Making up one's own mind is still a fairly new experience, and it is relished. The mature adult, however, has learned to deal with life on a knowledge-first basis. Trial-and-error learning seems an inefficient use of time and may also prove embarrassing. Nonetheless, the older adult who is encouraged to discover that improvising is possible and perhaps quite exciting often has far greater appreciation of the entire experience than the young improviser to whom experimenting seems altogether acceptable. The younger adult is also more willing to learn by rote, assuming that memory will be there when needed. The older adult prefers the security of printed directions, no matter how difficult to translate, having already learned that memory is not always trustworthy.

In many respects, however, both young and mature adults possess similar cognitive characteristics. Some of these prove advantageous to learning a new skill; some may be deterrents, if only temporarily. The piano or keyboard teacher may capitalize in a number of ways on the positive aspects of the adult's cognitive tendencies and, at the same time, provide or encourage experiences that will offset those tendencies deterrent to learning, or to the establishment of good playing and listening habits.

The advantages and disadvantages of typical adult thinking patterns are described in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1
THE ADULT AS A THINKER

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ has a long concentration span, especially if the activities are interesting and varied. ■ is capable of independent study. ■ responds readily to verbal communication. ■ desires to put things in context and arrive at a synthesis. 	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is more often interested in arriving at a definition than in experiencing what is defined. ■ may insist on labeling each procedure and bit of knowledge, trusting neither the senses nor the memory. ■ may allow subsidiary interests to deflect attention from the matter at hand.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is eager to understand relationships. ■ often asks questions that are helpful and that indicate areas of confusion. ■ enjoys relating tangential references. 	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is prone to verbalizing before acting, explaining and rationalizing in advance what he or she anticipates is going to happen. ■ may resist new ideas or be less interested in testing unfamiliar sensations and experiences.

TEACHING TIPS

- Be sure that experience precedes definition. This is especially important when it comes to dealing with pulse, meter, and rhythm.
- Playing the piano—by rote, by ear, from unstaffed notation, or as part of improvisation—should precede the presentation of single, or grand, staff reading.
- Choose materials carefully, knowing that the adult is capable of and enjoys independent study.
- Select books that have adequate, though not overwhelming, explanations, diagrams, and glossaries.
- Be sure that each lesson or class is as full of musical experience as possible.
- Avoid excessive talking. Try to communicate in solely musical ways. Show and demonstrate, rather than explain and tell.
- Try to arrange that in each lesson or class the student has had several successful playing experiences, no matter how short or simple.
- Suggest other means of preparing for the lesson or class. Give listening assignments, ask the student to tape-record practice sessions, encourage concert attendance, or offer sight-reading materials on a lending basis.
- Communicate sensitively, neither condescendingly nor unilaterally.
- Answer questions directly, but simply. Do not allow the student to involve you in elaborate discussions of nonpertinent matters.
- Ask many questions and listen carefully to the answers. Try to phrase questions that require an opinion, rather than a fact or definition.

Motor Skills and the Adult

The adult, unlike the child, has developed and refined a vast repertoire of motor skills, many of which are applicable to playing a keyboard. The adult is aware of the importance of timing and precision in the use of movements in a way that the child is not. Eye-hand coordination, especially in making smaller movements, has been tested and

used in the performance of many activities, such as writing, manipulation of objects, and the formation of expressive gestures. The adult has already mastered many motor skills that involve the relationship of the body to external objects and machines, some of which are large and/or complicated. The adult also has advantages of size, strength, and height not available to the child.

Yet precisely because the adult has already learned to use the body in certain ways and under certain conditions, he or she finds it more difficult to change movement patterns and gestures. For the adult, movements that are supple and flexible in particular situations may easily become taut and rigid in other circumstances. Raising the arm to slam down a trunk lid, for example, is not the same thing as raising the arm to move to a new position on the keyboard. Bodily awkwardness or stiffness often reflects psychological tension, rather than the actual inability of the adult body to perform specific acts. The adult finds it difficult to trust the body to move without a great deal of inner instruction and advice.

Sometimes older adults cannot make certain gestures with ease because of arthritis, muscle atrophy, nervous system degeneration, or other physical conditions. Less acute eyesight also affects movement control. The younger adult, on the other hand, is often in prime physical condition. He or she has attained the size and strength associated with physical maturity but has not yet lost muscle resilience. Any list of advantages and disadvantages relating to the motor aptitudes of adults must therefore be regarded with considerable latitude.

It is easier for the teacher of the adult to tolerate time and difficulty factors inherent in the learning of new motor skills than it is for the adult to view the same situation with equal forbearance. Telling the adult to be patient is usually ineffective. The adult needs to achieve recognizable success in order to move forward with assurance and enthusiasm, if not immediate pleasure. The teacher must provide ample opportunity for the adult to exercise motor skills and, in the process, to begin to establish an internal feedback system.

Some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with adult motor skills are listed in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2
THE ADULT AS A MOVER

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ fits the piano. The instrument is designed to be played by the adult person. There is no problem reaching the pedals or keyboard extremities. ■ is tall enough to allow maximal peripheral vision of the entire keyboard. ■ can reach an octave with relative ease. Playing full chords may be enjoyed from the beginning of study. 	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ frequently tries too hard to achieve immediate perfection, velocity, and power. Unnecessary tensions result. ■ may be unwilling to accept the fact that learning new movements and gestures takes time and repeated trial-and-error practicing. The adult always hopes that understanding what to do will translate quickly into efficient action.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ has control over finer movements and enjoys making them. ■ can use the relationship between the body and the instrument in order to capitalize on the resources of each. 	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ may be physically tired, or otherwise burdened or distracted, at the lesson or when practicing. ■ is often unduly self-conscious. Self-criticism frequently impedes progress in learning to attend to what the body reports. ■ may reject directive advice, having already attained the ability to make accurate, accomplished movements in other areas. ■ often approaches the learning of an unfamiliar motor skill with preconceived notions of probable personal success or failure.

TEACHING TIPS

- From the beginning, stress posture and attitudes that foster relaxation.
- Plan the lesson or class so that the adult may warm up.
- Warming up need not necessarily mean attending to technique per se. Do not overlook the value of getting the adult to experience rhythm while clapping, tapping, swinging, scat singing, or the like. The larger the body motions involved, the better.
- Because the adult is likely to remain highly concentrated during the entire instructional period, bodily tensions and fatigue accrue easily, though not always noticeably. Have the adult occasionally stand, stretch, bend, shake hands and arms, or otherwise move around to break the concentration.
- Arrange experiences so the adult may observe and feel how the body functions naturally: the weight of the hand and arm dropping from the shoulder, the natural finger curve when the hand is at rest, and so on.
- Work at physical skills (technique) in small doses.
- At first, the adult should be able to direct full attention to making basic gestures. Do not expect the adult to attend to technique, reading, and counting at the same time. Short, memorized technical exercises that do not involve reading and rhythm complexities are best.
- Assign specific practice goals. Stress that short, repeated periods of concentration, with full attention to what the body is doing and feeling, are preferable to longer blocks of technical practice. The adult tends to overdo things in this respect.
- Stress awareness of the body, not merely performance of routines.

- Encourage the adult to experiment with gestures and fingerings until the body feels good or cooperative.
- Be alert to whether or not the adult is picking up his or her own bodily feedback. Learn to ask questions that stimulate such attention.

The Adult Has Attitudes

Both young and older adults have chosen to learn to play the piano. They have, therefore, definite—and preconceived—ideas about what playing the piano will be like. Each adult expects the experience to be pleasant, but each might define in quite different ways what will constitute that pleasure. One may be hoping for instant fun and may be satisfied to play just a few well-known melodies. Another has always wanted to know the “secrets” or the “basics,” and hopes to learn how to read, count, finger, and pedal. Yet another has great curiosity about music in general rather than piano playing in particular, and therefore is eager to learn about chording, harmony, and accompanying. Few are looking to establish a career in music, at least not as pianists, so there is no urgent desire to learn and perfect technique beyond just getting around the keyboard comfortably.

The majority of teachers, however, have been classically trained and find it difficult to envision keyboard instruction that does not include technical development along with learning to perform a certain repertoire. They are accustomed to thinking about the taking of lessons in terms of long-range goals, even though most of their students never really complete years of study. Because they so often deal with the young, they plan in terms of the future, anticipating that hands will grow, that concentration will increase, that pedaling will become second-nature, that reading will become fluent, and that musical sophistication will develop accordingly. In agreeing to teach an adult, the instructor must think in terms of more immediate goals, because the adult is not likely to take lessons for many years or be willing to work patiently in order to have details fall into place somewhere down the road.

It is important to realize that both the beginning adult student and the teacher have attitudes about playing the piano. (While the child beginner also has some predisposition about what music lessons are going to mean, the child's preconceived notions are apt to be less fixed or less broad in scope than the adult's.) The teacher is likely to be more successful in helping an adult player achieve results if the adult's attitudes are acknowledged. This is sometimes a matter of discussion between teacher and student, but it may also be a matter of the way the teacher paces the lesson or class activities, chooses materials, designates practice routines, or suggests other actions or arrangements that directly affect what the adult player does and feels while at the keyboard.

The teacher always plays an important role in influencing a student's attitude and in setting the tone of the lesson or the class atmosphere. This is particularly true when the student is a child who is more accustomed to responding to suggestion than initiating or controlling actions that involve other people. The adult student, however, is generally not so easily led or influenced and brings to the lesson or class a perhaps equally strong predisposition to affect the learning atmosphere. This is often overlooked by a teacher accustomed to setting the pace. Dealing with the adult student in an adult manner is the teacher's best mode of operation in all circumstances.

Table 3.3 lists some of the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with an adult student's preconceived ideas about taking piano lessons.

TABLE 3.3

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ has made a commitment of time and, usually, money to taking piano lessons. There is a desire to succeed, to get something out of it. ■ regards whatever he or she does at the keyboard as a means of personal expression. Opinions, suggestions, and criticisms about the playing, therefore, are taken as reflections on the self. Successful performance is consequently a potent ego boost. ■ is capable of setting goals and appreciating the necessity of waiting for delayed rewards. Since the concept of cause and effect is better understood, the relationship between practicing and achieving results may be more patiently tolerated. ■ is more adept at expressing opinions, likes and dislikes, and is also more likely to question what is not understood. The teacher is therefore able to read the situation more clearly and to respond accordingly. ■ is often interested in additional background information about whatever is being learned. Thus the lesson may be more enjoyable for the teacher, as well as more stimulating for the student. 	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ may have unrealistic expectations about the amount of time it takes to achieve technical ease in the performance of motor skills and may become impatient when success is not instant. ■ is often inhibited, having already judged the self so often in relationship to the perceived accomplishments, opinions, or attitudes of others. Trial-and-error learning is not acceptable to most adults. ■ fears failure, assuming that what can be done by young children with apparent ease should be done perfectly—and immediately—by the adult. ■ who performs incorrectly is quickly frustrated and loses self-confidence. ■ often does not realize how complicated an act playing the piano is. Growing awareness of what it will take to arrive at an acceptable playing standard may result in discouragement. ■ may have forgotten what it means to practice, believing that the application of earnestness or energy will compensate for the discipline of drill.

TEACHING TIPS

- Create an atmosphere of partnership.
- Offer frequent choices of pieces and activities. Have examples of materials that can serve the same purpose, and allow the adult to select those most attractive or meaningful to him or her.
- Allow the adult, at least on occasion, to be musically responsible (for example, to set tempos, suggest fingering, or determine dynamics or agogics).

- Arrange opportunities for feedback.
- At all times be encouraging, but honestly so.
- Ask questions that call for judgments and opinions. If inappropriate opinions are forthcoming, try them out with the student before suggesting a different solution.
- Provide many short reinforcing exercises, pieces, or activities so that there can be several successes in each lesson or class.
- Avoid creating an atmosphere in which only perfection is acceptable.
- Don't polish every piece. Especially in the beginning, stress different things at different times—sometimes pitch accuracy, sometimes rhythmic or dynamic precision, sometimes tempo, and so on.
- Musical activities in which there is no single correct response or solution—for instance, choice of accompaniment style when harmonizing—are valuable in creating a feeling of self-worth as well as providing insight into what a student is really able to feel and play.
- Have adult students play for one another, even if they don't study in a group. Allow this playing time to be somewhat social, encouraging discussion and sharing of personal anecdotes related to music making. Participate in this yourself.
- Maintain a sense of humor. There is nothing as helpful in inducing relaxation, relieving frustration, and fostering realistic self-appraisal than a light word offered at just the right moment.

Technology and the Adult Student

There are many types of technology that can support adult music and keyboard learning, and therefore make studio or class lessons more satisfying. Many adult learners will enjoy the self-paced, drill-and-practice programs designed for the older student, such as MiBAC Music Lessons. Others will enjoy using electronic keyboards and software that support the basics of keyboard playing.

A number of courses for adults provide instruction in sight reading, ear training, rhythm, and music theory. Many of these programs are also designed for self-study and may include a software program, in addition to CDs or cassettes that support the learning and provide accompaniments in various styles to finger exercises, melodies, and repertoire. These accompaniments not only make practicing more satisfying but also reinforce rhythm and beat keeping, both of which can be difficult in the early stages as adults develop coordination.

Teachers who are concerned about being replaced by these forms of technology (especially when some have titles like the “Miracle Piano Teaching System,” “Keyboard Basics,” “Piano Made Easy”) need not worry. Adults, like younger learners, thrive on teacher contact and one-on-one studio instruction. Indeed, the promise of a regular class session or lesson can be more motivating than even the most captivating form of technology “guaranteed” to teach the basics. Used well, however, these programs are a

wonderful support for the adult learner. It is important for teachers to become familiar with software of this kind, so that they can recommend appropriate programs as *desired or necessary*.

Initially, adult learners may be less interested in composition than their younger counterparts, but the use of improvisation and composition programs with adults can be a way for teachers to encourage adults to think of music making as something beyond the performance of other people's music. Sometimes adults are more willing to experiment with improvisation and composition using technology than on the piano alone. Programs like "The Pianist" (distributed by PG Music, Inc.) are a good introduction. "The Pianist" allows the user to listen to several hundred piano masterworks (something appealing to adult beginners, because they often begin piano lessons with the goal of playing some well-known masterworks) and to manipulate aspects of the performances like tempo and key. Information about composers and the works themselves is also given. Once adults can see the effects of manipulating aspects of masterworks with which they are familiar, they often become interested in creating and manipulating works of their own. At this point, a program like "Band-in-the-Box," "Rock, Rap 'n Roll," or "Concertware" might be introduced.

Another way for teachers to encourage adults to learn from music technology is by having adults explore software with children, learning about aspects of music along the way. Indeed, many adults begin to take piano lessons when their own children start playing musical instruments. Exploring "children's" software not only reinforces the idea that both parents and children are learning together, but also gives the adults opportunities to monitor their children's learning and interests. The exploration of music technology with children can include software programs, recordings, videos, and a variety of software and hardware components to support improvisation and performance.

Adults may also enjoy exploring an older form of technology—books—to support and understand their learning. There are numerous texts on the learning process, on learning about music and how to play an instrument, and on the use of technology in teaching and learning. Similarly, discussion groups on the Internet can link adult learners with one another, allowing them to share frustrations and successes as they become music makers.

Categories of Adult Piano Books

All books intended for use with adult students have characteristics that differentiate them from methods designed for children, even though the actual level of the introductory performing and reading difficulties may be similar in both types of instructional material.

The adult piano course

- presents the method in very few (sometimes only one) volume(s)
- contains a considerable amount of text with explanations and definitions
- includes charts and graphs that often depict an entire body of information
- incorporates standard classics quite early in the book

- offers few(er) supplementary books
- moves quickly to playing chords and harmony

Most adult piano books are designed for use in either of two teaching situations: the individual lesson or the college class. Ages may vary in either of these situations but are less likely to vary in the case of the college class. The text that seems intended for use in the individual lesson, then, must appeal to the broadest range of ages. Each category of adult-oriented texts has certain characteristics. Knowing these may make a search for the right book easier. Table 3.4 compares typical qualities of older- beginner versus college-course books.

TABLE 3.4
COMPARISON OF OLDER-BEGINNER VS. COLLEGE ADULT METHOD BOOKS

Older-beginner method	The college adult method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is often a relatively small book, perhaps 50 to 100 pages. ■ expects that the user will want to play pieces, the sooner, the better. ■ presents repertoire that consists largely of arrangements of folk, patriotic, religious, and popular melodies. ■ seldom contains ensemble music of any kind. ■ presents primary triads played in close position early on. ■ quickly expands reading of harmonic intervals to the octave. ■ contains minimal reference to technique, technical exercises, or etudes. ■ does not emphasize (and may not even include) material relating to functional skills, such as sight reading, transposition, and improvisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is usually a substantial book, perhaps 300 or more pages. ■ is often in a chapter/unit format designed for pacing within a semester or quarter. ■ expects the user to integrate playing and functional skills. ■ presents repertoire that includes original teaching pieces along with arrangements of folk, patriotic, religious, and popular melodies. ■ often includes easy original classics and pieces using twentieth-century compositional and playing techniques. ■ contains a fair amount of ensemble music (often for multiple pianos). ■ places some emphasis on development of technique, at times providing accompaniments and discs to enhance practice of technical exercises. ■ usually provides an abundance of separate rhythmic drills, melodies to sight read, transpose, and accompany, and ideas to guide improvisation.