

# PIANO HANDS

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## SHOULDN'T FLIP BURGERS



**Discover The Secrets to  
Piano Teaching Success**

*Andrea Dow & Trevor Dow*

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## **Piano Hands Shouldn't Flip Burgers** ***The Essentials***

What does “*The Essentials*” mean?

This book is an adapted version of our commercial guide, “Piano Hands Shouldn't Flip Burgers”. We have selected 7 chapters from our guide that we believe will put you one step ahead of the competition and one step closer to your dreams of piano teaching success.

The complete guide is a 22 chapter, 113 page piano teaching machine. When you feel you have mastered the tips and strategies presented in “The Essentials”, we invite you to visit our website (<http://www.teachpianotoday.com/pianoteachingbook/>) to purchase the guide in its entirety.

Happy Reading!

Andrea and Trevor Dow

*P.S. On the last page of this document you will find a Table of Contents for the complete guide.*

## legal disclaimer

This book is a common sense guide to teaching piano and running a piano studio. In practical advice books, like anything else in life, there are no guarantees of income made or success achieved. Readers are cautioned to rely on their own judgment about their individual circumstances and to act accordingly.

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**Glad that's over with... let's roll!**

## **one**

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### in the beginning

I started out in a rusted old sedan driving from one house to the next, delivering piano lessons as I went. More often than not my students would still be in their pyjamas while younger siblings shrieked past the living room; our “teaching studio”. The family dog would rest his whitened snout on my lap, the dishwasher would rumble in the background, and I . . . would teach piano.

Before long, demand was great enough that I parked the old jalopy and students came to my house to learn piano. And when I had more students than I could handle, our second bedroom became a second studio, we hired another teacher, and whammo ... we were running a music school.

Well, not long after, our driveway started to look like a Wal-Mart parking lot, our backyard became a communal gathering place for waiting parents to do yoga, our kitchen table became a place for siblings to do homework, and our bathroom became ... well it became the reason we needed to move the studio out.

So, we leased a nice commercial location in our town centre, built some studios, bought some pianos, put up a sign, and the rest is history.

If this sounds fast, it was. We literally went from 30 students to 300 students in 3 years. And while extremely exhausting, it was also immensely satisfying and fulfilling. So, how did we do it?

Well, I can tell you how we didn't do it. We didn't build a studio by calling in favours or using a massive social network. We are admittedly shy, and somewhat reserved. We didn't tap into our trust fund (if such a thing exists, our families are playing a mean joke) to hire a top-notch marketing firm to help us become a household name. We started with no money at all. And we certainly didn't break into a market void of competitors. There were three major studios within ten kilometres of our house, not to mention countless private teachers teaching from home studios.

Having a massive social network, a top-notch marketing firm, or a competition-free zone certainly would have made our job easier in the short term, but more likely than not, relying on these conveniences would have led to failure. Why? Because they are all short-term solutions to building a business. They lack the true substance that makes a business great. And it is this, the substance of piano teaching, where we excelled.

What we lacked in social connections we made up for in our understanding of what makes kids connect with the piano. What we lacked in money, we made up for in our understanding of how to convince parents that *we* were the right choice for their children's piano lessons. And what we lacked in community history, we made up for in good old creativity, both in music and in business.

The result is our unique, creative, and wildly successful approach to running a piano studio and teaching piano lessons; a philosophy that we decided to start sharing with the world, and the Teach Piano Today community, 5 years ago. And, just like the growth of our musical school many years ago, the Teach Piano Today community has also exploded.

We now have the good fortune of being able to interact with close to 15 000 piano teachers every week. We spend our waking hours developing new and exciting piano teaching resources and helping readers develop their skills and grow their music studios.

Having discovered our passion for helping others succeed, we recently handed over the reins of our music school to our long

time studio manager and friend, and now focus all of our energies on the Teach Piano Today community and on our private experimental teaching studio where we explore new techniques, technologies, and resources before releasing them online.

We are thrilled to help you on your piano teaching journey! Teachers who work with us know our approach inside and out. They understand our philosophy (and therefore understand their students). And best of all, they are successful - without fail ... every time!

Piano Hands Shouldn't Flip Burgers will show you how to be successful at teaching piano. We will show you, step-by-step, everything you need to do to attract, engage, and retain students so that our story becomes yours. Let's get started!

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*See these boxes? They will be used throughout this book to highlight what we feel are the **most** important strategies to remember while reading.*

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## two

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### piano lessons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

I sometimes wonder why parents even consider enrolling their children in piano lessons. Why? Because time and time again I hear parents say the same thing, “Wow, this is not how I remembered piano lessons to be!” After this statement they usually go on to recount how a cigar-puffing old man tortured them with never-ending scales in the musty basement of an old church.

Of course, not all piano teachers who taught in the past century left their students musically traumatized. There were, and still are, many fabulous teachers instilling a love for music in the hearts of thousands of students. But, like so many other things, a few bad apples can spoil the barrel. Thankfully, despite their experiences, parents are still giving piano lessons a second chance and are registering their own children in lessons. This is our opportunity to show kids what music is all about, to bring piano lessons back to the mainstream, to erase all memories of musty church basements and cigar-puffing teachers.

This is the essence of our book - the reason we bothered to sit down and write this guide. We are determined to make piano



lessons relevant again; one teacher, and one student at a time. We also have the teacher's best interests in mind. We know first hand (and hear over and over again) how hard it is to "make a go of it" in this profession. We cringe when piano teachers are forced to take on a second job at the local hardware store ... or the local fast food chain. Piano hands really *shouldn't* flip burgers. You've invested years in your abilities on the bench. Invest a few more hours reading this guide, and reap the rewards of your hard work.

In undertaking this journey and joining us in this mission, you, of course, will be rewarded handsomely. Why? Because if you follow our strategies and methods, you will become "the" teacher that parents want their children to have, "the" teacher who understands kids today, "the" teacher who can teach any child to not only play the piano - but to LOVE the piano!

## three

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### finding your niche

I don't doubt that you are an extremely talented piano player. You are probably also a gifted teacher, an enthusiastic teacher, and an inspiring teacher. But, without students, you are probably also going to be a very lonely teacher! Finding your niche in the piano teaching industry will help you stand out from the competition, and get noticed for your originality, ingenuity, and creativity.

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*Find a niche and you will grow your studio fast!*

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Like many professions today, a shortage of piano teachers does not exist. Check out your local yellow pages or newspaper classifieds and you will see scores of people offering lessons. Fortunately, armed with a little business sense, you will never have to compete with other studios to attract students.

Take a moment to check out several ads for local piano studios. If you were a parent, which studio would you choose? Chances are you were unable to choose a teacher based on their newspaper ad alone. Why? Because they all sound the same: *Piano Teacher, all ages, good rates*. I don't know about you, but this ad does not

have me reaching for the phone ready to sign up my children. To be successful, you must identify a niche that you can serve, and then (most importantly) let people know you are serving that niche.

So, which niche should you serve? The opportunities are endless ... teach seniors, teach songwriters, teach stay-at-home moms, heck - teach teenage boys who want to develop hand-eye coordination to improve their hockey skills (okay, that might be a little “out there”). The point I'm trying to make is that you need to specialize, to be recognized as an expert in your particular field. Choose a niche that ignites your passion, learn everything you can about it, and start marketing yourself.

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*If teaching piano to preschoolers is your passion, be sure to check out our program [WunderKeys Piano For Preschoolers](#).*

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Check Out A Piano Program That's Making **Preschoolers Smile**

**Click above to learn more.**

## four

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### piano lesson basics

So your student is in front of you. They're either quiet or off the wall. They're excited or reluctant. They're focused or distracted. They're most likely nervous, and they have no idea what to expect from their piano lesson experience with you. This first lesson is your opportunity to make it or break it. No pressure. Know that if the student leaves with a smile and is bubbling over with nice things you've said and a sense of pride in what they've accomplished, you've not only secured *them* as a student, but more often than not, their friends and siblings as well! The teachers we mentor have got this down to a science. In fact, they often offer a “free first lesson” when advertising for new students (as mentioned previously). They know without a doubt that the child will be hooked and that word-of-mouth will accomplish far more than any other form of advertising.

Parents are reluctant to commit to a full year of lessons without knowing if their children will enjoy it. However, after a first lesson with a teacher using our methods, they'll be scrambling to secure a spot. We've had parents phone to register from their cell phones as they're leaving our studio – desperate to be sure they're “in”. As

a parent myself, I know that if my daughter comes out of an activity beaming, I'm immediately sold. Here's how to accomplish this:

### “I understand you”

I've toured countless music studios that look beautiful. There are grand pianos, wall shelves full of sheet music, certificates displayed, and an overall sense of “this is serious business”. Parents may be momentarily impressed, but this will be short-lived if their child bursts into tears and refuses to come into the room with you. You will not make a 5-year-old feel comfortable with an environment that appeals only to adults. This doesn't mean that you need to create a musical Disneyland in your studio. There's a balance between function and fun that takes careful planning, but that has big payoffs.

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*Make sure your studio appeals to your clientele. It should feel welcoming, not intimidating.*

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Consider adding the following to your studio to increase your child-appeal:

- A “Beethoven Bear” stuffy for those young, reluctant, first-lesson students who are nervous to come in the door.
- Colourful, but tasteful pictures on the walls – the best ones are ones that include children. Our studio walls are filled with the smiling faces of our own students. It projects an image of “it's fun here” and besides, photography is much cheaper than artwork.
- An uncluttered atmosphere that is not too stimulating. You will need to deal with fewer behaviour problems if there is less “stuff” to get into. If you're following our guide, you will have students of all ages. Little boys love to “explore” a room. Keep your decor simple and childproof.
- A white-board for teaching concepts away from the piano.

- A well-stocked room – you shouldn't have to leave in the middle of a lesson to grab a needed item. This appears to the waiting parent as though you are wasting time – which in fact, you are!

This all being said – it is important for your studio to project an image of class. Paper cutouts of treble clefs on your walls may be appealing to children, but gives the parents the impression that you are not a professional. It may seem silly to be spending your efforts away from the piano – but it will pay off in the long run. Parents enjoy sending their children to a place that they themselves are proud to be associated with. Children learn best in an environment where they feel comfortable. Satisfy all who are involved, and you're a giant step ahead.

### “you are my best student”

The teachers we mentor live by the mantra of “two stars and a wish.” Every time you offer advice and suggestions to your students it should be directed by this way of thinking. We've all been in lessons where we have struggled through a piece, even though we've worked at it all week, only to have the teacher peer over their glasses and say, “Well, what happened there?” or something equally confidence-crushing.

Remember that your job is to not only be a teacher, but to be an inspiration. Even if their piece was a disaster, you can always find something to compliment ... even if you have to invent it (*“You really paid attention to the dynamics! I could hear that forte loud and clear! I was so impressed with how beautiful your posture was! Nice work. Now, let's make sure we remember those F sharps in the key signature and try it again.”*) There's your two stars – two things they did well, and your wish – remember your key signature. This actually works two ways; not only have you boosted their confidence and made them feel as though you value them as a musician and a person, but the next time they play the piece you can be certain that forte will be there and their posture

will be beautiful ... after all, you've told them they do these things well; they're going to do it again to really impress you.

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*At every lesson, present your students with "two stars and a wish".*

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You have immense amounts of influence in your position. A simple comment such as, "I've heard three students play that song today and you just played it the best!" will immediately result in that song being a favourite. That child will adore the piano because it is something they feel they are especially good at. They will practice, they will pay attention in lessons, and they will progress. A comment that may seem humorous to you ("*Your fingers just don't want to behave today!*") can have long-lasting and damaging effects on a sensitive child who actually hears "*My fingers are no good*". This really is a very simple concept, but it is something that is unfortunately lost on many teachers. Yes, you are there to share your wisdom. However, if you don't have a willing audience, all the wisdom in the world won't make a difference.

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*Every student, every day should leave with a smile.*

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Learn to read children – learn what to say to show you understand them, that you care about them, and that they are valuable. The teachers we mentor have invested the time learning what to say, how to say it, and when to say it, to really have their students connected to their lessons in an emotional way.

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*The key to piano teaching success is making your students feel good about themselves.*

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It is this connection that makes them want to come in your door – and that makes them reply "yes!" when their parents ask if they want to take lessons again next year.

## five

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### get with the times

I was excited that our local music festival had finally decided to include a “Popular Music” class. It had been a long time coming ... and the powers that be had finally giving the category the “go ahead”. It never made sense to me that it wasn’t included in the festival. The very title, “Popular Music”, indicates that the pieces played in this category must be undoubtedly ... popular.

Packed tightly in a church pew I listened as a pre-teen boy played *Clocks* by Coldplay. Wow, could he play! Everyone in the audience immediately perked up watching closely as he swayed to and fro, striking the keys with precision and feeling. He reached the final note, and the previously apathetic audience erupted in applause.

The über-qualified adjudicator for the class approached the boy, notebook in hand (though I’m not sure what she may have scribbled to herself), looked over the top of her glasses and said, “I haven’t heard that song before. Coldplay, huh ... are they a local band.”

Local band? Was this lady joking? We’re talking about a band that has won 7 Grammy awards, 6 Brit awards and 4 MTV Video



Music awards... a band that has double-platinum selling CDs, with millions of albums sold worldwide. Get with the times!

today, music is for everyone

A fabulous trend is unfolding in the music educator's world today. While in the not-so-distant past, our students came from "musical" families, more and more frequently they are coming from non-musical parents who want their children to have an opportunity that they themselves missed. Indeed, in our studio, over 80% of the parents have no musical background whatsoever.

The students that come from these families do not have an ingrained appreciation for classical music, and may have only experienced it from watching television commercials or movie trailers. Instead, their musical passions lie with today's pop music.

As piano teachers, we must embrace this, as ultimately our goal is to teach our students to love playing the piano and creating music. By bidding our time and introducing classical music slowly, whilst teaching music that is immediately relevant to their lives, we will be more successful in retaining beginning students and building a lasting appreciation for classical music.

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*Are you struggling to inspire your male students? If so, check out our Piano Music For Boys series, [The Adventures of Fearless Fortissimo](#).*

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Check out the Piano Book  
Boys Just **Can't Resist!**

[Click above to  
learn more.](#)

## six

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### practice shouldn't be painful

Practicing tends to be a sticky issue for everyone involved in piano lessons. Teachers get frustrated with students who haven't practiced, parents get frustrated with having to force their children to practice, and children get frustrated having everyone breathing down their necks. This chapter seeks to appease everyone by offering practice solutions that will motivate students, thus alleviating the stress experienced by parents, teachers, and students.

### break it up

Practicing piano pieces is very different from playing piano pieces. "Play through this piece three times each night" a student will be told. And so, the piece is played through beginning to end three times as quickly as possible ... and nightly practice is over. Bad habits are reinforced and robotic play results.

If you really want your students' practice sessions to be beneficial, break the piece into smaller, more manageable chunks (you can do this visually with your coloured pens) and encourage

them to focus on one challenging portion at a time. Once each chunk is mastered, the piece can then be played through. Were there any mistakes? These are the places to which your students should return before starting from the beginning again. By breaking their material into manageable portions your students will feel less frustrated and more successful, as their pieces will be learned in less time and with more accuracy.

### the student becomes the teacher

They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks ... but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try! Teaching someone a new skill can have incredible benefits for one's own mastery of a concept. What does this mean for piano students? Well, it means that finding an "old dog" (mom or dad) and teaching them a new piano skill, concept or piece can have great benefits.

Explain the following to their parents: during the "lesson", encourage your child to explain the concept in as many different ways as possible; break it into chunks, give demonstrations, or draw pictures. Remember, the purpose of this activity is not for the parent to achieve mastery (the skill may be quite advanced) but for them to facilitate new connections in their child's understanding.

### making a music video

When your students practice the piano, what are they practicing for? Is there an upcoming recital, exam, festival or ... music video? To be successful in piano, your students should work towards a clear goal; if not, they will be driving without a destination. Recitals, exams and festivals are obvious goals that encourage repeated practice sessions. But, what can your students focus on when these events aren't occurring?

The answer: shoot a music video! With a digital video camera and an internet connection, you can easily record your students playing the piano and upload the performance onto a video-sharing site such as YouTube. Once uploaded, they can email all of their distant friends and relatives with a link to the online performance.

For your students, shooting a music video will be a unique and enjoyable experience. Undoubtedly, it will inspire them to spend a few extra sessions a week at the piano, perfecting their pieces for their upcoming video shoot. Please be sure to obtain written permission from parents before posting anything on the internet.

### a million ways to play one piece

Even the most beautiful piano piece can become redundant when played over and over. As much as we need to encourage our students to practice the piano regularly, we also need to maintain our sanity! Hearing the same old piece played in the same way at the same time every night can drive even the most patient parent to the edge. And chances are, if it's driving them crazy, your students' patience is probably being tested as well.

A solution is needed to keep parents sane and your students interested. One way to accomplish this is to encourage your students to alter the style of the piece. Instead of playing the piece as originally intended by the composer, encourage your students to add a comedic flare. How could the piece be played if it was supposed to be a funeral march? How could the piece be played if it was supposed to be a circus song, or ... the soundtrack to a horror movie? What else could be changed to alter the piece's style? Think in terms of tempo, articulation, dynamics, octave choice etc. Your students' ability to play artistically will improve as they learn to play with expression, and you will both enjoy their lesson time (and practice time) much more.

## get a group

The life of a pianist can be a lonely one! The piano's versatility as a solo instrument means that pianists don't often play in small ensembles as often as their string or brass instrument-playing peers. However, facilitating these groupings for your students can have a profound effect on their enjoyment and their skill development. Creating music in a group is an entirely different experience than playing solo. Your students will develop excellent listening skills, rhythmic accuracy and improvisational abilities as they learn to play with others. Small ensemble groupings can take on many different forms.

Organizing a duet pairing is a great way to banish the seclusion of solo practice hours. You'll find everything from Brahms to the Village People in the duet section of your music store. Did they enjoy the duet? Try a trio! Your students should seize every opportunity they can to accompany, play as a group member, or form a duet. You'll be amazed at the results!

## become a lyricist

How do you get a young piano student interested in their latest Bouree, Minuet or Sonatina? While most piano method books include pieces with engaging titles such as "March of the Goblins" or "The Sleeping Dragon", other pieces require an extra infusion of imagination to capture your children's attention and to make the piece one they are excited to play. So.... grab a pencil and become a lyricist! Sit down with your students and make up a new title for the piece ... add accompanying lyrics following the same theme while you're at it. Write the title and lyrics directly onto your students' music with pictures to help those who are not yet reading. Sing along as they play to help your students learn the words.

Stuck for a topic? Choose a pet, a fairy tale or a best friend. Ensure the words follow the rhythm of the main melody. They can

rhyme or not — it's up to you! Wouldn't a 6 year-old rather play *Tangles my Hamster* than *Minuet in G Major*?

An added benefit to adding lyrics to the music is the ease with which your students will memorize the piece. The melody line has now become a story. They will always remember “Tangles tickles when he cuddles,” follows the part where “Tangles sleeps all in a huddle.” You've found a new way for their creativity to blossom and their musical enjoyment to continue to thrive!

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*Are you frustrated with students who just won't practice? If so, you need to check out, [Shhhh... Your Piano Teacher Thinks This Is Practice.](#)*

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Never Again Will Students Forget To **Practice!**

Click above to learn more.

Shhhh...  
your piano  
teacher  
thinks this is  
Practice!

By Trevor and Andrea Dow

## seven

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### composing with students

So, Evan hates playing “Once There Was a Princess”. Do you blame him? However, he does need to learn about quarter rests. There's got to be some other way. So you search through other method books. *Hmmm ... maybe “The Rainbow.”* I can see his face now. Teachers often don't realize the fragile self-image their students possess. For most 8 or 9 year old boys, playing either of these songs is a fate worse than death and is going to either cause practising problems at home, or a flat out refusal to pay attention in lessons. Or – if you're lucky, he'll behave and play it ... but I promise you he didn't want to. You could get out your pencil and change the title. I've done this before. “Once There Was a Princess” became “Once There Was a Ninja” but my student could still see the loathsome picture on the page. He didn't really learn it well and to preserve his dignity I didn't force the issue. As a result, once quarter rests morphed into half rests in the next few pages of his book, he hadn't quite “got it”. His playing suffered. I kicked myself. Then I found the solution that has single-handedly made our studio first on the lips of parents on the playground.

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*Compose with kids. It gives them a vested interest in learning the piano.*

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When I talk to the teachers we have mentored about composing with students, they immediately become self-conscious and get a deer-in-the-headlights look. I can see them frantically searching their brains for what they learned in their university theory classes about harmony and counterpoint, the structure of a Sonata, writing a canon, and other such techniques that have no place in your teaching studio when dealing with young students. When I show them how we approach composing at our studio, it's actually humorous to watch. They want to try it themselves – right now. So will your students.

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*Use composing to reinforce skills that students are currently using.*

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### 3 things to remember

1. You are not creating a masterpiece. You are opening the door to creativity. You are also being sneaky and reiterating what they are learning in their book.
2. Take a good hard look at the pieces in your students' method books. More often than not they are composed in the way I will show you. There are no ingenious master plans behind these pieces. They are designed to be simple, to be engaging, and to teach one concept.
3. You must be able to complete the creation of the piece in 15 minutes. Yes, I'm serious. Please remember this one.

### keep composing short and simple

1. Why must everything be perfect? You will have some compositions that turn out to be absolute gems. You'll want to enter them in competitions, and to shout out to the hills that YOUR student created this wonderful bit of music. We



have a “Composer of the Month” award to highlight these bits of musical genius in our studio. However, keep the goal in mind: If your student is having trouble with quarter rests, this will be the goal of the composition. You need to create a piece that accomplishes this goal, while being enjoyable to that particular student. Here's where the creativity comes in. As long as they love to play it, you've done your job.

2. Don't try to get too fancy. Remember that you are doing this to benefit your *student*. No one will be judging *your* musical abilities, so come down to the student's level and make it all about enjoyment.
3. If the suggestion of composing results in endless music theory lectures, your students will groan, not cheer when you suggest it. My students come in the door asking to compose. It should feel easy. It should feel accessible. They should feel enabled to try it on their own at home. Keep it short and simple. I can't say this enough.

### a fool-proof method to composing

Most teaching guides offer a few token suggestions about composing and leave it at that. I feel so strongly about composing with children, and know how big of a difference it will make to the retention aspect of your studio, that I'm going to share our method with you. So here we go – get your creative hats on...

1. Use a worksheet that is easily laid out. Do not use manuscript paper. Yes – you heard right! We are doing a bit of reverse learning here ... learning a piece by the note names and THEN by the notation. It has multiple benefits. The most important one being to keep this process simple.
2. Encourage students to choose a topic for their piece. Most are immediately brimming with ideas “My hamster! A cabin in

the woods! A purple cow!” Just go with it. Choose an interesting topic and the piece will be much more enjoyable to create. You will inevitably have those students who cringe at sharing their creative side with you. You can help them narrow down their topic by saying, “Choose a place, a time of day, an animal or a colour.” Having you help them choose takes the “put on the spot” aspect away and makes those more reserved students feel comfortable.

3. Conjure up three sounds that the topic makes the student think of. “My Hamster chews, runs and sleeps” or “A cabin in the woods has a crackling fire, rain on the roof and crows in the trees.” etc. etc. Now discuss how you can transfer these sounds to the piano. My Hamster running would be. . . fast or slow sounds? High or low? A crackling fire would be staccato notes or legato notes? Write these down for inspiration later. Here's where you can sneak in a bit of theory (what's the musical term for “bouncy?”, how would we indicate to play the song slowly? How can we show the sounds getting louder and louder?) They'll remember these bits of wisdom much more readily in this context.
4. Choose a fun title. Don't just call it *My Hamster*. More creativity – and pride – will come if you choose an engaging title that grabs attention. *My Hamster* should be *Escape from the Cage* or *A Cabin in the Woods* should be *Cabin Fever*. You get what I mean. It should be interesting enough for other students to want to play it too.
5. Choose a repeating motive (also called a motif) for the piece. When you first begin composing with your students, you can create the motives. Later on, let the students take control. **The motive should be a phrase no longer than five notes and has to be catchy, but not difficult.** Use the “sounds to piano” imaging you did before to help you come up with a motive. Judge your students' level to decide if it should be something that is hands together or hands separate. Remember that this should be *easy* for them to play. This

motive should also include a skill or technique they are learning in their method book – like those quarter rests I mentioned before. This motive is what will tie your students' songs together and make them sound like an actual piece. It will repeat several times (take a look at your method book, they do the same thing). Give your students a choice of two and let them pick one.

6. Assign a symbol to this motive for ease of transcription. We use a triangle. Instead of re-writing the motive each time, simply insert the triangle. This represents the concept of a motive being a “chunk” of music, and is much easier than writing it out each time.
7. Start on your piece! Compositions for beginning students should always be in ABA format. The A section should go like this: **Motive – Connection – Motive – Lead-in to B section.** The connection is where your students make the choices. Put their hands in the right key, and get them to decide on a few notes in an arrangement they like. Be enthusiastic about their decisions. Connections are usually no more than 2 bars long. The lead-in to the B section should signal that a change is coming. Students again create two bars that they like the sounds of.
8. Explain the concept of the B section – we need a mood change. Discuss how this could happen (change to minor key, change of octave, change of rhythm, change of melody into the other hand etc. etc.). Decide on one and go for it. B sections should be about 4-6 bars long. This can be two bars that simply repeat twice. Keep it short and to the point.
9. Here's where you exclaim with glee to your students that you are almost done! Because ... the magic of the ABA format means you already know what will happen once you return to the A section. Re-write what you had in the first A section again. All that is needed now is the ending. This can be as simple as one final note or chord; it's up to your students.

10. To notate what you are doing, use note names with simple representations of rhythm on top.

Play the composition for your students from beginning to end so they can hear it. Have them play it. Add dynamics and articulation markings. Send the composition home to be learned and shown off to family. Remember, practicing a composition is just as valuable as practicing a piece from their method book. The next week your students comes back, take it from them and publish it using *Finale Notepad*.

Your students will be floored when you return to them a professional copy of sheet music with their name at the top. As will their parents. Mission accomplished ... they have a new favourite song and their parents think you're a god; and will sing your praises to other parents.

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*Use a program like Finale Notepad to give a professional look and feel to a student's composition.*

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### composing extensions:

As well as publishing their compositions as “real” sheet music, the sky is the limit in terms of what you can do with these compositions. Our studio has published studio yearbooks of the best compositions from each student and sold them at our year-end recital with proceeds to charity. Students enjoyed being able to play music created by their friends.

We highlight an impressive piece with our “Composer of the Month” award. Students who are really keen have created books (ie. “Animal Fair”) of similarly themed compositions, which we coil bind at a local office supply store after they've created their own front cover. We've held composition contests, we've recorded their original compositions onto CD's for Christmas presents for

family members, and we've had composition recitals where students showcased their original work. It is guaranteed that you will make a name for yourself in your community by doing these kinds of things – it's even newsworthy enough for your local paper to do a story on your teaching methods (much more noticeable and effective than a classified ad). It's really not much effort on your part, but the payoffs are huge.

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*For a super-exciting composing adventure, check out  
[The Curious Case of Muttzart and Ratmaninoff!](#)*

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**If You're Not Composing**  
With Your Students Already  
That's About To Change

**Click above to  
learn more.**

The Curious Case of  
**MUTTZART AND  
RATMANINOFF**

Adventures in composing - for kids ages 7 to 11

The advertisement features a stylized orange book cover with a white title box. A cartoon character is visible at the bottom left of the book cover. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout with a black border around the entire advertisement area.

that's all for now

*We truly hope you have enjoyed “The Essentials” and are ready to put our tips and strategies into practice.*

**To purchase all 22 chapters of the full guide (\$9.95 US) please visit us at**

<http://www.teachpianotoday.com/pianoteachingbook/>.

*Wishing you the best,*

*Andrea and Trevor Dow*

*P.S. Check out the next page to see what's in the complete guide!*

# **Piano Hands Shouldn't Flip Burgers**

## **ATTRACTING STUDENTS**

- **PIANO LESSONS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**
- **FINDING YOUR NICHE**
- **ADVERTISING YOUR STUDIO**

## **TEACHING STUDENTS**

- **PIANO LESSON BASICS**
- **STRUCTURING A LESSON IN 3 PARTS**
- **PART 1 - "BOOK-BASED" LEARNING**
- **PART 2 - STEP AWAY FROM THE PIANO**
- **PART 3 - BREAK FREE FROM THE BOOK**
- **LEAD SHEETS**
- **COMPOSING WITH STUDENTS**
- **MAKE A GAME OF IT**
- **GET WITH THE TIMES**
- **PRACTICE SHOULDN'T BE PAINFUL**
- **RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING STUDENTS**

## **MANAGING YOUR STUDIO**

- **STUDIO POLICIES – NIP PROBLEMS IN THE BUD**
- **MANAGING THE MOOLAH**
- **KEEPING IT LEGAL**
- **YOUR HOME OR THEIRS**
- **DON'T BE A DRILL SERGEANT**
- **IT'S UP TO YOU**
- **TIPS AND STRATEGIES REVISITED**