



# Establishing strong foundations in piano lessons



Most people seem to agree that the piano is a fine instrument 'to start on'. But is it as friendly as all that? We don't have half-sized pianos for small children and learning to read two different clefs at the same time can be taxing. So when is a good age to start 'establishing strong foundations' and what are they?

Many will tell you that children of 5 or 6 are advancing in leaps and bounds aurally but their motor and conceptual skills have some way to catch up. So perhaps this is not such a great age to take on playing two hands, reading two clefs and all that goes with it. Solutions for fives and sixes include omitting the music reading and learning by ear or moving the keyboard itself to a subsidiary role in 'music classes'. Both approaches have strong track records.

However by 7 and above many children can multi-task better and so playing the piano as a musical instrument is more realistic. But what are the main foundations to lay? Listening and moving seem to be top of the list. Advancing motor skills allow for internalisation of rhythm through movement at and away from the keyboard. And strongly developing aural acuity enables the start of focused listening to what is coming out of the piano. Finally, visual and conceptual skills are forging ahead at this age so beginning along the road from symbol to sound and sound to symbol makes sense.

Moving, listening and looking involve a complex set of educational manoeuvres that are best managed through a set of good tutor books. But these are only as effective as the teacher delivering them. Does the teacher thoroughly endorse the tutor being used? Too often that isn't so and making do with second best won't help anybody in the equation.

Examiners will probably tell you that a strong sense of rhythm and good reading skills are the weakest aspects of beginners they encounter. So ensure your pupil is developmentally 'ready' for piano lessons, ensure the tutor is a perfect match, make sure rhythm, reading and listening are all tended like precious plants in the garden, and of course as you're a fabulous teacher your pupil should shine.

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