



## 5 Ways to Get the Most Out of Music Lessons



These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching. This comes from teaching hundreds of students each year in dance, and now, music.

### **1. How Young is too young – Starting at the Right Age**

Adults can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing an adult is to commit to practicing.

For children, starting at the right age is a key element to their success of their lessons. Some people will tell you “the sooner, the better” but this attitude can actually backfire and be a negative. If a child is put into lessons too soon, they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn a child off to music just because they had one unpleasant experience which could have been prevented. Sometimes, if the child waits a year to start lessons their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the suggested starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

#### **4 -5 Years Olds**

If a pre-schooler has a keen desire and wants to start music, a group pre-school music class will give them a good foundation in music basics which will be helpful later, in private lessons. At this age, private lessons generally do not work as the child has not yet experienced the formal learning environment of kindergarten or school and learns more effectively through the game oriented preschool environment.

#### **Piano/Keyboard**

At our school, 5/6 years old is the youngest age that we start children in private piano lessons. At this age, they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.



#### **Voice Lessons**

7 years old is recommended as the youngest age for private vocal lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique. For children younger than 7, we have a small group lesson (3-4 students) that teaches them how to use their voices properly, in a fun, relaxed environment.

### **2. Insist on Private Lessons when Learning a Specific Instrument**

Group classes work well for preschool music programs and theory lessons. However, when actually learning how to play an instrument, private lessons are a better choice. The music instructor is able to focus on the student’s individual strengths and weaknesses directly, which allows him/her to learn at their own pace. For that lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher.

### **3. Take Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment**

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment a student cannot be distracted by TV, pets, ringing phones, siblings or anything else. With only ½ to one hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results, since the only focus at that time is learning music. In a music school, the lessons are not just a hobby or a side-line for the teacher, but a responsibility which is taken very seriously.

#### **4. Make Practicing Easier**

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

- a.) **Time** – Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally, the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required by parents to get the child to practice.
  
- b.) **Repetition** – We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a young child, 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we use repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day, and this scale 5 times a day. The child then does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but knows if they are on repetition number 3, they are almost finished.
  
- c.) **Rewards** – This works very well for children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage their children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. In our school, we reward young children for a successful week of practicing with stars and stickers on their work. Praise tends to be the most coveted award – there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Sometimes we all have a week with little practicing. In that case, there is always next week.

#### **5. Use Recognized Teaching Materials**

There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example, in piano, there are books for very young beginners, and books for adult students that have never played before. There are books that can start you at a level you are comfortable with. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. These materials ensure that no important part of learning the instrument can inadvertently be left out. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to smoothly continue from where the previous teacher has left off.

#### **Have Fun!**

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. So, try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.

