

You've studied Piano Pedagogy in college, but now let's talk Piano Geragogy:

The PEDAGOGICAL model is teacher directed. We choose repertoire that is appropriate to the child's level, and teach them musical concepts in a preconceived sequence.

The GERAGOGICAL model is a partnership. Lessons are driven by student needs and goals, and accommodated by the teacher's knowledge and open-minded approach. Older adults often come to lessons with the desire to play a particular song, or piece, or style of music that they love. If they want to learn the *Rhapsody in Blue* on their first lesson, we say great! We write out or find a simple arrangement of the theme they can play right away. If they haven't learned to read music, we write letters on the page and use a letter strip behind the keys and help them to play the rhythm by ear. Or we show them the keys and let them imitate. We don't say, "that's too difficult," but rather we *find a way to make the music they love accessible to them*. We refer to ourselves as piano coaches. We keep an open mind, and encourage, respect and facilitate their musical dreams!

TIPS FOR TEACHERS:

- 1) Older adults come to you to learn to PLAY the piano. Get them to PLAY right away, and teach them music theory and technique gradually. Make it FUN to play in your studio! It's ok if the rhythm isn't perfect for a while. WE ARE NOT MOLDING VIRTUOSOS! We are nurturing piano lovers.
- 2) Chords are emphasized throughout the *Upper Hands Piano* books. Chords are the basis of almost all of western music, and the faster students learn and understand chords, the better they will understand and learn their music. This is true for all genres of music- classical, jazz, and all popular styles. Make sure that the student is practicing the APPENDICES in the *Upper Hands Piano* BOOKS 1-4 as directed in the early pages of each books. The exercises in the APPENDICES are the most important aspect of the deep learning that will occur within the *Upper Hands Piano* series.
- 2) Don't be too much of a stickler on fingering; **see what is most comfortable for your student**. And don't make them count everything! Sometimes using their ear to help play a familiar song is much more fun and accurate for beginners, than trying to count all the eighth notes.
- 3) Extra songs should be introduced alongside the *Upper Hands Piano* pages. I like the "easy" Fake Books published by Hal Leonard, such as *Your First Fake Book*, *The Easy Standards Fake Book*, and *The Easy Sixties Fake Book*. (**Click on RESOURCES at UpperHandsPiano.com** to order.) Write in the notes your students don't know, next to the note heads (not above them!). When they are ready to play with two hands, write in a simple 1-note accompaniment next to *Fake Book* chord symbols. Find common tones in left hand so that they don't have to move left hand too much. For example, for a song in C, I write mostly Gs for the left hand accompaniment, which can work for both C and G chords, then I might write just an F for F chords. Once they are ready you can add a 2-note accompaniment. For example, for a song in C, you can write EG for C chords, FG for G or G7 chords, and F or FA for F chords. Eventually as students make their way towards the middle of *Upper Hands Piano* BOOK 2, you can introduce some triads, for example writing CEG for a C chord, then maybe just a G for G chords, and FA for F chords, etc. For more information, see my blog post (with Youtube video) called Simplified classical pieces are great too; just write in the letters where needed. Let them choose several things they like, then you find the easiest amongst their choices to play first. Remember, if the rhythm seems too challenging to count, let them **use their ear**. Singing or saying the

lyrics can help them play songs they know with fairly accurate rhythm.

4) **Students should summarize new concepts, objectives, and strategies aloud**; they should take their own lesson notes and write down their own assignments at the end of the lesson. At the end of the lesson, go back and play the 3-4 most difficult passages to make sure they remember how to practice them.

5) The brain takes at least 6 hours to process new motor-skills, so don't expect your students to learn new finger techniques quickly, especially if they are first time beginners. **It is especially effective for students to practice new skills right before they go to sleep.** Sleep helps to embed new skills into long-term memory. Remind them in their lesson planners to practice their new technique the night of their lesson, just before going to bed.

6) Create a **comfortable environment** for your students. The ideal temperature for learning is about 70-72 degrees, and the room should be brightly lit with as much natural light as possible. Older adults are often particularly sensitive to glare, and noisy surroundings.

7) Some older adults are hearing impaired and may have difficulty distinguishing between the letters E, C, B, G and D when you say them. Try pointing to the letters or notes with a pencil, for example, when you are calling out keys for the pentascale exercises.

8) **Approximately 70-90% of new information is forgotten within 18-24 hours of the lesson.** Implore your students to practice soon after their lesson to **maximize memory retention.** This is the most important practice session of the week!

9) Students will best remember what they have learned at the beginning and end of the lesson; Ask them to warm up on exercises before they come, so that you can **start with new material** and important concepts soon after they arrive. Take a short break every 15-20 minutes to stretch, take deep breaths, have a quick snack, or take a drink of water. 45 minute-lessons are usually optimal for older adults. It has been my experience that after 45 minutes, learning can begin to decrease.

10) Even though **they usually learn at a faster pace than young beginners**, adults over 50 are sometimes more self-conscious, and have higher self-expectations. Remind them often of what they have already accomplished, and encourage them wherever you feel it is warranted. Remember what it's like to be a beginner and praise them for their courage to try something that is so daunting. When you are looking for what they have done well, instead of focusing on just what went wrong, you will find much to compliment!

11) It would be great if you and your students would follow our blog Blog.UpperHandsPiano.com and LIKE our Facebook page Facebook.com/UpperHandsPiano to get monthly free sheet music, practice tips, and the latest information on *Music and the Brain*. Gaining a better understanding of how the brain processes musical information will support and quicken the learning process.

Thanks for your willingness to use the *Upper Hands Piano* series! Reach out with your questions, and I will be happy to answer as soon as I am able: UpperHandsPiano@gmail.com
Enjoy! – Gaili Schoen