

Your First Piano Lesson

by Stacy Kastner



Naming the Keys

Find groups of two and three black keys on your piano. The white key just to the left of any group of two black keys is always named C. The white keys are each named alphabetically after that – D, E, F, G. Here the musical alphabet begins again on the next key with A, then B, and finally we've reached another C. The C in the center of the piano is named Middle C.

Naming the Fingers

If you put your hands out in front of you with your palms facing the ground, we number the ten fingers from left to right as 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 on the left hand (LH), and then 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 on the right hand (RH). In other words, both pinky fingers are named 5, both ring fingers are 4, middle fingers are both named 3, index fingers are named 2, and thumbs are both named 1.

C Position

Put the right hand thumb (RH1) on middle C. The rest of your fingers (2, 3, 4, 5) are placed one by one onto D, E, F, and G. Now, place the left hand pinky (LH5) on the next C you can find to the left of Middle C. The rest of your left hand fingers (4, 3, 2, 1) are placed one by one onto D, E, F, and G. Your hands are now on C Position.

Hand Position and Posture

Sit with your back straight, and with your feet placed squarely on the floor in front of you. Your shoulders should stay down and relaxed. Pull the bench towards the piano just until you can comfortably stand up from it without knocking it backwards. Place your hands on C position. Your forearms and wrists should be parallel to the floor. Nothing but your fingertips should touch the piano. Your fingers should be curved and relaxed, as if a ball or a bubble were between your palms and the keyboard. When pressing the keys, be sure that all knuckles, especially the smallest, remain curved.

You're ready to play!

1) Finger Warm-Up

Easier:

Place hands on C position. Play C – D – E – F – G – F – E – D five to ten times each day. Begin with one hand at a time, and then try both together. Remember to always keep a good hand position and posture. *Challenge: Can you do this without looking at your hands?*

Harder:

Hands go on keyboard similar to C position, but both hands skip over the note D (Your fingers will be on C, E, F, G, and A). Play C-E-F-G-A-G-F-E with hands together or one at a time. Slide hands to right, so that they start on D, and play that pattern again. Continue by sliding to the right each time you play the pattern, and stop once you find your first fingers on C once again. This exercise is the first in a book of sixty written by Hanon. Remember to always keep a good hand position and posture. *Challenge: Can you do this without looking at your hands?*

2) C Scale

Place hands on C Position. Remember to always keep a good hand position and posture. You will play a row of notes, C –D –E –F –G –A –B –C, using these special fingerings:

RH only, up: 1 – 2 – 3 – [RH1 under] – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

RH only, down: 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – [RH3 over] – 3 – 2 – 1.

LH only, up: 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – [RH3 over] – 3 – 2 – 1.

LH only, down: 1 – 2 – 3 – [RH1 under] – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

Hands together, up: C – D – E – [RH1 under] – F – G – [LH3 over] – A – B – C.

Hands together, down: C – B – A – [LH1 under] – G – F – [RH3 over] – E – D – C.

Challenge: Can you do this without looking at your hands?

3) Reading music

When you open your lesson book, you will see a lot of different musical symbols. The set of 5 lines that the music is printed on is called the *staff*. The first staff begins with a *G-clef* (also called Treble clef), and the second begins with an *F-clef* (also called Bass clef). Your right hand will read the music on the G-clef, and your left hand will read the music on the F-clef – at the same time! Another important thing to notice is that as we press keys towards the right (also called the ‘top’) of the piano, the notes sound higher. As we press keys towards the left (also called the ‘bottom’) of the piano, the notes sound lower.

Place your hands on C position and play the song, saying the letters of the notes aloud as you press them. When you are done, play the song again and count the groups of four beats in each bar. The top number of the *time signature* at the beginning of the line shows us to count to four. It's important to keep a steady beat while you play. A *metronome* will help you to play at the same speed from the beginning of the song to the end. Try to always look at the music, rather than down at your hands, while you play. Also remember to always keep a good hand position and posture.

4) Long-term Lesson Outline

We will gradually increase the tempo of Hanon #1 each week, as your hand position remains good, until you can play this at 60 on the metronome, with four notes per beat, without any mistakes. Then we begin Hanon #2.

After you can perform the C scale can with your hands together at 60, we will learn the G, D, A, and E scales. When you can play all five of these scales on your first try without mistakes, we will learn the C scale again. This time, you will learn how to play four C scales in a row without stopping!

We will also continue learning songs from your lesson book. In order to pass a song and move on to the next one, you must perform the song at 60 on the metronome, without stopping, and without mistakes.