Lesson 3: Hand Position

<u>To position your hands correctly:</u>

- before sitting down at the piano, stand and allow your arms to hang loosely at your sides – notice the natural curve of your fingers – you will be mimicking that natural curve in a moment, so commit it's appearance to memory

- sit down at the piano, relax your shoulders, let your arms hang loosely from your shoulders and keep your elbows close to the sides of your body – make two fists and rest your fists on the keyboard

- make sure your forearms and the backs of your hands are approximately level with each other (they should create a straight line)

> - adults tend to hold their wrists too high
> - children tend to rest their wrists on the front edge of the keyboard (not okay)

- the weight of your hands should be carried by your wrists – not by your shoulders or elbows

> - confirm this is the case by moving your fists upward – the movement should be at your wrists only, not in your shoulders or elbows

- open your fists and curve your fingers slightly as if holding an imaginary ball in your palm – mimic the natural curve you noticed earlier

- with one hand, place the side of the thumb and tips of the other four digits on five adjacent white keys near the center of the keyboard – do the same with the other hand

> - instead of putting your fingertips on the ends of the keys nearest you, place them a couple of inches closer to the fallboard – this makes it easier to reach the black keys when you need to do so

- make sure you are touching the keys with the tips of your fingers and the tips of your fingernails

> - this is only possible with short fingernails, so it is important to keep your fingernails short!

- depress a key with each finger/thumb, one key at a time – try this with each of your ten fingers/thumbs

> - make sure you are depressing only one key at a time
>
> - when you depress a key, make sure the fingers you are <u>not</u> using stay in contact with the keyboard – don't allow them to lift off their assigned key – this may take practice to master
>
> - when you release a key, make sure that all of your fingers/thumbs stay in contact with the keyboard – don't let any of them lift off their assigned keys - this may take practice to master
>
> - keep a relaxed, rounded hand position as you depress/release the keys
>
> - keep your fingertips vertical and firm

- keep both hands on the keyboard, even when you are depressing keys with only one hand

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There are good reasons for maintaining a naturally curved hand position:

- when the fingers are straight, each finger has a different length; when curved, all the fingers are, in effect, the same length

- if your fingers are straight, the thumb cannot reach the keyboard; when curved, the thumb is brought into the correct playing position

- straight fingers will bend at the first joint, opposite to the downward motion of the key, delaying key response; when curved, fingers control the key's response

- playing the piano will sometimes require turning the thumb under the fingers and crossing fingers over the thumb; curved fingers provide an arch that makes this motion possible

For the Younger Student

New vocabulary: **shoulders, elbows, forearm, wrist, knuckles, fingertips, keys**

Keep in mind that a young child will not be able to keep track of all these instructions, especially not all at one time. Cycle through them, focusing on only one or two key aspects at a time – and don't expect perfection.

Also keep in mind that his/her muscles are not used to this position and movement and it will take time to build up the strength and dexterity of those muscles so he/she can maintain good hand form for an extended period of time. Repeated frequent reminders will result in good form in the long run.

Any of these exercises can be performed one hand at a time or both hands together, depending upon the skill level of your child.

"Accomplished pianists have great posture - shoulders to knuckles"

1) Have your child sit down at the piano, relax his/her shoulders, let his/her arms hang loosely from his/her shoulders and keep his/her elbows close to the sides of his/her body – have him/her make two fists and rest his/her fists on the keyboard.

2) Have him/her balance a ruler or other straight edge on the top of one forearm and the back of one hand – can he/she find the position that allows the least amount of light under the straight edge? Give extra credit if he/she can open his/her hand without the straight edge falling off his/her arm.

"Accomplished pianists have curved fingers and flexible wrists"

1) Have your child hang his/her hands loosely at his/her side (you may need to turn the bench 90 degrees so he/she is sitting on the end of the bench in order to do this). Have him/her notice the natural curve of his/her hand and then try to maintain that curve as he/she moves his/her hands to the keyboard (onto any keys).

2) After mastering that skill, have him/her place his/her hands on the keyboard (open hand, curved fingers), then move his/her hands upwards from the wrists (only movement is to be in the wrists) – do this several times.

3) Combine the first two steps into one repetitive exercise (dangle hands, move them to the keyboard, bend hand upward, bend hand downward, repeat) and do it in step with the beat of some favorite recorded music – stress maintaining the natural curve of the hand and fingers.

4) Alter the pattern of movement to this:

- dangle hands at his/her side

- raise his/her hands the into the air with relaxed wrists (backs of hands and fingers are hanging downward)

- start dropping his/her hands towards the keyboard (backs of hands are sloping upward, fingers are significantly curved)

- land gently on the keyboard with a naturally curved position – give extra credit if he/she lands on his/her fingertips and fingernail tips.

"Accomplished pianists have great finger movement skills"

This fine motor skill will take some time to develop and may require much practice – there may even be some limits on ability due to age – please be very patient.

1) Have your child stick out the index finger on one hand (like he/she is indicating the number one). Have him/her lay that finger on a key without depressing that key. Then, have him/her depress the key and then release the key without raising he finger and loosing contact between his/her finger and the key. Repeat until the contact is consistent and repeat with the other hand.

2) Have him/her stick out two fingers (like he/she is indicating the number two). Have him/her lay those fingers on adjacent keys without depressing the keys. Then, have him/her depress one key without loosing contact between the other finger and its key. Then release the key without raising either finger off their keys. Repeat until the contact is consistent, then repeat with the other finger and then the other hand.

3) Repeat the process with three fingers, four fingers then five fingers – repeat with each hand then both hands together. Make sure the fingertips stay firm.