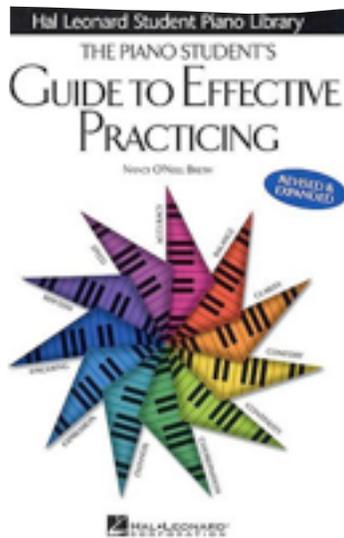


# Practice Makes Perfect

Order your guide today **Deadline 10/26**

An honest memo from your beloved piano teacher



I have made it my mission to improve both the *quantity* of student practice sessions as well as the *quality*. Playing piano may well be the most challenging activity your child will ever undertake. Reading music notation and translating it to refined motor skills is an extremely advanced neurological process. Mastering the instrument requires a continual commitment to practicing. I won't lie to you. The repetition isn't always fun, but it is *always worth it*.

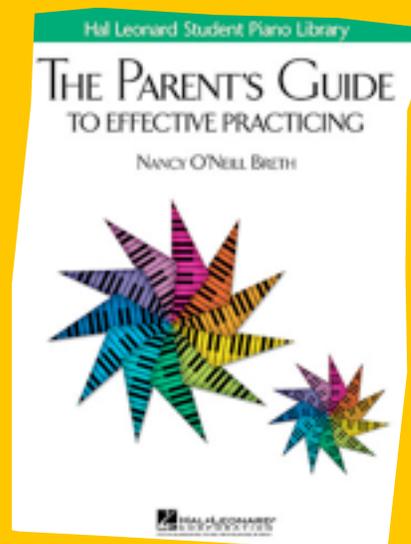
It is believed that piano students statistically perform above average in their academic studies because they have mastered, to a greater extent, the processes involved in learning. Certainly, success on their

instrument depends largely on their ability to commit to working through a challenging task, their tenacity. Piano study has also proven to positively impact the organic development of the student's brain. This particular benefit seems to be at the root of the many inquiries I receive from physicians and scientists, who understand the research well. Please read the concluding article for the details. While this is certainly not new information, let this reminder bolster the energy of your commitment to your child's music education.

Less often discussed, is the transformative effect that playing music can have on your emotional state and sense of well being. When you exercise, does listening to upbeat tunes improve your energy level? How about beloved pop tunes from your favorite era? Do they momentarily transport you to a place in time when you felt more carefree? Masterful classics, similarly, can elevate your mood from the mundane to the sublime. Groovy jazz tunes may provide just the relaxation you need. When you sit down at the piano, the act of playing requires reserves of concentration that leave little room for ordinary worries. In their place, you connect with something divinely beautiful. What a gift! What an amazing gift!

Once I understood this myself, I committed myself to sharing it with others. Of all the careers I could have chosen, I chose this one because I want your children to experience this metamorphosis, because I understand the power of it.

My commitment to my students, which I can guarantee to you is exceptionally high, can only carry us so far, however. I need your help making sure that students are doing their very best at home. If I could stress one thing, it would be consistency. I'm realistic. I have a child learning two instruments. Just like you, we're unfathomably busy. Some days our practice sessions at home may involve playing through our most important pieces only once. This type of practice session is acceptable as long as it is balanced with much more detailed work the next time. If you only have fifteen minutes to practice, please don't rule out practicing all together, use the fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes here and there can add up.



Secondly, I want to encourage piano students to pace themselves to avoid burnout. I want you to be in this for the long haul. I would love nothing more than for you to exhaust my knowledge of piano! Find a realistic routine that your family can accommodate, and then stick to it. In our family, we all fare better when we take Friday off from practicing. To compensate, we try to squeeze in extra practice sessions whenever possible.

Of course, some degree of facility is necessary before students can truly feel the positive impact of their music education. Many students get stuck in a frustration trap, as they struggle to find notes and master technical passages. Let's work on *that*. To help students remember the many mindful practice techniques that we have learned in our lessons, I suggest that you each consider purchasing one of Nancy Breth's wonderfully thorough practice guides from Hal Leonard.

***The Parent's Guide to Effective Practicing (\$6.88):*** This guide is a tool for parents to help their children build good practice habits. It brings together a variety of widely used practice tips, written in a way that is easy for children to understand. Parents who use this guide regularly, even if they have limited time or little knowledge of music, can greatly improve the quality of their children's practice sessions. When practicing is interesting and fun, children get good results and want to practice more. I recommend it for younger beginners and elementary students.

***The Piano Student's Guide to Effective Practicing (\$6.92):*** Students are genuinely surprised when things go wrong in a lesson. They don't realize that they only half-listen while practicing. When they do notice a problem, they simply play the passage over and over (cementing in the mistakes) and hope for the best. That's what most students call practicing.

The Piano Student's Guide to Effective Practicing shows the student how to save time and build good practice habits. It helps the student solve specific problems with 58 concise practice tips – clearly-explained drills and tactics for mastering challenging passages. Printed on heavy-coated stock for durability, the Guide is designed to be kept on the music desk for quick reference by the student when problems occur in daily practice.

Practice tips are categorized to address issues of accuracy, balance, clarity, continuity, coordination, comfort, evenness, expression, fingering, rhythm and speed. The tips work for students at all stages and ages, including adults! I recommend this guide for fourth grade up through adults.

**How to Order:** Rather than have the delivery truck trekking big carbon footprints all over town, I would like to place one order for the entire studio. Parent's Guide: \$6.88. Student's Guide: \$6.92. **I will submit the order on October 26.** If you want to purchase one or both guides, please notify me and **bring your payment to your next lesson.** Money will need to be collected in advance of ordering. Delivery time is estimated to be three days.

## Piano Music and Its Benefits to Brain Development

By Andy West

Sonatas and symphonies on the piano not only sound nice, but they are also relaxing to hear. Discoveries by neuroscientists have indicated that listening to and playing piano music helps with better development of certain parts of the brain. Studies of children exposed to such sounds at a young age show that there are differences in how specific parts of their brains develop over time.

By imaging the brains of people during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, experts found that in their research, people who practiced the piano early on had differences from those who

did not. There were actually variations in nerve tracts that go from the cerebral cortex, the main part of the brain, through the medulla, to the brainstem and spinal cord. The scans showed that the brain matter was more organized in these pathways in kids who practiced the piano. The coatings of nerves were also better formed, it was found, providing more insulation that enables impulses to travel faster. This makes the nerves especially more efficient at transferring signals from the brain to fingers, an essential trait for playing the piano and especially fast-paced parts of classical pieces, for example.



Musical training seems to affect other areas of the brain as well. The corpus callosum is the area in between the two hemispheres of the brain and where a lot of information is transferred between the two halves. A study showed that this section is thicker in musicians than non-musicians and in people who had music training when young. This enhanced connection is thought to maybe speed the communication from one half of the brain to another, so it could improve motor control, better connect areas of emotion and memory, and allow for more efficient control of the fingers while playing.

Other researchers proved that when children of preschool age practiced piano music, there was an increase in spatial reasoning ability. This capacity in turn affects mathematical reasoning. The

connections between brain neurons appear to be strengthened by listening to and practicing. All brain signals are transmitted between the edges of neurons, or brain cells that are specialized for ultimately sending signals to the nerves in the body.

Non musicians are not necessarily at a disadvantage when it comes to being able to perform certain actions. People instructed to make certain finger movements in a study were able to do so whether they played the piano or not, but there was more activity detected in the brains of musicians. Overall, the various studies show that piano music seems to increase the efficiency of the brain to transmit nerve signals and improves motor coordination and cognitive reasoning. In young children, the brain is more able to develop in critical parts, so it is believed that the changes brought on by music training can be permanent, but that has not yet been proven. It is still not known that if someone stops playing altogether, the changes seen in the corpus callosum would be permanent, or if the person would always have to play to keep their brain in shape, like when working out to build muscle.

All the research put together suggests there are benefits to brain development by playing piano music, so it seems musical training is vital to the education of young children. Mathematics and certain sciences can be difficult for some to understand. Music may assist in the ability to comprehend math skills. There is always the satisfaction one has when they possess a musical skill. At the very least, the enjoyment of listening to music and having an outlet of creativity are things that provide an advantage to the quality of life for anyone.

