

# Part 1: Basic Principles, Posture, and Alignment

## I. Introduction

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“If a picture is worth a thousand words, an experience is worth a thousand pictures.”  
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“First we know, then we learn.”

## II. Environment and Development

- a. Video clip: Toddler’s at play
- How would describe the movement of these children?
  - Are their movements varied or unvaried?
  - Do they engage in the same type of physical actions throughout the video or do they make many different kinds of movements?
  - How would you describe the relationship of their heads to their spine? Their spine to their pelvis? Their pelvis to their legs?

- What happens when they reach out their hand and arm to tag a friend?

b. video clip: Teenagers hanging out

- How would you describe the movements of these teens?
- Are their movements varied or unvaried?
- Do they engage in the same type of physical actions throughout the video or do they make many different kinds of movements?
- How would you describe the relationship of their heads to their spine? Their spine to their pelvis? Their pelvis to their legs?

c. Environmental factors:

- strollers and car seats
- desks and chairs
- heavy backpacks
- smart phones

d. Conclusions:

- Posture the head, spine, pelvis, and legs are all in alignment
- Movement Patterns: Varied
- Coordination: The eyes and head lead the movement, the body follows
- The younger the child the more likely they are to move in a healthy and dynamic way
- Separate the natural from the habitual

### III. Fine Motor Skills

"Children coming into school are being given a pencil but are increasingly not be able to hold it because they don't have the fundamental movement skills. Because of this, they're not developing the underlying foundation skills they need to grip and hold a pencil."

-Dr. Sally Payne

#### Posture

"Good hand alignment begins with the feet."

#### a. What is posture?

Video clip: Rubinstein Playing Chopin

- how would you describe the relationship of his head to his torso?
- Where does most of the movement occur? In his head, ribs, hips or legs?

Exercise 1: Growing Tall  
(freely adapted from Feldenkrais)

Exercise 2: The Pivot  
(freely adapted from Feldenkrais)

Awareness: the head and neck (atlanto-occipital joint)

- Tools: pencils above the ears
- c. Awareness: the hips (ball and socket joint)  
Movement exercise: "The Clock"

### IV. Seating

Excellent Seating Guide: [www.wellbalancedpianist.com](http://www.wellbalancedpianist.com)

- a. Level forearm  
Tool: book under the arm
- b. Bench height  
Tools: seating pads and risers
- c. Distance  
Movement: touching the fallboard
- d. Foot support  
Tools: pedal extender/foot stool, stickers  
Images: king or queen on their throne riding a horse
- e. Where to sit
- f. Standing while playing
- g. Sitting too low
- h. Sitting too high

### V. Hand Shape

#### a. What is the ideal hand shape?

"We all carry a model of perfect alignment around with us at all times: The shape of the forearm and hand when it hangs to the side."

-Dr. Teresa Dybvig

Images: weeping willow, spaceship with slimy aliens, monster vs. princess hands

b. Flipping over the hand

Images: holding a book/cup of ice cream

c. What is not an ideal hand shape?

- curled fingers, holding an egg or ball

d. Common pitfalls:

- neat and tidy- five finger positions
- neat and tidy- straightening at the wrist

Images: pointer and pinky are friends

tulip shape

ghost with a flashlight

Songs: "Alien Song"

"The Pointer and Pinky are Friends"

(music and words by Steinhardt and Chan)

- fingers in a straight line

activity or tension beyond that related to the physical properties. "

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a. Tension and relaxation

Image: leaping cat

b. "Sensation of no sensation" - Teresa Dybvig.

Movement: sloppy drop vs. toned drop

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"In good action, the sensation of effort is absent."

-Moshe Feldenkrais

c. Body levers:

- finger
- finger-hand
- finger-hand-forearm

d. Distal to proximal gradient: smaller moments at the center of the body (proximal) than those farther away from the center of the body (distal)

Image: handle of the whip vs. the tip

Tool: pencil held between the thumb and forefinger

e. Anatomy lesson 1- Finger flexion and extension

Extensor digitorum:

- first strand ties to the 2nd finger
- second strand ties to the 3rd finger
- which connects to the 4th finger
- The 5th finger gets its own extensor tendon (extensor digiti minimi) but is connected to finger 4

## VI. Important Concepts

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"Movement is life; without movement life is unthinkable."

- Moshe Feldenkrais

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" to·nic·i·ty

(tō-nis'i-tē)

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1. A state of normal tension of the tissues by virtue of which the parts are kept in shape, alert, and ready to function in response to a suitable stimulus. In the case of muscle, it refers to a state of continuous

## f. Anatomy lesson 2- Extensor tendons

### Muscle:

Flexor digitorum profundus/superficialis

- flexion of PIP, MCP, DIP

### Interossei

- adduction and abduction

### Lumbricals

- flexion of MCP joints
- extension of DIP and PIP

### Extensor digitorum

- extension of the MCP joint

### Extensor indicis

- extends finger 2

### Extensor digiti minimi

- extends finger 5

## g. Comparatives

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"Difference that is not perceived does not exist"- Anat Baniel  
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## h. Attention and awareness

Movement: "Goldilocks" comparatives

Range of motion- the motion allowed by the joint's shape and surrounding tissue to allow a specific movement between bones

Mid-range- the hand in its natural alignment

## Fingers:

- curl
- straighten
- spread
- squeeze

## Wrist:

- swivel towards the thumb
- swivel towards the pinky
- drop
- raise

## Shoulder:

- raise
- lower

## Elbow:

- towards and away from the body

# Part 2: Fundamental Movements and Patterns

## Physical Touch Ground Rules:

1. When teaching minors, have another adult present observing lessons and/or an open door policy. In larger studios or school setting CCTV cameras can offer additional protection.
2. When teaching a minor discuss the use of touch and how it will be used with the parent and ask for permission before touching the student.
3. Children have the right to bodily autonomy and may be uncomfortable being touched or have sensory issues. Always ask permission from the student before touching (“Is it okay if I touch your hand?”). When touching a different body part ask again (Is it okay if I touch your forearm”). If they say, “no” respect their wishes.
4. Look out for non-verbal cues that the student may be uncomfortable with being touched.
5. A young student may be more comfortable being touched by a parent. Involving the parent can help ensure healthy practice habits at home.
6. When teaching minors restrict touching to the fingers, hands, forearm, elbow, and the top of the shoulder. When teaching adults, adjusting the hips, head, and shoulders can be highly beneficial but special permission should be granted.

7. Only initiate touch when making a specific pedagogical point.
8. Touch should be gentle. Never touch a student in a way that would cause discomfort. Never grab at a student as this will instinctively cause the student to tense up.

## I. Sequencing

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“Gross motor skills come before fine. Arm before fingers.”  
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### a. Fists

Image: holding a bird’s egg

Pieces: “The Woodpecker” - Marilyn Lowe

“Cuckoo Clock” -Faber

“Homage a Tchaikovsky”- G. Kurtag

### b. Pencils

Seymour Bernstein exercises:

- pianissimo black and white keys (kitty mews)
- silently playing to the escapement (the kitty bed)
- playing to the escapement pianissimo (whispers from outer space)
- playing forte to the bottom of the key (earth tones)

### c. Finger 2 or 3

Piece: “The Apple and the Worm” - Marilyn Lowe

Movement: touching the face or opposite forearm

### d. Balance

Images: skydiver with parachute

piece of paper between the fingers and the keys

flat sidewalk, tabletop balance  
Contacting: “as if standing on the floor”- Taubman  
Tool: finger paint/silly putty

**e. The Two Drops: Hand**

Movements: hi-five and pat-a-cake  
Image: drawbridge and moat  
Pieces: “Rain, Rain” - Irina Gorin  
“Butterfly” - Irina Gorin

**f. The Two drops: Fingers**

Image: wave “bye-bye”  
Tools: stickers on the joints  
pencil roll using the MCP joint  
Movement: finger tapping/drumming

**g. Combining the two drops**

Movement: High five

**h. Finger Isolation**

-avoid “independence” exercises  
-causes simultaneous flexion and contraction  
-the finger must pull contrary to the weight of the hand

**i. Keybedding (use of excessive force):**

Exercise: playing with the keys depressed  
Tool: kitchen scale

**j. Legato**

Exercise: playing the teacher’s fingers  
‘walking’ with the fingers  
Pieces: “Wache Finger, Wache Ohren” -  
Bettina Schwedhelm  
“My Family/Favorite Animals” - Irina Mints  
“Cinderella/Brave Prince Out Hunting” I.M.

**k. Rotation**

Images: royal wave

tilting airplane wings

Tools: velcro toy

**l. Preparatory Motion**

Image: kicking a ball/swinging a bat

**m. Fifth Finger and Thumb**

Image: no teepees  
walls and roof of the house  
Piece: “Stomping Grounds” - Paula Dreyer

**n. Fifth Finger**

Image: one bone  
karate chop

**o. Thumb**

Image: magic thumb spot  
drumstick  
wishbone  
“v” shape, not “c” or “u”

Movements:

- Rotation

Watch out for:

- extending/curling
- extending/curling to lift
- the thumb reaching for its key

**p. In and Out**

- Adjusting for finger lengths
- moving in and out of the black key area

Images: opening and closing the drawer  
car in and out of the garage  
walking into the forest  
changing fingerprints  
conveyor belt

Key Weight

-Near the edge of the key is lighter

3-2-1:

- 3-2-1 (move IN)
- 1-2-3 (move OUT)
- 3-4-5 (move IN)
- 5-4-3 (move OUT)

Watch out for:

- thumb causing the hand to swivel
- the fingers curling when moving OUT
- the fingers failing to release
- falling into the heel of the hand

C Major Pentascale

- 1-2 (o) 2-3 (o) 3-4 (i) 4-5 (i)\*
- 5-4 (o) 4-3 (o) 3-2 (i) 2-1 (i)

Moving in and out of the black key area

Image: Car in and out of the garage

V7 - I

Thumb starts closer to the black key

Tool: stickies

#### q. **Negra-clavi-phobia**

Fear of the black keys

#### r. **Walking Hand and Arm**

(down) up-across/down

- small shift of weight from finger to finger
- large shift of the whole arm

Piece: "Tree Frog" - Piano Safari

#### s. **Staccato**

Image: dribbling a basketball  
bouncing on a trampoline  
riding the elevator

Tools: rubber ball

Piece: "Zechariah Zebra"- Piano Safari

Exercise: magic alignment exercise

#### t. **Elliptical Shapes (a.k.a. wrist circles)**

Pieces: "Tree Frog" and "Soaring Bird" P. S.

Images: smile and rainbow

C major pentascale:

- 1 (u) 2 (u) 3 (u) 4 (d) 5 (d)

Even number of notes

-highest/lowest point is between two keys

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 "...smooth curvilinear movements are more economical in piano playing because less work is required to redirect motion than to regenerate it" -Wristen and Deahl  
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#### u. **Scales and Thumb Crossings**

-Start with B major r.h., E major l.h.

Thumb under:

- "one under 2, under 3"

OOF

- Out-over-forward
- Two "rainbow" shapes

Avoid crossing under 4, instead use WHA

Hand over thumb:

"Find your angle"

Image: "standing on head"

"Do the Hustle"

# Part 3- Flow and Music: Developing Inner Hearing Through Movement

## I. Reminiscence

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“Music is the foundation of musicianship.”

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## II. Key Figures

- a. Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950)
  - b. Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967)
  - c. Edwin Gordon (1927-2015)
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“Audiation is to music what thought is to language.”  
-Edwin Gordon

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## III. Three Elements of Rhythm

- Pulse
- Meter
- Rhythm Patterns

### a. Pulse

“Watch Please” game (Music Moves)  
Music Moves resources:

[www.musicmovesforpiano.com](http://www.musicmovesforpiano.com) - Teacher's Guide  
[www.musiclearningacademy.com](http://www.musiclearningacademy.com) - Online Course

- Large body movements of the hips and shoulders
- The pulse determines the tempo
- “Seymour: An Introduction”

### b. Meter

- Evenly divides the pulse into groups of 2 (duple) or 3 (triple)
- Unusual meters include 5 and 7
- small muscles - hands, feet, fingers, toes

### c. Rhythm Patterns

- Rhythm patterns are to music what vocabulary words are to language
- They may coincide with the rhythm of the melody or text

Piece:

“Sounds from the Gumdrop Factory”-Faber

# IV: Laban

Rudolph Laban (1879-1958)

Movement Qualities:

- Time (quick to sustained)
- Flow (bound to free)
- Weight (strong to light)
- Space (direct to indirect)

## a. Time

- Pulsating Body Movements
- Pulse in different places around the body
- Steady Pulse Games:
  - Keep a beat to the music. Maintain the beat when the teacher stops playing.
  - Maintain a beat regardless of what the teacher plays
  - Count objects on the piano (external vs. internal pulse)
- Fast vs. Slow comparatives
- Gradual Tempo changes/Rubato
  - Big to small arm circles (accel.)
  - Small to big arm circles (rit.)
  - Gradually reaching up
  - Figure eights faster or slower (rubato)

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“To stop the flow of music would be like the stopping of time itself. Incredible and inconceivable.” -Aaron Copland

## b. Flow

- Utilizing Props: Scarves
  - Remove unwanted accents making figure eights in the air
  - Bring the scarf back and forth across the body. Dip on the downbeat.
  - Larger or smaller circles (cresc/dim)
  - Floating scarf (dim)
- Free Flow  
Piece: “Mashed Potato Clouds” - Hidy
- Bound Flow  
Piece: Trumpet and Drum - Kabalevsky

## c. Weight

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“Bar Lines...should be seen and not heard” - Artur Schnabel

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“If I were rich enough I would have all my music printed with our bar lines.” -Schnabel

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## Tangent - Meter is Enrhythmic

- Rhythms can be notated differently but sound the same

- Metric accents should be felt and not heard
  - Strong vs. light imagery
  - Music Weight Games
    - Bouncing while varying the meter groupings
    - Pat-a-cake, weight leaning and release
    - Dances
  - Anacrusis, Appoggiatura, Dynamics
    - Jump into the downbeat
    - Palms together/ fling apart
      - Lean into a pillow (appoggiatura)
      - Lean into a partner's hands (appoggiatura)
      - Swing a big book (fortissimo)
      - Swing a scarf (pianissimo)

#### d. Space

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“The notes I handle no better than many pianists.  
But the space in between the notes, ah, that is  
where the art resides.” - Schnabel

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“Music is the space between the notes.”  
-Debussy

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- Space imagery
- Direct to Indirect
- Duration
  - Listen to ringing sounds disappear
  - Play a triangle on downbeats
  - Large flowing movements while gently tapping
  - Conducting Patterns
    - The Resting Tone Game (Music Moves)

#### e. Phrasing and the Melodic Line

- Feel the Adam's Apple (high to low)
- Flowing arm movements (shapes)
- Fists opened and closed
- Bend at the Waist (cadential patterns)
- Use different parts of the body to represent pitch

## Resources and Materials

### Websites:

[www.BenjaminSteinhardt.com](http://www.BenjaminSteinhardt.com)  
[www.WellBalancedPianist.com](http://www.WellBalancedPianist.com)  
[www.TheMusiciansBrain.com](http://www.TheMusiciansBrain.com)

### Referenced Methods:

Music Moves by Marilyn Lowe  
Piano Safari by Knerr and Fisher  
Musi-Physi-Cality by S. Bernstein  
Hello, Piano! by Irina Mints  
Tales of a Musical Journey - I. Gorin  
Jatekok- G. Kurtag  
Wache Finger, Wache Ohren - Schwedhelm

### Taubman Approach:

The Well-Balanced Pianist  
The Golandsky Institute  
Keyboard Wellness Seminar  
Dorothy Taubman Seminar

### Somatic Education:

Feldenkrais  
Alexander Technique  
Aston Patterning  
Iyengar Yoga  
Anat Baniel Method  
Dalcroze Method

### Music Learning Theory:

Music Moves for Piano  
Gordon Institute for Music Learning

### Books:

What Every Pianist Should Know About the Body - T. Mark

Adaptive Strategies for Small Handed Pianists- Wristen and Deahl

Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique - O. Ortmann

The Child's First Steps in Piano Playing - T. Matthey

Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique.... - Julie Knerr

Kids Beyond Limits - Anat Baniel

The Hand: How its use shapes the brain, language, and human culture - Frank R. Wilson

Lies My Music Teacher Told Me - Gerald Eskin

Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning -Brown, Roediger III, and McDaniel

Rhythm: Contrasting the Implications... (and other titles)- Edwin Gordon

The Eurhythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze - Dalcroze

Rhythm and Movement: Applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics - Elsa Findlay

The Kodaly Method- Lois Choksy

### Films:

The Taubman Tapes  
Choreography of the Hands: The work of Dorothy Taubman  
Seymour: an introduction

### Online Courses:

[www.musiclearningacademy.com](http://www.musiclearningacademy.com)