

The Holmes Studio of Dance, Music & Wellness
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5 Ways To Get The Most Out Of Music Lessons

These Guidelines will help you have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching and our experiences with teaching hundreds of students.

1. How Young is too Young - Starting at the Right Age.

Adults can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing they are to commit to practicing. Adults who've waited for that "right" time often find renewed vigor in life studying music.

For children, starting at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons. Some people will tell you "the sooner the better" but this attitude can actually backfire and be a negative. If a child is put into lessons too soon they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn off a child just because they had one unpleasant experience which could have been prevented. Sometimes if the child waits a year to start lessons their progress can be faster. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

3-4 Years Old

If a preschooler has a keen desire and wants to start music, a group preschool music class will give them a good foundation in music basics which will be helpful in later private lessons. At this age, private lessons generally do not work well as the child has not experienced the formal learning environment of kindergarten or school and learns more effectively through the game oriented preschool environment.

Piano/ Keyboard

Our experience has shown us that 6 years old is the youngest advisable age to start children in private piano lessons. At this age they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.

Guitar - Acoustic, Electric and Bass

8 Years old is the earliest we recommend for guitar lessons. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips from pressing on the strings. Children under 8 generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable. Bass guitar students generally are 10 yrs. and older.

Voice Lessons

10 years old is the earliest we recommend for private voice lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the the vocal chords and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique. For children younger than 10, we have a children's choir, elementary music classes and/or music & movement classes. These opportunities help build rhythm & melodic awareness along with sequential patterning skills in a fun and relaxed environment - Great building blocks for success!

Drums

Our experience has shown us that students wishing to start drum lessons should be at least 9 years old. This varies greatly depending on the size of the child. They have to be able to reach both the pedals and the cymbals.

Flute, Clarinet and Saxophone

Due to the lung capacity (and in the case of the saxophone the size of the instrument), we recommend that most woodwind beginners are 9 years and up.

Trumpet, Trombone and Tuba

Brass instruments require physical exertion and lots of lung power. 9 years and older is a good time to start the trumpet and trombone. We recommend tuba students to be at least 11 years old.³. Insist on Private Lessons when Learning a Specific Instrument

2. Insist on Private Lessons when Learning a Specific Instrument

Group lessons work well for preschool, elementary music programs and theory lessons. However, when actually learning how to play an instrument, private lessons are far more superior since in private lessons it is hard to miss anything, and each student can learn at their own pace. This means the teacher does not have to teach at a middle of the road level, but has the time and focus to work on the individual student's strengths and weaknesses. For that lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher. The teachers also enjoy this as they do not have to divide their attention between 5 -10 students at a time and can help the student be the best that they can be.

3. Take Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment a student can not be distracted by t.v., pets, ringing phones, siblings or anything else. With only a 1/2 to one hour lesson per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at the time is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments. In a music school, lessons are not just a hobby or side-line for the teacher, but a responsibility that's taken seriously.

4. Make Practicing Easier

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and fights between parents and students to practice. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

a) Time - Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required by parents to get the child to practice.

b) Repetition - We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a young child 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we suggest repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day, and this scale 5 times a day. The child then does not pay attention to the

amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but knows if they are on repetition number 3 they are almost finished. Recording part of a practice session and then listening with a critical ear often reveals hidden secrets. Home computers make great recordings and even burn CDs. Ask us about software recommendations that are inexpensive and sometimes even free!

c) Rewards - This works very well for children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. In our school we reward young children for a successful week of practicing with stars and stickers on their work. Praise tends to be most coveted award - there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well down. Sometimes we all have a week with little practicing, in that case there is always next week.

5. Use Recognized Teaching Materials

There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example in piano, there are books for a very young beginners, and books for adult students who have never played before. There are books that can start you at any level you are comfortable with. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. These materials ensure that no important part of learning the instrument can inadvertently be left out. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to smoothly continue from where the previous teacher left off.

Have Fun!!

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. So, try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.