



HANDBOOK  
*for*  
STUDENTS AND PARENTS



## *~ Welcome to Sykes Music ~*

Hello and welcome to Sykes Music. This handbook is for parents and students to gain a better understanding of Sykes Music and for you to learn a lot of valuable information which make your piano learning experience as successful as possible. I hope that your learning experience is enjoyable and fruitful! Students learning through the revolutionary Sykes Piano Program developed by Julia Sykes, become excellent pianists and musicians while also enjoying learning and playing the piano.

### **What is Sykes Music?**

Sykes Music publishes and distributes Sykes Piano Program books and materials. It is also a training centre for piano teachers. It also helps connect students with Sykes Music teachers. For up-to-date information on Sykes Piano teachers and their contact details, go to <http://www.sykesmusic.com.au/teachers>.

### **Why is it a good idea to learn the piano?**

There are so many things learned when learning the piano more than just learning the piano. The enjoyment of playing the piano is enough of a reason to want to learn to play. We all need to do things in our lives that are fun. Playing the piano is also a creative outlet. It gives us a rare opportunity to be creative. There are also many physical and mental benefits of learning the piano. It improves our fine motor skills, listening skills, concentration and coordination. It is also a good discipline. The requirement to play the piano almost every day to improve our piano playing teaches us many things such as, that Rome wasn't built in a day; practice makes better and if you keep at it, amazing things can be achieved. It also teaches us organizational skills, helps us develop good daily routines, and teaches us how to pace things to be able to reach goals. Learning music is part of receiving a well-rounded education. Music is such a large part of most people's lives. The more that you know about music, the more that you appreciate it. Playing the piano is a valuable and healthy way to spend our time. It is a great emotional outlet, when we are feeling angry, we can play the piano, when we are feeling sad, we can play the piano, when we are feeling happy, we can play the piano. Students gain a lot of self confidence through playing. They are often proud to show others what they can do. Performance experiences also boosts self confidence. There has been a lot of research in recent years which shows that playing the piano actually increases our intelligence. For older people, they often learn the piano to keep their mind stimulated and active. Playing the piano is also a great family activity. You can play duets. Also it sounds nice to have music in the house, especially when you know that it is being created in your home by a member of your household. Because our Sykes Music parents are involved in lessons, they learn to play too, and often enjoy playing just as much as their children. Playing music together is a great activity for everyone.

## **The piano is a good instrument to start on**

The piano is a very good instrument, if not the best instrument to begin learning music on. The piano is an instant reward instrument – you press down a key, and it makes a nice sound. This is not the case with many other instruments such as the violin, trumpet, clarinet and flute. In the first piano lesson you are able to learn and play at least 1 piece of music, if not more. Again, this is not the case with other instruments. Often students need to practise exercises for weeks or months before they are able to play their first piece of music. Also, with the piano, students learn to read the treble and the bass clefs (the high notes and the low notes), which means that it is easier for them to go and learn any 2nd instrument, because they can already read the music of this instrument. The piano is also the best instrument for learning to understand music. This is because the notes are laid out in front of you in black and white. This is not the case in other instruments where the notes are not clearly and visibly set out in a sequential order. You also can not see the notes like you can on a piano. Most non-piano teachers, will refer to the keyboard when teaching their students about music. For piano students, this makes more sense to them, because they are familiar with the keyboard.

## **The Sykes Piano Program**

The Sykes Piano Program was developed by Julia Sykes. It has taken many years of piano teaching experience and extensive research to create this unique and successful piano program which is always in a state of review and improvement. The Sykes Piano Program provides students with a well-rounded music education which is both enjoyable and sees students progress quickly. The Sykes Piano Program covers all aspects of music including performance, technique, aural, singing, improvisation, composition, music reading, arrangement, theory and music appreciation. It also encompasses all musical styles and considers the particular interests of students. This comprehensive program includes an unique fast and effective music reading and writing method. There is no program in the world that is as comprehensive as the Sykes Piano Program, but the amazing thing is that it also manages to be a lot of fun, rewarding and students progress quickly.

## **Sykes Music Teachers**

There are two main elements which constitute the success of the Sykes Piano Program: 1) The program itself; and, 2) The deliverance of the program by the teachers. Both of these aspects are equally important. All Sykes Piano Teachers are carefully selected. The application process includes meeting music qualification prerequisites. All Sykes Piano Teachers undergo a thorough training process that is a minimum of 8 days of training. During training, teachers learn general teaching as well as specific piano teaching skills. Teachers learn how to teach every aspect of the program in a step by step process. They also study the pedagogical benefits of every exercise and learn solutions to difficulties that students may encounter. The teacher training is very 'hands-on', and trainee teachers practise teaching each other and receive feedback from fellow trainees and the trainer. At the completion of training, teachers undergo assessments that include written and practical assessments. They are also required to observe a number of lessons. All teachers once trained, receive ongoing teaching advice, support and training. Many non-Sykes Music teachers never receive any training in how to teach music because this is not an official requirement in Australia. The quality of Sykes Music teachers and the lessons delivered are of a very high standard.

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## Sykes Little Maestro Piano Program

The Sykes Little Maestro Piano Program is designed for children 4-6 years of age. Research has shown that when children learn to play piano from a young age, this helps with their overall development in many areas. It is a fun way for children to develop fine motor skills, coordination, listening skills, concentration and finger strength. The Sykes Little Maestro Program includes pieces that are enjoyable and suitable for children in this age group. It is a great introduction to piano at a young age and provides children with a deeper love and understanding of music. Children first of all learn to play without reading music and then reading is introduced later in the program. Little Maestro classes are private lessons once or twice a week and are from 10 minutes to 30 minutes in duration. It is imperative that parents are involved in the learning process for students to get the most out of lessons and to make good progress. Parents are involved by attending lessons, learning the pieces and exercises, helping with home practice and providing praise and encouragement. Parents are also shown how to play the duets so that you can enjoy playing the piano together at home. The Sykes Little Maestro piano lessons includes the development of repertoire as well as learning something new every week. Lessons always finish with something fun such as playing rhythms on percussion instruments, singing, listening to music, playing duets, aural games or improvising on the piano. The Sykes Little Maestro Book has explanations on pieces and exercises, notes to parents, sheet music for all of the pieces and exercises and a CD. They also have a Sykes Music Repertoire Book. This book is incredibly important as a means of keeping track of the pieces and exercises that the student has learned, it is often used as a sticker book for stickers that the Little Maestro receives during lessons, and it is a great motivator to practice. In the Repertoire Book, the pieces and exercises are ticked every time they are played. Once the student has 20 ticks, they receive a special sticker. Sykes Music has an award system with stars. Once students have completed the Sykes Little Maestro Program, they move onto Level 2 of the regular Sykes Piano Program.

## The Regular Sykes Piano Program

The regular program is for students 6-7 years of age and above and for 4-6 year olds that have completed the Little Maestro Program. This program is an excellent piano program that is equally enjoyable for both adults and children. It has been designed for all students regardless of age. Students become great musicians and really enjoy learning the piano.



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## A Comprehensive Program

The Sykes Piano Program incorporates the following areas of music. Each of these aspects of music are included into every level of the Program.

- **Performance:** Learning to perform pieces of music
- **Technique:** Learning good playing technique and technical exercises to assist in becoming a technically proficient at playing the piano
- **Music Reading:** Learning how to read music
- **Theory:** Learning musical concepts and terms
- **Aural:** Learning to understand what it is that you hear and exercises to assist with this
- **Singing:** Learning how to sing well and how to sight sing (read and sing music)
- **Arrangement:** Learning about chords, how to put chords to songs, common chord progressions, and accompaniment styles, how to read chord symbols and make arrangements of music
- **Improvisation:** Students learn to improvise through a developmental progression and in different styles.
- **Composition:** Composing music
- **Music Appreciation:** Learning about composers, bands, musical styles, genres, instruments, music history

## Comprehensive Styles of Music

Incorporated into the piano program are classical, jazz, blues, pop, folk and world music. This encourages students to become flexible and well rounded musicians and caters for all musical interests.

## Music Reading

All Sykes Piano students start to learn to play the piano before learning how to read music. This is so that they can concentrate on getting to know the piano, develop finger strength, command of their fingers and a repertoire before also adding the layer of difficulty of reading music. In Sykes Music Level 1 (the first 10 weeks of learning for an average student), students do not read music at all. In traditional methods, the process of learning to read usually restricts the progress of students. It is difficult and slow. This is because the traditional approach to reading music takes students a long time to understand and become fluent at reading. Often students stop learning the piano during this time because it is too slow and difficult. Also traditional teachers only teach music through reading, and therefore this limits what the students can play. The Sykes Piano Program method of learning to read is easy and sees students progress quickly. Students learn to read using the Sykes Music Intervals and the 'C's as reference points. Letter names are used to a minimum in the early levels. Students can fluently read all notes on the piano by Level 4 (just one year of lessons for an average student).

## Group Lessons or Private Lessons

Learning in small groups has many benefits for students and is highly recommended by Sykes Music. The ideal group is of 3 students with the lesson duration being 50 minutes. You can also have groups of 2 with a lesson of 40 minutes, or groups of 4 with the lesson being 1hr in duration. Only one piano is used in group lessons and the students always learn together at the same time, even though they often take it in turns to play the piano. The competition in group lessons assists the speedy progress of students. Group lessons are fun and they are financially economical for

students. Groups are beneficial for group activities such as aural, improvising, rhythm exercises and duets. Group lessons do not suit everyone though, and so private lessons are also an option.

## **Parental Involvement**

For young children, Sykes Music parents are involved in the learning process. With parental involvement, children achieve far superior results than when parents are not involved. Parents are involved by attending lessons, by learning what the students learn, assisting with practice and homework, and by providing an encouraging and supportive home environment. In this way the children receive one lesson a week from their teacher and then receive ongoing daily help from their parents. Parents are asked to attend lessons until their child has reached what we call 'an age of independence'. This is the age when the child is capable of writing their own notes in their practise journal, are able to learn without their parents help and are able to be self-motivated and organised to do their own practise without their parents help. The 'age of independence' varies with each child, but generally ranges between 10 – 12 years of age. Parents are welcome to attend the occasional lesson, but it is better as the student gets older, to take on the responsibility of learning onto their own shoulders, and to be responsible for organising their own practice. It is also important as they reach their teenage years, to develop a more mature relationship with their teacher.

## **Home environment**

It is necessary to create a supportive environment for students to learn in. It is an important factor that contributes to the success of the student learning piano. Think about where the instrument located. Is it close to the TV? Does it disturb any one else in the house? Is it too far out of the way? Often children like to be listened to while practicing, so they will get put off practicing if their parents can not hear them and they are away from the life of the house. Is there a time that is most appropriate to play the instrument? Someone learning an instrument involves everyone in the household therefore you may need to discuss creating a supportive environment at home. When someone learns an instrument, it involves the whole family/household.

## **Practice Journal**

All students receive a Practice Journal. Each lesson notes are written in to this by the parents or the student about what to practice during the week and how to practice these things. Also notes are written down about new musical concepts that are learned during the lesson. In the front of the Practice Journal are Tips for Practice and a Practice Log that students can use if they like, or if their teacher asks them to keep a log. Teachers also keep their own record of what is covered in a lesson in their Teacher Journal.

## **Repertoire**

Repertoire maintenance is an integral part of the Sykes Piano Program. Students are encouraged to have music ready to perform and continually play the music that they learn. Piano playing is improved through two methods: 1) Improving music already learned; and 2) Learning new music. Sykes Music encourages a balance between these two. When students maintain their repertoire, they also enjoy playing more because they sound good and are not always working on difficult new material. All students either have Repertoire Book or a Repertoire List to help them maintain their repertoire.

## Adult Students

The Sykes Piano Program is enjoyed by adult learners because it is not aimed specifically at children. Adults appreciate the quick progress, learning how to read music, gain satisfaction from rising through the levels and becoming flexible musicians. There is also a Learn to Read Music and Play Piano Weekend Workshop available to adult students which provides a springboard into the world of piano playing.

## The Lessons

Teachers always follow a lesson plan. The standard lesson format that is adhered to during most lessons is:

1. Repertoire piece
2. Technical exercise
3. Theoretical concepts/reading exercise
4. Current piece in progress
5. New piece in progress
6. Fun activity such as improvisation or an aural exercise



## Quick Progress

Sykes Piano students progress at least twice as fast than average students. With just 15 minutes practise, 5 times a week, most students reach Preliminary Grade after just 1 year of lessons. This usually takes other students 2 to 4 years to reach. Sykes students learn approximately 20 pieces of music in each grade. Each grade takes 1 year to complete. Other students will usually only learn 5 to 10 pieces in each grade and also take 1 year to complete this. This is with the Sykes students not practising any more than the other students. Sykes Piano students progress quicker than the average student for a number of reasons:

- **Two Hand Coordination:** The coordination of two hands playing two different things at the same time is one of the most difficult aspects of playing the piano. It is common to hear students say, 'I can play it well separate hands, but I just can't play it hands together'. The Sykes Piano Program embraces coordination development by being aware that it is difficult and therefore in a progressive approach, sees students develop their coordination skills quickly. In turn, the playing ability of students increases quickly. The Program includes exercises and pieces which are designed for this purpose
- **Reading:** Because of the Sykes method to teach students to read is so easy and efficient, it sees students progress quickly and they are not restricted and slowed down by learning to read
- **Enjoyment:** The music in the Program has been specially chosen to be enjoyable. Because students enjoy the music that they are learning, they want to play the piano more. Because they want to play more, they make more progress. Also we, as human beings, always learn more quickly when we are enjoying ourselves
- **Learning Styles:** Students also enjoy a variety of learning styles. They learn music through reading, by ear, improvisation, composition and arrangement. This acknowledges that all students have different ways that

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they learn and also have different strengths and weaknesses. Because the Sykes Music students learn through these many different learning styles, students have the opportunity to improve on their weaknesses and also enjoy their strengths. They do not get 'stuck' by continually learning in an approach that is difficult for them

- **Listening:** Students are provided with a CD recording of their pieces for each Sykes Piano Book. Through listening to these recordings, students learn more quickly because they know what pieces are supposed to sound like, they are more familiar with the pieces and are motivated to practice so that they can sound like the recording
- **The Levels:** Students progress quickly because they can enjoy the measured progress of rising through the levels. They like to see the progress that they are making and look forward to moving from one level up to the next. The Sykes Levels are manageable, achievable goals
- **Group Lessons:** The competition helps students progress quickly, plus lessons are fun
- **Repertoire:** Because students maintain and improve their repertoire they become better musicians sooner. They also sound good, so feel good about themselves and about playing the piano
- **Performances:** Students always have a performance coming up. This helps keep them motivated and practicing
- **Parental Involvement:** With the constant involvement and encouragement of parents, students progress quicker
- **Rewards:** Students are always rewarded for practicing through praise, stickers and prizes. This keeps them motivated to continue practicing
- **The Teachers:** Because the teachers are all trained Sykes Piano Teachers, they know how to solve problems quickly, how to make the best use of lesson time and how to teach effectively and efficiently. They are also not developing a program 'on the job' and so have a clear path on which to lead the students

## The Levels

The program is designed with 4 beginner levels, Levels 1 - 4, and then progresses to the Grades, starting with Preliminary Grade, and then going to Grade 1, 2 etc. The Grades are at an equal level of difficulty to the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) grades but include a lot more than the AMEB grades. Each of the Sykes grades are divided into 3 levels, A, B and C. All Sykes Piano Program books come with a CD and have 2 tests at the end of each level, a practical and a theory test.

## An Overview of the Levels

Every level includes all aspects of music including performance, technique, theory, aural, singing, arrangement, improvisation and music appreciation. Composition is only included in the grades. Following is a break-down of the program with some aspects that are included in each level or grade.

**Little Maestro Program:** This is for 4 to 6 year olds learning the piano. It takes students between 6 months and 2 years to complete the program depending mainly on the age of the students and how much they practice. It includes approximately 50 pieces and exercises and an introduction to reading music. Students develop finger strength, two hand coordination, reading skills repertoire and a love of playing the piano.

**Level 1:** This level is for beginning piano students that are 6-7 years of age and above. It takes approximately 10 weeks to complete this level. Students learn 15 pieces and exercises and also music reading preparation exercises. Students develop finger strength and and a repertoire of pieces.

**Level 2:** This level takes approximately 10 weeks to complete. Students learn 13 pieces and exercises and also learn to read and play all 5 Sykes Music Intervals, and how to read notes around High C and Low C. Students also learn to play their first piece of music through reading the music.

**Level 3:** This level takes approximately 10 weeks to complete. Students learn 11 pieces and exercises and also learn to read and play the Sykes Music Intervals in the leger lines, and how to read notes around Middle C. About half of the pieces of music are learned through reading the music, and the other half the teacher shows the students how to play them.

**Level 4:** This level takes approximately 10 weeks to complete. Students learn 10 pieces and exercises and also learn how to read notes around Very High C and Very Low C. They also learn how to read rhythm and how to write different notes and rests. Most of the pieces that the students learn are through reading the music.

**Preliminary Grade and Grades 1 to 6:** The first grade in AMEB is Preliminary, followed by Grades 1, 2 etc. All of the Sykes Grades takes approximately 1 year to complete and are divided into 3 levels, A, B and C which all take approximately 13 weeks to complete. Students learn approximately 20 pieces of music in each grade. The grades progress in complexity of performance, theory, aural and all of the other aspects of music included in the Sykes Piano Program. Students continue to sit both practical and theory tests at the end of each level before moving to the next level.

## Sykes Piano Books

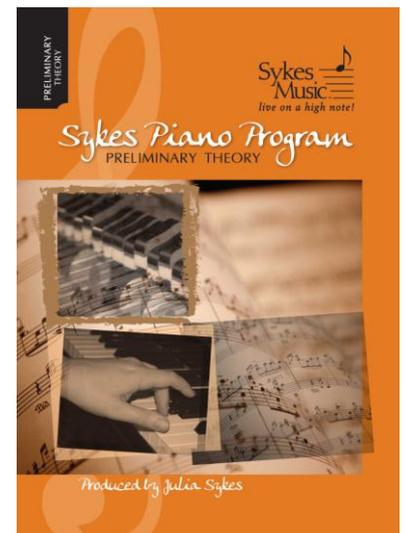
Each level or grade has its own book. You will find an overview of each level in the front of the book and also information on the tests. Sykes Music books are a valuable recourse with a lot of information in them. Take the time to go through them.

## How is Sykes Music different from other piano methods?

There are quite a few different methods available for learning to play piano. This short summary of some more well-known piano methods will hopefully help you understand the differences between the Sykes Program and other methods.

### Suzuki Method

- This program was developed by Shinichi Suzuki
- Students learn to play the instrument before beginning to learn to read and write music. For this reason sometimes Suzuki students are not good at reading music
- The program is suitable for teaching very young children
- There are Suzuki programs in many different instruments
- It is a classical music program and does not include modern music
- The program includes performance (playing pieces), technique, aural and theory
- The progression of pieces in the Suzuki program are well designed, so that students move smoothly from one challenge to the next and progress quickly



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- Students need to perform all of the pieces from one book from memory in a concert setting, before being able to graduate to the next book. The benefits of this is that students spend a lot of time on repertoire maintenance and improvement. This can also hold students back and they get tired of playing the same pieces
- There is an intensive training program for Suzuki teachers
- Parental involvement is recommended

### **Simply Music**

- This is a new program developed by an Australian living in the US
- Simply Music only has a piano program
- It is focused on students learning to play without reading music
- It has classical and contemporary style pieces
- It is fun and students progress quickly
- Anyone can be trained as a Simply Music teacher without having any qualifications and the teacher training is not very thorough
- Teachers are not supposed to supplement the Simply Music program with any other material
- Students are encouraged to maintain their repertoire

### **Yamaha Method**

- This program was developed by the Yamaha company that sells the pianos and the motorbikes
- Students usually learn in groups on keyboards
- It is a reading based program but also with a lot of focus on aural
- They use “fixed do” in music reading (do re me instead of C D E)

### **Sykes Piano Program**

- It is a contemporary and classical music program
- There are four main elements that distinguish the Sykes Program from other methods:
  - 1) Is that it is a comprehensive program that includes all areas of music: performance (pieces of music), technique, theory, aural, singing, arrangement (learning how to arrange music), improvisation, composition and music appreciation
  - 2) It incorporates a superior method of learning how to read music is through Sykes intervals and C's
  - 3) The program is divided into 4 ten-week levels (Levels 1 - 4) then the Grades are divided into 3 thirteen-week levels
  - 4) It integrates learning to read music as well as playing by ear

In addition to this, all Sykes teachers have minimum qualifications to be able to be trained and they go through a thorough training program. Sykes Music has a special program for 4-6 year olds learning piano, The Sykes Little Maestro Program, which is unlike any other program in the world. In Sykes Music, parental involvement is imperative and students are encouraged to maintain their repertoire. The Sykes Music Program is fun and students progress quickly.

## Practice versus playing

Playing the piano is playing not anything in particular, but whatever you feel like and how you feel like. Practice is having specific goals or things that you are aiming to achieve. It is good to both 'play' the piano and 'practice' the piano but also good to establish that there is a difference between the two. Having said this, the word 'practice' sounds like a chore, and so it is nicer to refer to practice as 'playing' the piano.

## How much should you practice?

What you want to focus on is not the amount of time that you spend practising, but what it is that you are achieving. At the same time, it's a good idea to know roughly how much time is required to make good progress. Playing the piano is not a once a week thing like other activities. It is unrealistic to expect to practise every day, but 5 days a week should be possible. This is a guide on how much practise is required to make good progress:

These are Sykes Music's recommended minimum practise times, 5 days a week:

<b>Little Maestro:</b> 10 minutes a day (50 min per week)	<b>Grade 4:</b> 45 minutes a day (225 min per week)
<b>Levels 1 – 4:</b> 15 minutes a day (75 min per week)	<b>Grade 5:</b> 50 minutes a day (250 min per week)
<b>Preliminary:</b> 20 minutes a day (100 min per week)	<b>Grade 6:</b> 1 hour a day (300 min per week)
<b>Grade 1 - 2:</b> 30 minutes a day (150 min per week)	<b>Grade 7:</b> 1 ½ hours a day (450 min per week)
<b>Grade 3:</b> 40 minutes a day (200 min per week)	<b>Grade 8:</b> 2 hours a day (600 min per week)

## What should you practise?

Practise what has been written into your practice journal to practice for that week. In addition to this, your practise should consist of a well balanced diet of:

- new pieces
- technique
- theory or reading exercises
- repertoire
- something creative such as aural, rhythm, improvising, arranging, working out a song by ear or composition

## How should you practise?

The three most important practise tips are: **Separate Slowly Sections**

That is, separate hands, slow practise and concentrate on small sections. So remember your three S's! Your teacher will often give you tips on how to practise, so take good note of these tips and follow their advice. If you want to learn quickly, then listen to your teacher. We often avoid things that are difficult, so identify what is the most difficult thing that you have to practise that week, and do it at the beginning of your practise when your energy levels and concentration are at its highest. Another helpful hint is try to practise on the same day after your lesson. What you have learned then is foremost and fresh in your mind and you will get a lot out of that practise session. Also, it is best to practise in the morning. Even if you do not have much time, try to at least get 10 or 15 minutes practise in the morning. Remember that once good habits are established, they are easier to maintain.

## The benefits of practise

With playing the piano, the more you put into it the more you get out of it. If you play a lot, you enjoy your lessons more. Instead of having your tail between your legs and feeling guilty because you haven't practiced enough, you will feel excited about going to the lesson and showing your teacher what you have achieved. Your lessons are more fun because you will be learning new material rather than just going over the same things. When you practise, you will enjoy playing the piano more because you are making good progress and will feel satisfied and happy. Don't forget that you will get good value for money if you practice too!!

## What should I do if I am finding it difficult to motivate myself or my child to practise?

Prevention is better than cure. Give positive reinforcement by rewarding and encouraging yourself or your child for the achievements that are being made. If practise has slowed down, don't let that drag on for a long time. If you do not address this challenge quickly then it can fester and eventually make you or your child stop playing the piano. It is very discouraging and depressing when we do not make progress or sound good. When you first notice a slowing down on the amount of practise that you do, then ask your child or yourself, if there are any reasons why this has happened. Some questions to ask:

- Are you finding it too difficult and need to slow down or consolidate your repertoire?
- Are you bored and want to move through the pieces more quickly?
- Do you like the music that you are playing?
- Are you stuck on a piece? Perhaps you should leave it and come back to it later?
- Do you need to change your lesson time, duration or frequency?
- Is your instrument letting you down?
- Do you need to change something in your home environment?
- Is there something going on in your life that is distracting you?

Once you have identified your reason (s), then try to solve it if possible. Don't forget to talk to your teacher about this because they will have a lot of experience in this area, and would have gone through similar trials themselves. It may be necessary for you to make yourself a practise timetable. If you or your child is only practising two times a week, then set a goal for the next week to practise three times, and then the next week four times until it is back at five times. Perhaps you might find using the practise log in your Practise Journal useful: writing down how long you practise each day and aiming to reach your practice time goal can be a good motivator. Perhaps you need a specific goal to work towards such as a performance, recording, busking or an exam. If this works for you, then schedule several performances into your year to keep yourself busy and focused. Have you thought about joining a group if you have private lessons? The competition and social aspect of group lessons can be very motivating. Is there some way that you can join an ensemble? You may even just be able to tee up with another piano student and learn duets, or form a piano and violin duo or join a band or school ensemble. When you know that other people are relying on you, that usually get you moving!

Love of the piano is like a plant, it needs nurturing, if you don't care for it, it will shrivel up and die. Keep yourself or your child inspired and motivated by going to live music performances, attending masterclasses and listening to music. You will also gain inspiration from other art forms such as the fine arts, dance and theatre. Has your child ever seen a live piano performance before? Would you expect your child to want to play football or netball if none of their friends do it and they have never seen it before? How can you expect your child to want to learn piano when they

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have never really seen it played properly before? A simple solution to this is asking your teacher to play for you now and then. Positive peering is important for children and teenagers. They need the opportunity to perform at school or to be recognized by their peers. There is a lot of recognition for sport achievements in Australian schools, but often not the same recognition for artist achievements. Perhaps you could approach the music teacher at school and see if it is possible for your child to play for their class or in an assembly. Also be involved in the performances here at Julia Sykes School of Music – there they will see other children and teenagers playing and will feel safe and confident that it's OK to play the piano!

## Looking after your piano

There are some things that you should know about caring for your piano.

### Piano placement

It is important to position your piano on a wall that is not exposed to the outdoors. This helps prevent your piano from being affected by heat and moisture.

- Avoid placing your piano in a place that receives direct sunlight. Constant changing of temperature is bad for your piano
- Avoid placing your piano close to a heater or under an air-conditioning vent

Also refer the notes above on 'Home Environment'

### Piano maintenance

To clean the keys, dust them regularly. If they become dirty, wipe the keys going down the length of the keys towards you (not across) using a damp soft cloth. Also, if you have an old piano with ivory keys, you may wish to prevent them from browning by leaving the lid open. The sunlight bleaches the keys. If you have a modern piano with plastic keys, it is best to keep the lid down when the piano is not in use to limit a dust build up under the keys

If the case of your piano is coated in a high gloss lacquer, clean it by mixing one part of window cleaner with three parts of water in a spray bottle and then rub dry with a soft cloth. If you have a wooden piano then you can just use furniture polish. Did you know that you can adjust your pedals, and in fact this needs to be done every now and then. You can talk to your tuner and ask them to do it for you, or ask your teacher to show you how it is done.

### Piano Tuning

All pianos need to be tuned at least once a year. If a piano is moved it will need to be re-tuned. Pianos are also very sensitive to change in the atmosphere. Therefore, such things as gas heaters, air conditioning and changing seasons will affect your piano. Often piano tuning gets put off the last possible moment, similar to the servicing of our cars. We know that postponing car services is not good for the car and it is the same for pianos. Playing an out of tune piano is also not good for the development of the musical ear. It teaches incorrect pitch. It is always more pleasurable listening to a tuned piano. It resonates with us whereas an out of tune piano can be grinding to the ear. Give yourself, your children and those around you the best musical experiences you can by having a well maintained piano.



## What Sort of Instrument Should I have?

You have the option of a keyboard, digital piano, upright piano or grand piano. There are pluses and negatives to each:

**Keyboard:** These usually do not have the full number of keys as a full piano keyboard (88 keys). Electric keyboards have usually between 61 and 76 keys. Keyboards do not have weighted keys, This means that they are lighter to play than pianos. The down side of this is that students do not develop the necessary finger strength to play the piano properly. They are also not very respondent to touch, therefore students are unable to develop the ability to control dynamics and play the piano with expression. Because keyboards do not come with a stand, you need to buy these in addition to the keyboard. A cheaper keyboard stand will cost you \$50 new and if you get a more stable double braced stand, this will cost you \$80. When you put the keyboard on a table, bed or ironing board etc, there are two problems with this – one is that it will get in your way and will have to be put away (which becomes a deterrent for practice) and the other is that by having the keyboard on an object that is not suitable, you have a good chance of developing some bad playing techniques. The upside of keyboards is that they are cheap. You could pick one up 2nd hand for \$100 and new for \$330. You can also plug in headphones and practice silently. Often keyboards have loads of cool sounds and are a lot of fun to play. Professional musicians will also use them to create effects and to help them write music. Because they are so fun, young kids get a lot out of this and they can be good for getting Little Maestros interested in playing. Some piano teachers will say a flat out No! to keyboards, but we think that keyboards are fine to start off with, having said this, it is still better to have a piano if you can. In Level 4 of the Sykes Piano Program, students are introduced to playing with the pedal and also playing with dynamics, therefore you really need to get a piano or a digital at this stage. If you already have a piano, perhaps you could think about picking up a cheap 2nd hand keyboard just to have fun with?

**Digital Piano:** Digital pianos have a full-length keyboard and have weighted keys. You can get portable digital pianos which are often called Stage Pianos and come with a foldable stand, and then other digital pianos are made to be more like pianos, and come on a solid wooden cabinet with inbuilt pedals. Digital pianos are great if you want more of a piano feel, but don't want to disturb people in your house or the people upstairs when you play, or simply if you can not afford a good acoustic piano. The price of new digital pianos that are suitable for students vary from about \$800 to \$3000. You can also get more expensive stage pianos for professional musicians. They vary in the number of sounds and features that they have, and the quality of the sound. The downside of digitals is that they still don't feel or sound the same as pianos, and so they are not so enjoyable to play and your technique will not develop as well as if you are learning on an acoustic piano.

**Upright Piano:** This is your standard piano. We generally do not recommend to buy anything less than \$5000 new, though you may be able to pick one up second hand for less than this. They go up to about \$10,000 in price.

**Grand Piano:** These are the best type of pianos that you can buy. Having said this though, a good quality upright is better than buying a cheap grand. Grand Pianos start at about \$8000 new and then go up to about \$70,000. There are also concert grand pianos and they can cost up to \$500,000.

**The piano stool:** It is best to get an adjustable stool so that the height suits the student.

**Where should I buy my instrument?** Ask your teacher for advice on this.

## Tips on what to look for when buying a piano?

Pianos are a bit like wine. It comes down to personal taste. People fall in love with the sound of a piano for no particular reason, they just like it, or they don't. Some things to look for in pianos:

- Open the lid and have a look at the strings and the moving parts inside. If they look old, they probably are
- There is a bridge inside the piano – one set of strings go one way and the other go the other way. Find out on the keyboard where the notes go from one bridge and move to the next bridge. You want a smooth transition on the bridge, that is you do not want to hear when it changes from one set of strings to the other. The bridge is somewhere around Low C
- Check that all of the notes work. Try to do rapid replays on the notes to see that the notes bounce back quickly
- Check that the pedals work
- Play the same piece on a few different pianos so that you can compare more easily
- Play a bright, lively piece and a slow, flowy piece so that you can see how the piano sounds with both types of music

Click here for more information: <http://www.sykesmusic.com.au/single-post/2016/10/14/How-to-buy-a-piano>

## Performances

Regular performances give students something to strive towards and parents enjoy the opportunity to listen to their children perform in front of others. Students also become motivated and encouraged by listening to each other. At Julia Sykes School of Music Manjimup there be at least two performance opportunities for students each year.

## Examinations

**Practical Exams (performing on the piano):** Sykes Piano students may also sit formal practical examinations if they would like to. We encourage students to sit practical exams after they have completed the Sykes Piano Grade, For example, sit the Grade 1 exam once they have complete the Sykes Grade 1 Program. Students can also use exam pieces as their own choice pieces in their Sykes Grades. At Julia Sykes School of Music we normally use the Australian Music Examination Board for practical examinations, but we can also prepare students for ABRSM and St. Cecelia exams. Exams do not suit all students, so please have a conversation with your teacher to find out more and to see if exams are a good idea for you or your child.

**Theory Exams (written exams):** our students may also sit theory examinations. In fact students are encouraged to do so.



## Music Competitions

There are many music competitions available for students. These provide students with formal recognition of their music learning, gives students an opportunity to compare themselves with other students their age or grade, and encourages students to play pieces of music at a very high standard. Ask your teachers what music competitions are available in your area.

## Music at School

If students are enrolled in music class at school and are required to learn an instrument as part of the curriculum, Sykes Music teachers are able to prepare students to meet all of their school assessment requirements as well as prepare them for the piano performance aspects of their exams and provide extra assistance in the areas of music history, aural and theory.

## ADMINISTRATION

### How do I enroll?

You can contact Sykes Music teachers directly. Sykes Music teacher's contact details can be found on the Sykes Music website under 'teachers.' You can also contact Sykes Music for more information or help. Once you have organized a lesson with a teacher, then fill out an Application to Learn Form to give to your teacher. It is necessary for you to have an instrument organized before you commence lessons or just after you commence lessons. Talk to your teacher about this if you have not already organized an instrument. We can help you with how to move a piano, how to get your piano tuned, where to buy a piano, where to hire a piano, and also some teachers have keyboards for hire.

### What sort of lessons should I enroll in?

**Frequency:** There are 3 different frequencies of lessons available. There are weekly, fortnightly and casual options. Most students enroll in 1 lesson per week, and sometimes 2 lessons per week. Fortnightly lessons are also available. This option is popular amongst busy adult students. The only condition with fortnightly lessons though, is that student's lesson time needs to be either the first lesson of a teacher's block of lessons, or the last lesson. Casual lessons are for when students are unable to commit to a regular lesson time slot. For a casual lesson, phone or email your teacher to arrange a lesson. Each of these lessons are paid for each time you come to the lesson. Also casual ½ hour lessons are more expensive than enrolling in weekly or fortnightly ½ hr lessons, but casual lessons of a longer duration are the same price as weekly or fortnightly lessons.

**Group or Private:** We recommend that most beginner students enroll in group lessons. This is because group lessons are fun and students tend to progress faster in groups. They are also more economical for students. Private lessons are also a valid option. When you email or phone the office, your teacher will discuss this with you and advise you what we think would best suit your needs.

**Lesson Duration: (Group Lessons)** The standard group lesson length is 40 minutes for 2 students and 50 minutes for 3 students. For 6 year olds we sometimes have a group lesson of 2 students for 30 minutes, or 3 students for 40 minutes. For more advanced students we will often run a longer group lesson, for example 2 students for 50 minutes or 1 hour. **(Private lessons)** Private lessons vary from 15 minutes to 1 hour. 15 or 20 minute lessons are appropriate

Sykes Music

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for Little Maestros (4 to 6 year olds), and then the most common length of lesson is 30 minutes. More advanced students (grade 3 and upwards) will usually have a 40 minute – 1 hour lesson.

### **What lesson times are available?**

This will depend on your teacher's availability.

### **How do I pay for lessons?**

Each teacher will have their own payment arrangements, so please discuss this with your teacher

### **What are the prices of lessons?**

Each Sykes Piano teacher set's their own prices for lessons, though teacher are required to adhere to minimum recommended fees.

### **How do I pay for books or other things?**

When your teacher supplies you with a new book, they will either ask you to pay for the book at the time that you receive it, or will invoice you for this in the following term. Teachers will also invoice you for things such as exam entry fees. You can also pay for these immediately in your lesson.

### **What happens if I miss a lesson?**

If you miss a lesson, you are still required to pay for this lesson and you will not be refunded. The teacher is also not obliged to make an alternative lesson for you. This is because the teacher needs to still be paid for this lesson whether you attend or not. If you know in advance that you are going to miss a lesson, discuss this with your teacher and there may be a possibility that this lesson could be rescheduled, or made up by having several longer lessons or having a lesson during the holidays. Please send a text, email, or phone your teacher directly if you cannot make a lesson.

### **What if the teacher is unable to make the lesson?**

If for some reason the teacher is unable to make the lesson either a replacement teacher will be organized, the lesson will be rescheduled or refunded.

### **Do I need to re-enroll in lessons each term?**

To make administration simple for everybody, it is assumed that you will be re-enrolling in the following term unless you have let your teacher know otherwise. What this means is that you do not need to do anything at the end of the term. Your lesson time will automatically be the same time and place and with the same teacher in the following term.

### **Can I lesson time, lesson frequency or duration?**

Yes. If you would like to change any of these, please let your teacher know and he or she will organise it for you. Sometimes it is necessary for your teacher to ask you whether it is possible to change your lesson time to accommodate other students availability.

## **What if I would like to withdraw from lessons?**

Please notify your through an email that you would like to withdraw from lessons for the following term before the end of the term. It is necessary for you to give your teacher a minimum notice of two weeks before the commencement of the following term. This is necessary so that your teacher can organise their timetable for the following term, let students on the waiting list know that this space is available, and also because we make invoices 2 weeks before the beginning of term, we need to know before we create your invoice. When you withdraw, we really appreciate knowing why it is that you have decided to, or needed to leave, so that if it is because of something that we have done, or not done, we then have the opportunity to redeem this situation and improve on the quality of the service that we provide to our students. If you decide to withdraw from lessons during a term, you will not be refunded for the lessons missed unless for extenuating circumstances. Also if withdrawing without 2 weeks written notice, you may be required to pay a late notice fee.

## **Sykes Music Website**

[www.sykesmusic.com.au](http://www.sykesmusic.com.au)

We post and update information about upcoming events, past events, information about teachers, information on the Sykes Piano Program and you can also purchase Sykes Piano Books from our website.

## **Sykes Music Facebook**

Please 'like' us on facebook to keep up to date with Sykes Music and good links to piano and music related things:

<https://www.facebook.com/sykesmusicaustralia/>

## **Sykes Music Youtube**

For tutorials on how to play pieces and other Sykes Music Videos, go to our Sykes Music YouTube Channel,

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9pu9PsIXBCjilIYb\\_dKOgw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9pu9PsIXBCjilIYb_dKOgw)

## **Feedback**

We honestly really like to have feedback. If things are not working out for you some reason, or you are unsure about anything, please let us know. We can not fix things if we don't know about it. We also like to know if we are doing a good job, so you can let us know that too occasionally!

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## Sykes Music Testimonials

*"I highly recommend Sykes Music - the programme works, the teachers are great and my children love going to music lessons there."*

*"Thank you Julia Sykes. I love all the songs I learn. I loved the concert I played in. I was the first one to play in the concert. There is no better activity than Sykes Music."*

*"Its an excellent program. You should be proud of what you have done and the good that you are doing for people."*

*"Our teacher is delightful and who has shown individual attention to our son. He loves coming to his piano lessons. Thank you Sykes Music for cultivating his love of music which will last a lifetime."*

*"I don't have to ask my child to go and practise the piano."*

*"I can't believe that I couldn't play the piano a year ago and now look at where I am at! I couldn't have done it without your program."*

*"It is such a better method than the way piano used to be taught."*

*"My family & I would like to thank your school, especially Isabelle's mentor Andrew & Jess, for helping Isabelle gain more confidence & musical skills in a fun & personal way. Her lessons made a positive difference to her personal & academic development."*

*"The Sykes Music Program is a great way to learn and develop an appreciation of music. The program encompasses a wide variety of music taught in a fun and non-threatening environment."*

*"Just wanted to let you know how much Miranda is enjoying lessons with you. I'm so impressed at how much both girls have progressed under your program. You should expand to the US!, Worldwide!!"*

*"I love the Sykes way of teaching music."*

*"...your method is just fantastic. It has made boring, tedious piano exercises, fun. I really enjoy it"*

*"Julia is a delightful teacher who has shown individual attention to our son. He loves coming to his piano lessons. Thank you Julia for cultivating his love of music which will last a lifetime."*

*"I wanted to thank the company for being so good for me over the past 3.5 years and providing such a steady stream of competent and engaging teachers. A big thanks to Ivana in particular who has been fantastic these past two years and has really engaged me as an adult student. In the past I had found it hard to be "taken seriously" as an adult student, as the presumption seemed to be that I just wanted to learn for fun. Both Ivana and Eileen in particular were really good at holding me to a high standard and not letting me off the hook easy. In my time at Sykes the first song I learned was The Snake Charmer - most recently with Ivana I finished up Mozart's Sonata in F Major, K.322, first movement (not without some sweat, mind!) - so I am rapt with the progress I have made at Sykes. I do hope to be back in 2015 and thanks again for the quality teaching."*

*"I am really impressed with how the kids responded to the Sykes piano program"*

*"My son and I are really enjoying the program"*

*"I have been told your method is excellent."*

*"We think Little Maestro's is fantastic – they understand that kids want to actually get in and start playing, and with the gradual introduction of theory after they've learnt the practical elements, in a fun and interesting way, it means they don't get bored and maintain their interest – while still learning the fundamentals. Clearly, the program has been put together by someone who understands the way kids think."*

## SUCCESS STORIES

### **Emma Kirkness**

Emma has been learning piano with Sykes Music when she was 11 and then became a Sykes Piano Teacher when she was 17. Emma completed her Grade 4 Theory and Grade 7 Practical AMEB piano exams.

### **Benjamin Pallagi**

Ben began learning with Sykes Music when he was 6 years of age and learned up to Grade 8 before continuing his piano studies with Mark Coughlan. He then became a Sykes Piano Teacher. He has gone on to study music at the University of Western Australia, University of Tasmania and the Liszt Academy in Budapest majoring in clarinet.

### **Jennifer Allen**

After learning piano as a child, Jennifer started learning with Sykes Music as an adult and completed her AMEB Grade 5. Jennifer then became a Sykes Music teacher.

### **Melanie Dunn**

Melanie began learning piano with Sykes Music when she was 9, she then became a Sykes Piano Teacher. Melanie completed her Grade 6 AMEB Practical Piano exam.

### **Rosie Jones**

Rosie learned piano through Sykes Music became Sykes Piano Teacher. Rosie has completed her Grade 3 theory and Grade 7 Practical AMEB piano exams.

### **Melissa Galan-Dwyer (Millie)**

Millie learned piano with Sykes Music and then became a Sykes Piano Teacher.

### **Caitlin Beeson**

Caitlin learned piano with Sykes Music and then became a Sykes Piano Teacher.

### **Jacob Sykes**

Jacob learned piano with Sykes Music and then received a half-scholarship in music at Trinity College.

### **Sofia Ottaviano**

Sofia learned piano with Sykes Music and was awarded a half-scholarship in music at St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls.

### **Edward Holland (Ned)**

Ned began learning piano with Sykes Music at the age of 7 and it was during his time at Sykes Music that Ned was accepted into Perth Modern School, a prestigious academic and music school.

### **Elizabeth Aitken (Lizzie)**

Lizzie started having piano lessons with Sykes Music when 12 years of age. She was then accepted into the music program at Perth Modern (an academic and music specialist school) and went onto to study a Bachelor of Performance (majoring in percussion).

### **Kate Gilbertson**

When Kate was approached to become a Sykes piano teacher in 2008, she began having lessons with Sykes Music. Through these lessons, Kate was successful in her application to study at WAAPA, and completed a Diploma in Contemporary Music. Kate is now a songwriter and performer.

### **Kirsten Symczyk**

Kirsten learned piano with Sykes Music as an adult student. She then went on to study Jazz at the WA Academy of Performing Arts and has become a Sykes piano teacher.

### **Will Britto**

Will began his piano studies at Sykes Music and then went onto to learn Jazz with Russel Holmes and was accepted into the Jazz program at the WA Academy of Performing Arts.

*Thank you for being a part of Sykes Music.*

*We hope that your experience will be a very enjoyable and rewarding one.*