

10 Top Tips for Tonal Beauty

1. Start by sitting correctly at the keyboard; make sure you feel comfortable and the spine is straight. Shoulders down, and drop arms by your side, so they feel 'heavy' and relaxed. This is the feeling to aim for whilst playing.
2. A free wrist motion is crucial in sound quality, so practice laying hands over the keys and then move the wrists before playing a note; up and down, from side to side, then making a circular movement.
3. Use a five finger pattern (place the fingers and thumb over middle C, followed by nearby D, E, F, G; using the fingering 1-5 (or 5-1 in the left hand), and whilst holding down the first note (middle C), encourage the wrist to make a complete circular motion, keeping the thumb (of the right hand) firmly attached to the note (even though the sound has dispersed).
4. Now continue playing D-G (and back down again, from G to middle C) using the same motion (taking time between each note) focusing on sinking deep into each key, feeling the key bed every time.
5. Use a soft, elastic, heavy arm movement providing plenty of gravity, support and substance behind the wrist. The fingers should ideally play on their 'pads', the padded, soft area of skin on the finger-tip, because this will further 'cushion' the sound, but you can also use fingertips here, if preferred.
6. Fingers must remain like steel; and this is developed over time by strengthening finger and hand muscles (usually via scales, exercises, studies etc.).
7. Try using Figure A (below) as a vehicle for creating different tonal possibilities; work at creating sound variations, from as quiet and soft as possible to all out *fortissimos*, checking your torso for tension regularly.
8. Employ the same example (below) to practice voicing specific lines i.e. highlighting the top of each chord, then the bottom note in either hand, followed by some of the inner notes within each chord. This will help to gain finger control too.
9. When producing a powerful *fortissimo*, guard against the urge to play as loudly as possible, because beyond a certain level, the sound tends to become astringent and unpleasant.
10. Have some sound in reserve too; try to avoid playing at full capacity (whether *fff* or *ppp*) all the time, keep some power or delicacy for certain performance situations, in order to cope with different instruments and acoustics.

The image shows a musical score for a piano exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with a brace on the left. The score is divided into eight measures, each containing a chord. The dynamics are indicated by bold italicized letters below the chords: *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, and *fff*. The chords are: C major (C4, E4, G4), D major (D4, F4, A4), E major (E4, G4, B4), F major (F4, A4, C5), G major (G4, B4, D5), A major (A4, C5, E5), B major (B4, D5, F5), and C major (C5, E5, G5).