

# A HELPING HAND

Melanie Spanswick talks through her top tips to incorporate into piano lessons for a refreshing approach.

We approach every academic year with the best of intentions, starting afresh, often with new students who possess a wide spectrum of levels and abilities. But how often do we change or re-evaluate our teaching perspectives? It can be worthwhile to have an occasional ‘teaching overhaul’.

Start by thinking through a typical lesson: whilst never the same, they probably follow a similar pattern. Decide how and where you could implement just a few changes, ensuring every moment of lesson time is used productively, encouraging students to become engrossed in the learning process, and therefore ensuring quality practice takes place in the week.

## Here are some ideas:

- At the beginning of a lesson, draw a pupil’s attention to their posture. Are they sitting comfortably, with a straight spine, feet firmly on the floor (or on a stool for smaller children), with shoulders down and arms swinging in a relaxed manner by their side?
- Do they have a positive ‘I can’ mind-set? How we think has a huge impact on how we play, and mindfulness is an aspect of playing that is often ignored. Aim to instil a positive approach to pupils’ piano playing.
- Help them to devise a workable practice schedule, including all the major elements, hopefully guaranteeing regular playing.
- How we move around the instrument affects accuracy and sound quality, so try to instigate freedom of body movement at all times, especially with regard to the wrists, arms and shoulders. Try some warm-ups at the start of a lesson to loosen those joints and muscles.
- Sight-reading is a vital but sometimes neglected element. It can be useful to begin lessons by reading through a few lines of level-appropriate music. Thorough ingestion of all musical details is crucial, as is assuming a very slow tempo.

I hope these brief tips may provide some inspiration and focus when formulating compelling lesson plans for the months ahead.

Melanie’s reputation as a pianist, author, and music educator has proffered a diverse and accomplished professional career. A revised, second edition of her piano guide **So You Want To Play The Piano?** published by Alfred Music, will be available soon. [www.melaniespanswick.com](http://www.melaniespanswick.com)

