

## The Teaching Tips of Portia Shuler Hawkins

Teaching piano brings me fulfillment and joy. My joy is heightened when I see the growth of my students and the satisfaction they express when they have learned to play a piece that they once found quite challenging. I love hearing from my students long after they are no longer studying with me and they share positive feedback about being one of my students. Nothing is more rewarding.

My goal as a teacher is to guide my students through this journey of discovery and efforts toward a successful outcome.

Some of the most valuable tools that I utilize are:

1. When introducing new music to my students, I offer two or more choices for them to select from. I find that a student will work more successfully on a piece that appeals to them.
2. When the piece has been selected, we decide on a practice strategy to master passages that may present challenges. We determine style, a practice tempo, fingering, rhythm, identification of melody, structure and any unusual marks of expression. Slow and hands separate practice are highly recommended.
3. To further emphasize a certain style of music, I tell stories about the historical background of the music, showing pictures and describing trends of the period being discussed; thus embracing an all-around learning experience that encompasses more than just keyboard technique, but the making of music.
4. The student and I do a general analysis of the piece, looking for repeated notes, harmonic and rhythmic patterns, incorporating some basic tenets of music theory.
5. I always encourage students to work on newly-assigned pieces in sections rather than tackling the entire piece at once.
6. For challenging rhythmical and intricate finger passages, I suggest to the student to practice on a tabletop or the fallboard of the piano.
7. I record my students when they have a piece ready for performance. This allows them to hear themselves and possibly improve on areas of the piece that could use additional work.
8. Now that I am teaching remotely, I record a video showing my hands demonstrating technical passages that can be beneficial to their preparation.

9. And lastly, I always make every effort to be positive and encouraging, making positive comments during and at the end of each lesson. I try to teach my students not just how to play the piano, but lessons in self-confidence. At my recitals, I always recognize any special achievement that each student has accomplished.