

## Piano Pronto – Methodology FAQs

Below you will find answers to the most frequently asked questions about the methodology and structures of the Piano Pronto method book series.

### 1. What makes Piano Pronto different from other methods?

- a. **On the staff reading from day one!** Piano Pronto utilizes a *total immersion* approach that allows students to comfortably read and play real music from the very beginning of their lesson experience.
- b. **Students of all ages love Piano Pronto music!** All of the materials in the Piano Pronto series were extensively road tested on students of all ages and ability levels over my twenty year teaching career. The series features strong and familiar melodies that make at-home practice sessions more enjoyable and productive.

Students are introduced to a wide range of genres and styles with aurally pleasing, hand-friendly arrangements that stay true to the original works. Because the melodies are recognizable students practice confidently and more effectively during their time outside of lessons.

- c. **Value.** Piano Pronto books are not only packed full of fun and motivating music, they also have all of the theory exercises integrated into each method book level. Add one supplement book to a student's method book and you've got music to last for months. This means the end of shuffling (and buying) 4 books per level.
- d. **Works with all ages.** Piano Pronto lesson books have a clean layout with no illustrations giving the user and the teacher exactly what they need. The music is age and gender neutral and will work splendidly with students from age 5 to 95.

The pedagogical materials are extremely flexible. I'm not in the business of telling teachers how to teach. Piano Pronto simply provides a thoughtful trajectory of concepts and introduces them through motivating, well-crafted selections that will keep your students happy and progressing.

- e. **Piano Pronto reinforces effective practice habits.** Quality over quantity. As teachers we want to develop independent students. The systematic approach to learning new repertoire in Piano Pronto helps with this process.

Nearly every piece is preceded by a *Pronto Prep* section where the difficult portions of the next piece have been extracted to be used as *section work*. By reinforcing this habit continuously students are less fearful of challenges in new pieces and engrain solid practice habits.

## 2. **How do I know which level to use?**

You can download the **free** Piano Pronto Transfer Guide on the website in the Teacher Resources section. This eBook offers excerpts from all levels of the Piano Pronto series to use as an assessment tool for new/transfer students. Each excerpt is followed by a page of recommendations for both method book level and supplements appropriate for the student based on how easy/difficult the preceding excerpt was for them to play.

## 3. **For beginners: Keyboard Kickoff and Prelude – what’s the difference?**

All beginners without any prior experience in music lessons should start the Piano Pronto series with the Keyboard Kickoff book. Transfer students with some prior musical background, or older beginners/adults, may start in the Prelude book.

There is some cross-over between the two books. In most situations I would recommend working through Kickoff and Prelude because this gives students a huge amount of reading experience with 67 different songs between the two books.

Keyboard Kickoff is designed to give beginners a great deal of experiential practice with their new reading skills. The pacing is slower, there are only 2 harmonic intervals introduced in the left hand, there is less focus on terminology, and all of the songs have letter names inside of the noteheads (but not on repeated notes). Think of Keyboard Kickoff like a boot-camp for music reading.

Prelude offers letter names in the noteheads for the first third of the book and then eliminates them altogether. The pacing *can* be too quick for younger beginners without any prior experience which is why I recommend starting with Keyboard Kickoff in nearly all cases.

## 4. **Can I use Keyboard Kickoff with kids 5 and under?**

Maybe. It really depends on the student and their natural musical aptitude. I advise teachers to use their intuition when choosing materials for very young beginners. In general if a student is taking 3-4 weeks to learn/master the 8-measure pieces in Keyboard Kickoff then they probably should be in a differently paced method series and come back to Keyboard Kickoff after a year.

## 5. **Can I skip Prelude book after Keyboard Kickoff.**

**No!** The Prelude book is essential after Keyboard Kickoff. Prelude introduces new notes, new left-hand intervals, dynamics/expressive playing/slurs, and a full explanation of sharps, flats, and naturals.

## 6. How do I transition to Prelude after Keyboard Kickoff?

There are 3 ways to use both books to their fullest potential:

- a. **Standard Transition:** Start at the beginning of Prelude right after finishing Keyboard Kickoff. The *easy* songs in the beginning of Prelude will serve as a review. This is a good solution for students who need a *refresher* or who could benefit from *slowing down* a bit and moving sideways for a while. Make sure to utilize the Prelude Teacher Duets to reinforce solid rhythmic skills and collaborative work.
- b. **Functional Transition:** Upon finishing Keyboard Kickoff, transition to Prelude by **starting** at “Brother John.” You can use the songs prior to “Brother John” as harmonization exercises where the students can compose and notate left hand intervals for those pieces, and/or use these pieces to introduce the concept of transposition.
- c. **Creative: Use both books in tandem.** Teachers are reporting that using Keyboard Kickoff and Prelude in parallel is extremely effective with beginners. The introduction of concepts overlaps seamlessly until you reach the halfway point of Prelude (at “Merrily We Roll Along”). At that point you should set Prelude aside and finish out Keyboard Kickoff. Once finished with Keyboard Kickoff you can pick up where you left off in the Prelude book.

## 7. What is your approach teaching students how to read music?

Piano Pronto takes a *total immersion* approach to gain fluency with reading musical notation. The most effective way to learn a language is to go live in that culture and to use the language on a daily basis. No amount of memorization or *tricks* will help you to gain fluency in any language and that includes music.

In the Piano Pronto series, students start with a tiny vocabulary (one or two notes), displayed in their natural state (on the staff), and begin to associate the music notation on the page with a location on the piano. From there students build out their vocabulary methodically and systematically and gain fluency by using these reading skills over and over in the songs throughout the method books. Only by *using* the language do we gain confidence in our abilities to communicate.

I’m often asked why I don’t utilize an intervallic/landmark approach or use mnemonics to help students. My problem with these approaches is that they add an extra step to the process of reading. First, a comparison of some sort has to happen, either comparing the distance from one note to the next note, or finding a landmark and looking for a relationship between our known landmark and where we actually need to be. And that’s just the first step. Then all of this information has to be decoded and placed onto the keyboard making it a two-step process to accomplish the goal of reading.

With the immersion approach we are training early beginners to approach music reading just like we do as professional teachers and musicians. We see notes on the staff and instantly associate them with a location on the keyboard in one streamlined step. We also see distances and relationships between notes as we're reading but for us that doesn't complicate or slow down the process since we have already achieved literacy.

Many years ago when I was living and working in Sweden I noted a shift that took place in my own language acquisition after about 6 months of living in the culture. At first I would hear or read things in Swedish and translate things back to English in my head and then comprehend, decode, and respond. As I started to gain fluency I noticed that more often I was actually *thinking in the new language* instead of translating things back and forth. I realized that the *trick* that I had relied on in the past (translating back to my mother tongue) was slowing down my ability to communicate. This same correlation exists when learning to read musical notation. Piano Pronto and the total immersion approach takes the extra steps out of the process and immerses students from day one in their new musical culture.

## **8. Explain your approach to fingerings.**

The goal of the Piano Pronto series is to develop independently-minded students. I take a *less is more* approach when offering fingerings in the series. One of the main objectives in the series is to get students moving around the keyboard in a smooth way with economy of motion as a top priority. Fingerings serve as triggers that a hand-shift needs to take place, but never serve as a crutch to facilitate the reading process. Every piece gives the student a starting fingering and beyond that fingerings serve to mark hand shifts or *specialty* movements.

In the Keyboard Kickoff and Prelude books there are a few songs where there are limited options for *smooth* fingering when the hand needs to reach for an adjacent note. In my mind there is no problem with allowing beginners to explore moving out of position via a lateral 5<sup>th</sup> finger reach and return movement. If we think about advanced repertoire that we ourselves play this is often a type of movement that we have to employ. The songs in Keyboard Kickoff and Prelude are designed to be moved through quickly (in 1-2 weeks) and it is my hope that you don't allow students to get *stuck* for too long on behalf of a fingering issue. If a fingering is too complex and frustrating for a student, consider letting go of your expectations and allowing for an *exception* to the usual "rules." Remember this is a long journey that you're on with your students and everything doesn't need to be perfect all the time.

That being said, editorial markings in any book, including fingerings, are always subjective. Great care and attention have been paid to the fingerings throughout the series, but by all means if you have a different way you'd like a student to finger a particular passage just change it.

## 9. Explain your approach to teaching rhythms.

In short: everything *but* counting out loud! There are so many fun ways to approach teaching rhythm these days so why not explore something new? By using a lot of familiar tunes in the Piano Pronto series, students make the all-important “eye-ear” connection with more complicated rhythms early on. Piano Pronto does not delay the introduction of eighth notes, dotted rhythms, or syncopation. You will find that your students can easily make connections between how they know a tune should sound with the written notation on the page. However, they won’t be familiar with every single melody they come across in the series, so you do not need to worry about students learning pieces by only relying on their ears.

I’m a big fan of playing duets as a means of developing a strong internal sense of the natural beat patterns in music. I also encourage teachers to use “fun metronomes” like Super Metronome Groovebox (iPad/iPhone) which provides drum beat patterns instead of just a standard metronome click. Drum patterns are often much easier for students to follow and they don’t tend to drown them out like a weak metronome click.

Additionally I encourage you to write words for tricky rhythms (if the song doesn’t have lyrics already). It’s a fun, collaborative process that will help your students internalize the rhythmic pattern but is also a bonding experience that makes lessons more enjoyable.

## 10. Do you use 5-finger positions? Will my students get stuck in position thinking?

Piano Pronto starts with a C Major position for both hands. Piano Pronto does NOT use Middle C position with the thumbs sharing the middle C.

Piano Pronto introduces and utilizes a ‘home-base’ full C Major position throughout Keyboard Kickoff and Prelude. That being said, students will not get stuck in “position-thinking” because they are frequently moving out of position (by using *trigger* finger numbers) by halfway point in Keyboard Kickoff. Students will learn to use a variety of adjacent notes outside of the *home base* C Position via different fingering techniques including: lateral reaches, crossovers, tucking the thumb under, and lifts to new temporary positions. By the end of the series they have explored repertoire in all 12 keys.

## 11. Explain your approach to pedaling and pedal markings.

Pedaling should be intuitive and my mantra in regard to pedaling is: “if it sounds good it *is* good.” Traditional pedaling marks are introduced at the end of the Movement 1 book, used in one piece, but never revisited unless a highly specific pedaling is intended. Pedal should be used in any piece from Movement 2 and beyond as long as it is stylistically appropriate. I encourage teachers to keep the discussion about pedaling open and exploratory.

## 12. What do I do about technique?

I believe in developing strong technique through exploring lots of repertoire. In keeping with the flexible nature of the Piano Pronto series, technique was a realm where I wanted to stay out of your way as a teacher. I speak with teachers all the time and have found that they are all teaching technique at different levels, in different ways, in vastly different amounts, and most importantly focusing on it on a *per student* basis. So aside from finding all the major scales throughout the series you will not find any finger exercises, but I encourage you to supplement with technical exercises as necessary and on a case by case basis.

## 13. Why are there so many duets?

Playing duets with your students, especially your beginners, is an excellent way to reinforce strong rhythmic skills. Additionally, you will find that students are taking careful note of your playing and will often begin to mimic your technical gestures and phrasing habits. The duets in the Piano Pronto series and supplements catalog are fresh, fun, and contemporary. The unique harmonies and syncopated pop-style rhythms in the teacher accompaniments also serve to open up the ears of young musicians.

## 14. Can you tell me quickly which supplements correlate to the method?

<b>Keyboard Kickoff</b>	Pronto Pizazz
<b>Prelude</b>	Pronto Pizazz
<b>Movement 1</b>	Pronto Pizazz; Spotlight Solos Vol. 1
<b>Movement 2</b>	Spotlight Solos Vol. 1 & 2
<b>Movement 3</b>	Spotlight Solos Vol. 2; Dog Days; Beethoven & Mozart Songbooks
<b>Movement 4</b>	Spotlight Solos Vol. 2; Dog Days; Beethoven & Mozart Songbooks
<b>Movement 5</b>	Dog Days; New Horizons; Beethoven & Mozart Songbooks
<b>Finale</b>	New Horizons; Impressions; Beethoven & Mozart Songbooks
<b>Encore</b>	New Horizons; Impressions

## 15. Do I need an extra theory book?

It depends. Just like I believe in developing technique through playing repertoire, I'm a strong believer in integrating theory knowledge as it appears in new repertoire. The concepts introduced in the Piano Pronto method books are always linked with the piece your student is about to learn. Additionally there are ample review worksheets to make sure that these concepts are reinforced.

For many teachers the theory that is integrated into the Piano Pronto method series is enough general knowledge to satisfy the needs of students, especially students who are hobbyists. For teachers who want more theory, or who have students taking standardized state-level tests, you can easily supplement with any of the theory methods on the market.

Piano Pronto has a Theory Workbook that is designed for students in Keyboard Kickoff through Movement 1. The Piano Pronto Theory Workbook does NOT follow the trajectory of the Piano Pronto series but instead is packed full of 100 reinforcement exercises covering basic music fundamentals. I purposely did not tie the theory workbook to the Piano Pronto series to keep it flexible and useable by any teacher/student no matter what method they are working with.

#### **16. Can I buy your books at my local store?**

Sure! If your local retailer doesn't already stock the Piano Pronto series and supplements feel free to give them my email address and I can send them a dealer term sheet. Email: [Jennifer@pianopronto.com](mailto:Jennifer@pianopronto.com)