

Unlocking AI for Piano Pedagogy

A Quick-Step Guide

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The Five Faces of AI

One artificial intelligence can strengthen four deeply human intelligences — and, over time, a fifth: who you are as a teacher.

Authentic	<i>The Scholar</i>	What do I know, and how do I find what I still need to know?
Artistic	<i>The Artist</i>	How do I help my student hear the music, not just play it?
Administrative	<i>The Manager</i>	How do I protect my time so I can protect my teaching?
Adaptive	<i>The Advocate</i>	How do I remove barriers in my design — not "fix" the student?
Actualized	<i>The Teacher</i>	What emerges when the other four integrate into who I am?

"AI does not produce the teacher. It reveals and sharpens the teacher."

The Prompt Formula *Role · Context · Instruction · Constraints*

ROLE	<i>Who?</i>	"You are a class-piano instructor and UDL specialist."
CONTEXT	<i>Why?</i>	"A beginner who reads notation slowly, learns best by ear, and has dyslexia." (generalized — no names)
INSTRUCTION	<i>What?</i>	"Draft a 13-week plan using multiple means of representation."
CONSTRAINTS	<i>How?</i>	"Flag where teacher judgment is essential. Flag any uncertainty."

The same four-part formula also drafts **scheduling, policy emails, recital programs, newsletters**, and more. *A better prompt is a more precise thought — and precise thinking is what teachers already do.*

Start This Week

- Differentiate one lesson three ways.** "Give me three ways to introduce this week's piece for a mixed-ability class-piano section — by ear, by pattern, and by notation."
- Build a semester scaffold.** Use the formula above for a 13-week differentiated plan, then curate it to the real learners in the room.
- Refresh a policy or email.** Paste your current policy; ask for a warmer, clearer rewrite; edit until it sounds like you.

EXPERT SKEPTIC PROMPT — USE EVERY TIME FOR RESEARCH

"You are an expert music educator who double-checks everything. You are not always right, and neither am I. Verify all composer names, dates, and piece titles before responding. Flag any uncertainty."

You are the pilot. AI can hallucinate musical facts and reflects a Western-classical bias. Interpretive judgment, emotional attunement, and physical demonstration are yours. AI is a co-pilot, never an autopilot.

Traffic-Light Privacy Rule

GREEN — Go ahead Generic teaching materials, handouts, policies, repertoire research, presentation prep. No student data needed.	YELLOW — Anonymize first Lesson planning from a student scenario. Remove names, ages, school, and diagnosis details before prompting.	RED — Do not upload Student names, videos, recordings, diagnosis details, parent communications, tuition or contact records.
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The full toolkit follows on the next pages: the complete prompt bank (organized by task), tools at a glance, demo videos, and a reading list with citations.
Contact for a follow-up workshop: Aya Higuchi Hagelthorn · University of Michigan · ahiguchi@umich.edu (email with "Piano AI" in the subject). Available as a 35-min chapter version, 60-min workshop, or hands-on prompt session.

"Don't use AI just to work faster. Use it to teach deeper."

Unlocking AI for Piano Pedagogy — Practical Prompt Toolkit

The full resource behind the Quick-Step Guide

Aya Higuchi Hagelthorn, D.M.A. · University of Michigan · GP3 2026 · Copy, adapt, and use freely. AI is a co-pilot, never an autopilot — it reveals and sharpens the teacher, it does not replace one.

How to Use This Toolkit

Find the task you need, grab the prompt, then edit the result until it sounds like **you**. Three habits make everything here work:

1. **Feed it context.** The quality of the output is almost entirely determined by what you put in.
2. **Verify what matters musically.** Composer names, dates, titles, and levels can be wrong — check before it reaches a student.
3. **Keep private data private.** Anonymize any student scenario before you type it (see the traffic light below).

The Prompt Formula

Use this four-part structure for every prompt.

Part	What to include	Example
ROLE	Who you want the AI to be	"You are a class-piano instructor and UDL specialist."
CONTEXT	Level, learning style, the specific challenge	"A beginner who reads notation slowly, learns best by ear, has dyslexia."
INSTRUCTION	The task, with a measurable output	"Draft a 13-week plan using multiple means of representation."
CONSTRAINTS	What to avoid or limit	"Flag where teacher judgment is essential." · "Avoid stretches larger than an octave."

"A better prompt is a more precise thought — and precise thinking is what teachers already do."

Refine the output with these follow-ups:

- "Use Hemingway's Rule" — short sentences, short first paragraph, strong verbs and active voice, positive phrasing.
- "Shorten by 5%."
- "Constraints: no em dashes, no 'As an AI,' no fluff, minimal hedging; use commas or short sentences."
- "Rewrite this to sound more like a warm, experienced piano teacher."

Try These Three First

1. **Differentiate one lesson three ways.** *"Give me three ways to introduce this week's piece for a mixed-ability class-piano section — by ear, by pattern, and by notation."*
2. **Refresh a policy or email.** *"Rewrite my studio policy for clarity and a warmer tone."* Then edit until it sounds like you.
3. **Hunt repertoire.** *"Suggest 5 intermediate pieces for a student who loves cinematic music and needs stronger left-hand arpeggio control. Include one underrepresented composer and explain the pedagogical value of each."*

Verify Everything: The Expert Skeptic Prompt

Use every time for research: *"You are an expert music educator who double-checks everything. You are not always right, and neither am I. Verify all composer names, dates, and piece titles before responding. Flag any uncertainty."*

Guardrail follow-ups to run on any output:

- "Double-check this for accuracy and flag any uncertainty."
- "What assumptions are you making here?"
- "What might be misleading in this response?"

The Prompt Bank, by Task

Lesson & Practice Planning

Use case	Prompt
Semester scaffold	"Act as a class-piano instructor and UDL specialist. Draft a 13-week plan for a beginner who reads notation slowly and learns best by ear. Use multiple means of representation, and flag where teacher judgment is essential."
RCM exam plan	"Create a 12-week practice plan for a student preparing for an RCM Level 8 piano exam, including weekly repertoire focus, technique, and theory milestones."
Masterclass notes	"Act as an experienced teacher leading a masterclass for pre-college students. Give concise teaching notes on Mozart's Sonata in C, K. 545: style, form, articulation, fingering, voicing, tempo, common pitfalls, and quick in-class exercises."
7-day practice challenge	"Create a 7-day practice challenge for a student learning Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor that focuses on technique, musicality, and confidence."

Repertoire & Research

Use case	Prompt
Repertoire discovery	"Suggest 5 intermediate pieces for a student who loves cinematic music and needs stronger LH arpeggio control. Include one underrepresented composer. Explain the pedagogical value of each. Double-check for accuracy."
Underrepresented composers	"Recommend piano repertoire by underrepresented composers appropriate for an intermediate student who enjoys lyrical music similar to Chopin nocturnes."
Technical-deficit finder	"Suggest Czerny or Hanon exercises that specifically strengthen left-hand broken-chord patterns and fourth-finger independence. Student is Grade 7 RCM."
Small-hand repertoire	"Suggest piano repertoire appropriate for students with small hand spans who want to play Romantic repertoire. Note which pieces require large stretches to avoid."
Style cheat sheet	"Summarize the key differences in ornamentation practices between Bach and Couperin. Format as a simple cheat sheet for a 16-year-old student."

Reaching Every Learner (Accessibility & Differentiation)

Anonymize first — remove names, ages, school, and diagnosis details before prompting.

Use case	Prompt
Differentiate one lesson	"Give me three ways to introduce this week's piece for a mixed-ability class-piano section — by ear, by pattern, and by notation."
ADHD focus routine	"You are a piano pedagogy professor and ADHD-informed educator. Create an 8–10 minute rhythmic clapping/body-percussion routine for an 8-year-old elementary piano student with ADHD who struggles to stay focused during traditional syncopation exercises."
Dyslexia support	"My student has dyslexia and finds standard notation overwhelming. Suggest 3 alternative ways to present a new piece in the first lesson, and explain how to introduce the yellow-sheet overlay method."
Hypermobility / small hands	"My student has hypermobile finger joints and a small hand span. What repertoire edits or alternative fingerings would you suggest for the Alberti bass in Mozart K. 331? Note: I will verify all suggestions with a physiotherapist."
Dyspraxia strategies	"Provide strategies for adapting piano lessons for students with dyspraxia or coordination challenges. Focus on practical in-lesson techniques."

Communication & Studio Admin

Use case	Prompt
Compassionate email	"Write a warm but firm email to a parent who is repeatedly requesting makeup lessons, referencing the studio cancellation policy while maintaining a positive and respectful relationship."
Late-payment notice	"Draft a warm but firm late-payment notice for a piano studio family. Maintain the relationship while clearly stating the overdue amount and deadline."
Newsletter	"Write a friendly monthly newsletter update for piano studio families highlighting student progress and upcoming recital preparation. Keep it under 200 words."

Use case	Prompt
Recital themes	"Generate 10 creative themes for a piano studio recital and categorize repertoire ideas that would fit each theme."
Scheduling	"Suggest an efficient weekly teaching schedule for a piano studio with 30 students while maintaining balanced teaching hours and administrative time."
Studio bio	"Write a short professional biography for a piano teacher that highlights expertise, passion for teaching, and student success. Keep it under 150 words."
Full policy rewrite	"I am uploading my current studio policy. Rewrite it for maximum clarity, warm but firm. Focus on cancellation and makeup lessons. Deliverables: (1) full revised policy, (2) standalone Cancellation section, (3) a 100–150-word version for emails. Ask up to 5 clarifying questions first."
Group-class budget	"Create a fill-in budget template for starting a group piano class: one-time startup, recurring monthly, per-student materials, space, insurance, equipment, software, marketing. Add break-even formulas and 3 enrollment scenarios. Output as a table I can paste into Google Sheets."

Interpretation & Artistry

Use case	Prompt
Guided narrative	"Describe Debussy's Clair de Lune as an emotional journey for a young pianist. Focus on the long architectural shape, tone color, and phrasing. Include visual metaphors."
Character imagery	"Explain the expressive character of Chopin Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 using imagery or storytelling appropriate for a teenage piano student."
Emotional arc story	"Create a short story that reflects the emotional journey of Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor to help a student understand the dramatic arc of the piece."
Program notes	"Write a 30-second spoken program introduction for a 15-year-old performing Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3 No. 2, at a recital."
Mood board	"Describe Clair de Lune as an emotional journey. What images, colors, and physical sensations does each section evoke? Focus on the long architectural shape."

Motivation & Theory

Use case	Prompt
Motivation	"Suggest creative ways to motivate a teenage piano student who feels stuck while learning a technically challenging piece. Include both in-lesson and at-home ideas."
Theory game	"Create a short music theory worksheet on intervals for a 10-year-old piano student that feels like a puzzle or game."

Keep Student Data Safe: The Traffic-Light Rule

Light	Rule
GREEN — Go ahead	Generic teaching materials, handouts, policies, repertoire research, presentation prep, public-domain content. No student data needed.
YELLOW — Anonymize first	Lesson planning from a student scenario. Remove names, ages, school, and diagnosis details before prompting.
RED — Do not upload	Student names, videos, lesson recordings, disability or diagnosis details, parent communications, tuition records, family contact details.

Do not upload identifiable student information into public AI tools unless you have explicit consent and a platform with strong contractual privacy protections.

Four Things to Remember

- 1. Verify before you trust.** AI can confidently generate incorrect facts, non-existent repertoire, and inaccurate attributions. Use the Expert Skeptic Prompt every time.
- 2. Bias is built in.** Most AI is trained on Western-classical data. Actively ask for diverse composers and cultural contexts.
- 3. You are the pilot.** Professional judgment, the student relationship, and the artistic decision always belong to you.
- 4. What AI cannot replace.** Interpretive judgment. Emotional attunement. Physical demonstration. The moment a student's face changes. Guard it.

Tools at a Glance

Prefer business, education, or institutional versions of any tool when available.

Tool	Best use	One caution
ChatGPT	Drafting, brainstorming, emails, policy wording, prompt iteration	Outputs can be wordy; edit until it sounds like you
Gemini / Nano / Suno	Live repertoire search; mood-board images from narrative prompts; short piano-backed audio	Curate image and audio outputs before sharing with students
NotebookLM	Upload your own documents and "talk" to them; great for research and your own notes	Works only with documents you provide; does not browse the web
Perplexity	Live-web research with numbered citations to original sources	Citations can look right even when the interpretation is wrong
Scribe	Auto-generates step-by-step how-to guides from screen recordings	Best for workflow docs; less useful for creative tasks
Canva	Mood boards, studio graphics, recital programs, visual aids	AI image features vary by plan; review all outputs
Wayground	AI quiz generation from any document; dyslexia font, read-aloud, difficulty adjustment	Formerly Quizizz; verify current feature availability
Claude	Scheduling, library organization, longer-form tasks; different strengths	Same ethical cautions as any AI tool
Otter	Records/transcribes meetings and rehearsals; summaries with action items	Accuracy varies; get consent and follow privacy policies before recording

Watch the Demos

- Scribe — how-to guide (MusicTheory.net ear training): https://scribehow.com/embed-preview/Customize_Interval_Ear_Training_Settings_on_Musictheorynet__9_9Y9Ur7RzuDCZ2cz91few?as=video&size=flexible
- Claude — scheduling from a form and sheet: <https://youtu.be/BRI2nLYqcQ>
- Nano / Canva — Clair de Lune mood board: <https://youtu.be/rB2yRO3CM6o>
- Gemini — library catalog custom Gem: <https://youtu.be/hEhFkczsCus>
- NotebookLM — turn a document into audio (Music Performance Anxiety): <https://youtu.be/17yA44W2HU4>
- Gemini — lesson-sheet translation and template: <https://youtu.be/bFxdfo7ENKQ>
- Wayground — quizzes for students (AP Music Theory): <https://youtu.be/IZYLQ5xeSX4>
- R2 Copilot — recital program and preparation: <https://youtu.be/1fxXG3t2Xrg>
- The "Iris" practice story (motor chunking), audio: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hOchzCBfyrKdfQ1hMxxAIT-uUyXVfyqY/view?usp=sharing>

Read More

Practice & motor learning - Li, X., et al. (2025). *Bridging chunks during complex movement sequence execution*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12816802/> - Furuya, S., & Altenmüller, E. (2012). *Fingers phrase music differently*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3, Article 495. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00495>

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