Teaching the Skill and Artistry of Piano Fingering

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# Fundamentals:

* Fingering=sound!
* Anatomic function:
  + Levers: Torso, Arm, Forearm, Hand, Fingers
  + Fingers are interdependent
  + Return hand to neutral
* Keyboard topography and motions in three dimensions
* Motor learning
  + Grasping gesture 🡪 individuation of fingers 🡪more complex coordination
  + Vision is primary in guiding and refining motor skill development
  + Students need to be aware of both the movement and the *goal* of the movement.

# Core Fingering Principles:

* Return to the smallest, most neutral hand shape as soon and as often as possible.
* Do not pass lower numbered fingers over higher numbered fingers.
* Favor the same fingering in repeated patterns and sequences.
* Use strong fingers or impulses from the arm on strong musical notes and inflections.
* Match intervallic gaps to spans between fingers.
* Consider finger length relative to placement along the key length.
* Hand shifts:
  + Favor longer fingers on black keys where horizontal movement is continuing in the same direction.
  + Use opening/closing hand motions
  + Cover distances with the arm
* Finger within handfuls. Hand size is a factor!
* Balance the need for power (arm) versus the need for speed of consecutive keystrokes (finger).

# Exploring Fingering Principles in Repertoire:

## Early Elementary:

* Arm first. Work on neutral hand with stable finger and finger-to-elbow alignment
* Adding thumb and fifth finger
* Using all five fingers in sequence: stepwise, then adding skips (that also skip a finger)
* Moving same finger up/down on consecutive notes
* Extending one note beyond five-finger melodies
* Black key accidentals
* Explore arm and finger coordination: 2-note and other small articulation groupings

## Mid/Late Elementary:

* Melodic sequences: favor similar fingerings, strong fingers for strong notes, finger in handfuls
* Matching intervals to hand shape: melodic and harmonic thirds, seconds, fifths, triads, etc. Move hands into different registers.
* Opening hand slightly and returning to neutral
* Using arm (forearm arcs) to cover distances

## Early Intermediate:

* Hand shifts
  + Scales (outside of repertoire) and scalar passagework within repertoire
  + Chromatic linear passages
  + Fingering within handfuls in extended-range melodies
* Matching hand to keyboard shapes: triads, triad chord inversions (including standard primary chord progression in closest voicings)
* Continued exploration of fingering patterns (including accompaniment patterns) and sequences
* Rotation: Alberti accompaniment patterns

## Mid/Late Intermediate:

* Covering larger distances quickly:
  + Widely spaced melodies
  + Leaps in one hand
  + Closing distances
* Expanded textures and larger, multi-voiced chord shapes:
  + Redistribution
  + Omitting notes
* Using rotation for power, speed, and voicing
* Using thumb and fifth finger on black keys
* “Caterpillar” fingerings
* Sustaining notes using pedal or finger substitution
* Repeated notes: same finger or changing fingers
* Double notes at moderate tempos

## Advancing:

Using greater variety of fingering coordinations within a piece and weighing all fingering principles to design a fingering appropriate to musical context.

* Need for more power and speed
* Double/triple note and octave passages at fast speeds
* Sophisticated strategies for finger legato:
  + Finger substitution
  + Finger sliding (black key-white key; white key-white key; white key-black key)
  + Moving a lower numbered finger over a higher one (e.g., third over fourth finger; fourth over fifth finger)
  + Changing fingers on fast repeating notes

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