

J Roth's Studio Policy for In-Person Lessons

I. Fees & Payment Options

Please contact info@walkingboxes.com for current rates.

Payment is due at the beginning of each month and should cover lessons for the entire month and/or for a larger block of time. Check, cash or Zelle are the preferred payment methods. If you have an alternate payment method, please inquire.

II. Missed Lessons, Make-Up Lessons, Illness, Weather

If you know in advance you will be unavailable for a specific date (due to a vacation, for example) you may request to forego paying for that date. Those families who miss regularly may be asked to pay for some of these missed lessons to hold their spot. For other, unforeseen cancellations that occur after payment has been made, full payment will still be expected. Whenever possible, a make-up lesson will be offered within the same work week. Most likely, this make-up lesson will need to be a remote one.

If I develop a cold or other minor illness, I will request to switch the lessons to remote. (Obviously for more serious illnesses I will just cancel altogether.)

If severe weather or significant snowfall is in the forecast (or the roads are otherwise deemed unsafe) I will request to switch the lessons to remote. I hope you will oblige me in this.

III. Yearly Recital Concert

Every year there will be at least one concert recital for which the student(s) will be invited to play. These are not mandatory but are strongly encouraged. I will endeavor to find a setting for which no rent/payment is required, but if I fail to find one, the families will be asked to help pay for renting a space. I am not an advocate of piano competitions or juried recitals, so if you would like your child to participate in these, you are better off finding a different instructor.

IV. Supervision

It will be expected that at least one adult or teen-aged sibling be present at the home when I am there giving a lesson(s). They do not need to be in the same room, but their presence should be known.

V. Books and Supplemental Materials

It will be expected that sheet music, method books, and song books be purchased by the family. There are many different method books out there. I don't subscribe to any particular one, but my default for piano is the *Faber Piano Adventures* series and for guitar it's William Bay's *Children's Guitar Method*. Theory/workbooks I leave as optional to the family. I believe they are helpful but can also more readily cause music lessons to join the ranks of homework drudgery. I will endeavor to procure photocopied material for supplemental songs from the public domain whenever possible, but for those songs outside the public domain, the family will be asked to purchase them.

VI. Communication

Email is my preferred mode of communication, but I do not have internet connection on my phone so any sudden cancellations (within half a day of the lesson) must be made via text or voice mail. I hold a preference to text messaging over phone calls.

VII. Practice

For better or worse it is not my way to demand that students practice. I will discuss with them the importance of practice and encourage them to do so, but it will largely be up to the student and his/her family to follow through with practicing. I believe time spent with me is valuable to the student whether he/she practices or not, but obviously their skill/development greatly hinges on how much they practice outside lessons. Setting up a routine is highly encouraged. Ten minutes a day or twenty minutes every other day are a couple options that aren't too demanding. It's a challenge to balance the approach to the instrument as both work and play; it is both. In my opinion, the less it seems like a chore, the better, but at the same time there will be moments of struggle and resistance which must be braved.

VIII. Distractions

A quiet atmosphere is really the best for students. Television, phone conversations, siblings playing in the background are all cause for distraction. I would also encourage families not to surround the lesson time with play time. I have noticed that for students whose lesson time interrupts their playing of video games or playing with friends are much more unhappy and anxious during the lesson. If their homework or house chores or reading time are interrupted, they usually seem less anxious for the lesson to be over.

IX. Parental Involvement and Finding Inspiration

A great way to encourage the budding musician is to take interest in their playing. Perhaps sit down and listen sometimes; sing along with a song; arrange for a little house concert for grandparents; help them choose a new song to learn. Taking them to see other musicians perform can also be inspiring and motivating. Guitar players seem to be readily presented as heroes of the instrument on mainstream media; for piano players – not quite as much. You may try to search for DVD/YouTube performances by pianists. As wonderful as classically-trained concert pianists can be, these should probably not be the only performers the students are exposed to. Pop/rock/jazz/blues pianists sometimes are more accessible and exciting for students. There are a series of videos put out by a YouTuber named “Rousseau” that show the pianist's hands playing while colorful notes drop and disintegrate when each note is played. Many of my students have been inspired by these videos or the like. “The Piano Guys” and their videos also seem to inspire some students.

X. Apps

I'm not a big fan of children getting lost in their hand-held devices, but... if you can't beat them, join them. There are many apps out there for music learning (an internet search will reveal plenty of options). I can recommend a couple that might be used to supplement the student's practice.

Teaching Philosophy:

I don't have a set formula or method I use to teach. I come prepared to meet each student wherever they're at on any given day. Having studied and practiced the art of improvisation (musically and theatrically) for many years, I feel qualified to use this as a teaching tool: consciously moving with the student, following their curiosity, onto any of the myriad paths winding up the mountain of Music.

Having said that (and speaking now less poetically), the general structure of each lesson is: scales/exercises, lesson book, student/teacher-chosen song(s). I always ask students for their input on what songs or kinds of songs they want to learn. My belief is that they are more likely to practice and enjoy making music if they're playing the kind of music they like. Certainly the choice of Beethoven would provide greater technical challenge than the choice of say – the latest hit by the latest pop diva, but I can always find ways to increase the challenge and thus insure the student is progressing with his/her instrument. *(Regarding that: though pop songs are usually simple in structure, the syncopated rhythm often occurring in melody lines can prove quite challenging to replicate.)*

There are very few things I am insistent upon during my lessons. If a student resists some kind of learning, I won't force them to “drink from that particular well”. The one major exception is musical scales – I insist my students learn a variety of these and play them at the beginning of each lesson. Frequently the students show some resistance to this kind of rote learning and all I can do is try to assure them that scales are the “chains that lead to freedom”.

I do not offer stickers, draw stars, or offer any such rewards for students completing songs. If you feel encouragement of this kind is beneficial in motivating your child to practice, please let me know and we can design some kind of reward system. If a student does not practice, I do not scold them; I make sure they understand they will not progress much without practicing, but beyond that, I put no pressure on them. I want music to be something they do because they want to. You may rest assured though, I make great effort to help every student connect to the power and joy of making music.

A note for students of the guitar: Whereas learning to read music is a near necessity for most piano students, it is less so with those learning guitar. Outside of “classical” music (which sadly, few young guitar players seem interested in playing) other forms of guitar playing frequently use a numerical system called TAB. This is what I usually use with guitar students. If parents feel strongly about their guitar-playing child learning to read and play standard music notation, I need to be informed – I can almost guarantee, from experience, the student will resist. I think this is largely because it takes great patience to learn to read the musical language and guitar students figure out in short order that they can have success playing their favorite songs without reading music. I make efforts to incorporate reading of standard notation into the lessons, but I don't push it if the will to learn it just isn't there.