

J Roth's Studio Policy for Remote Lessons

I. Fees & Payment Options

Please contact info@walkingboxes.com for current rates.

Payment is due at the time of each lesson. Payments can be made weekly, monthly, or for a larger block of time. My preferred methods of payment are through Zelle or by check. If you have a different payment option that you prefer, please inquire.

I realize your lives have many moving parts, but as much as possible, I'd appreciate being spared the awkwardness of having to send reminders about payments being overdue.

Though I do have official "payment due" invoice forms, it continues to be my preference to keep things more informal. Please consider the "Lesson Notes" email I send after each lesson as a notice of payment due (if you have not already prepaid).

II. Credit/Refunds

If notification of cancellation is given four or more hours before a lesson, no payment will be expected and/or any prepayments will be forwarded to a future lesson. If notification is given less than four hours before a lesson (or not at all), payment will be expected for the inconvenience.

Should you forget about the lesson and/or cancel suddenly, I'd ask you to please volunteer payment and spare me the awkwardness of having to ask for it.

Obviously emergencies happen and that is a different matter in which I can be more flexible with sudden cancellations.

Those families who cancel regularly may be asked to pay for missed lessons to hold their spot.

III. Make-up Lessons

As much as possible I will try to reschedule a missed lesson for some time during the same work week. If I am informed in advance, I will try to find an open slot or arrange a time swap with another family.

IV. Yearly Recital Concert

Every year there will be at least one virtual concert-recital for which the student(s) will be invited to play. Students will be asked to make videos of themselves playing a song and these will be compiled into a concert that can be viewed on YouTube (unlisted to the wider public.)

V. 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.

VI. 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.

I have also begun using *Carol Matz's Interactive Piano Method* which has some advantages for working virtually.

We can discuss which method is best for your situation.

VII. Communication

Email is my preferred mode of communication, but texting is also viable (phone calls, to a lesser extent, are also fine.)

In the past it was against my policy to have any communication with a student via email or text; I have softened my stance on this, realizing it can frequently work better to have direct communication with older students when:

>sending the Zoom lesson invites*

>sending the Lesson Notes*

Please note: I insist that a parent always be CC'd in any communication without exception.

VIII. 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.

IX. Distractions

A quiet atmosphere is really the best for students. Television, phone conversations, siblings playing in the background are all cause for distraction.

Please note that optimizing Zoom for lessons requires taking off the "background noise suppression" feature. This means that pots clanking in the kitchen, dogs barking, and other sounds in your home, at times, come through my speakers/headphones quite loud (magnified, in fact.) I realize it's not always practical to keep your house silent during lesson time, but anything you can do to decrease background noise is appreciated.

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.

X. 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.

XI. 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.

XII. Tech Set-Up

I'm willing to make any set-up work, whether it's a smart phone, tablet, desktop computer, or what-have-you. I'm a musician, so I depend on my ears a lot to help me recognize and make corrections with my students' playing. Having said that, I love it when I can use my eyes to help me too; that means having the camera angle set at its optimal position. I can provide sample pictures of the best angles, but generally, for pianists, the higher the angle the better. Slightly back (behind the student) is also good. Essentially, it's very helpful to see all the individual piano keys clearly which is not possible from a low or side angle.

For **guitar players**, setting the camera straight in front of them so I can see the full guitar is best. It helps if they have a music stand or raised table for their sheets of music slightly in front or next to the computer so they keep facing forward.

For **both pianists and guitarists**, if possible, it's great if their face (at least up to their eyes) is included in the frame as well.

XIII. Being Prepared

My schedule is very tight. If you can try to be ready at least five minutes before your lesson time, that will help keep things running on time. I realize things happen (including technical glitches) that can cause lateness – I will endeavor to give you your full time if possible, but this usually creates a ripple of lateness moving through all lessons after yours.

Pencils (not pens) with erasers are critical. Please have one at the piano or wherever your child has

lessons.

Frequently I find students don't have their materials ready and time is wasted digging through books and papers to find what they need. Please consider an organizational system (especially those of you with multiple children taking lessons). If you need ideas, I can provide them.

Additionally, guitar players should have their instrument tuned and ready to go. Picks and capo (if they have them) should be handy as well.

Making sure the computer/device is charged up (or plugged in) is also important.

XIV. Lesson Notes

After every lesson I will send the lesson notes, which is essentially the students' practice list. If you could either print this out for them (some families tape it to the piano so it doesn't get lost in the shuffle) or forward it to their phone so they can have it, I'd appreciate it. Or, for those of you who request it, I can email them directly to the students.

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.