

J Roth's (Traveling) Studio Policy

I. Fees & Payment Options

Please contact us at info@walkingboxes.com for current rates.

Payment is due at the time of the lesson. Payments can be made weekly, monthly, or for a larger block of time. Check or cash; at this time I do not accept credit card or online payments.

II. Refunds

If notification of cancellation is given three or more hours before a lesson, a refund will be given and/or any prepayments will be forwarded to a future lesson. If notification is given less than three hours before a lesson (or not at all), payment will be expected for the inconvenience. 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 missed lessons, but for those communities that I only visit one day a week, the rescheduled lesson will have to be on the same day as the missed lesson. If I am informed in advance, I will try to arrange a time swap with another family.

IV. 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, so if you would like your child to participate in these, you are better off finding a different instructor.

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

Lesson/song books can be purchased by the family or I can acquire them and be reimbursed. I have been designing my own lesson book series for piano (based on my years of teaching experience) and it is my preference that beginning students start with these. If the student has already begun a different lesson book series or is inheriting books, I am fine using those books for the lessons. 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/reimburse. I will always ask first before purchasing a song for a student.

VII. 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 slight preference to text messaging over phone calls.

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. 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 are much less anxious for the lesson to be over.

X. Parental Involvement

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; choose with them a new song for them to learn (and then let me know). Taking them to see other musicians perform can also be inspiring and motivating. Guitar players are more readily presented as heroes of the instrument on TV, for piano players – not as much. You may try to search for DVD performances by pianists. As wonderful as classically-trained concert pianists usually are, 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.

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.

Teaching Philosophy:

I endeavor to gear all my lessons around the individual student's learning style. I always ask students for their input on what songs or kinds of songs they want to learn. My theory is that they are much more likely to practice and enjoy making music if they're playing the kind of music they like.

Certainly the choice of Mozart 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.

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 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 also attempt to incorporate improvisation at times during the lessons. I believe the ability to improvise is a natural step toward the ability to compose and can also lead to endless hours of enjoyment making music by oneself and/or with other musicians (in spontaneous or planned “jam” sessions.)

Whereas learning to read music is paramount for piano students, it is less so with those learning guitar. Outside of classical music (which sadly, few young guitar players are 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 will make efforts at times to sneak music reading exercises into my guitar students' lessons, but not as a rule.

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 of mine connect to the power and joy of making music.