

# How to Choose a Piano Teacher

*By Joan Blench*



## Education

There are two major music conservatories in Canada, the [Royal Conservatory of Music](#) and [Conservatory Canada](#). Each go up to Grade 10, after which a person can take an advanced exam (ARCT / Licentiate) as a performer or teacher. Think of the former as a college diploma and the latter as a university degree. Another education route may be through a university, either with a Bachelor of Music degree or a Bachelor of Education with a specialty in music. When interviewing a potential teacher for your child, also remember to ask about ongoing professional development. Anyone can hang out their shingle saying they teach piano lessons, no matter what level of formal education they have obtained. Likewise, they may have achieved their degree years ago and never darkened the door of a conference or workshop since. Look for a teacher who regularly attends conferences such as those put on by the [Alberta Music Education Foundation](#) (AMEF), the [Alberta Piano Teachers Association](#) (APTA) the [National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy](#) (NCKP) or [Canadian Music Teachers Federation](#), as well as workshops organized by local/regional music teachers' associations, APTA, ARMTA (Alberta Registered Music Teachers Association), music retailers and publishers. Does the teacher subscribe to [Clavier Companion](#), or other professional journals? Does he or she belong to online forums for music education?

## Experience

As the saying goes, there is no substitute for experience. Seasoned teachers have a full tool box full of resources and ideas. They know what works with certain types of students and how to teach to individual learning styles. They will be able to tell you whether they prefer teaching beginner, intermediate or advanced level students, what age groups, and why. This doesn't necessarily mean you should avoid novice teachers – we all had to start somewhere – but I can say from personal experience that I am a MUCH better teacher now than I was 5 years ago, 10 years ago, or 30 years ago. One of the most heart-breaking comments I hear is from parents who say “Oh, I'll just get the teenager down the block to start my child, then we'll transfer to a real teacher later on.” Why would you not want to set your child up for success from day one? It makes so much more sense to choose an experienced teacher who is passionate about beginners, can identify problems quickly, and can get students excited about making music.

## Professionalism

Visit the teacher's studio and observe the surroundings. Is the studio neat and organized? Are lessons held in a distraction-free environment? Is the teacher operating legally? You should be able to see a business license from the Town displayed in the studio or waiting area. Does the teacher make an ongoing effort towards professional development as outlined in the first paragraph? Ask to see the teacher's studio policies about recitals, festivals, exams, practice expectations, missed lessons, tuition payment and other teaching philosophies. You are entrusting someone to shape and inspire your child's life-long love for music. Hire someone who takes this responsibility seriously.

## Tuition

Tuition varies greatly depending on where you live. It's a sad fact that urban teachers can charge much more than rural teachers simply based on what the market will bear in any given community. Don't make the assumption that a teacher who charges more is necessarily better. Likewise, avoid choosing a teacher because he or she is slightly cheaper than the one down the street. There are [bursaries](#) available to help parents in financial need. Read the teacher's policy paper on missed lessons, [make-up lessons](#) and/or refunds. Finally, please take into account that the tuition fee covers more than just the time spent with your child. A good teacher spends a great deal of time in lesson preparation and a great deal of money on resources, studio expenses, professional development fees, and other hidden costs. We run a business, but it is often more a labour of love than a lucrative money-making enterprise.

## Personality

When you choose a teacher, you are beginning a relationship which can last for several years or decades. In order to be successful, there must be trust and respect between all members of the teacher-parent-child triangle. If you ask people to recommend a piano teacher, be sure to find out why that teacher did or did not work out for that particular family since your needs, situation and personality types may be considerably different. When you go for that first meet and greet session, remember that the teacher is interviewing you just as much as you are interviewing the teacher. It's to everyone's best interest to seek out a comfortable relationship which will be nurturing and inspiring to all.

Further Reading:

<http://www.musicnotes.com/blog/2015/01/16/how-to-choose-a-piano-teacher/>

<https://thehappypianoprofessor.wordpress.com/2014/02/12/choosing-a-piano-teacher/>

<http://dianehidy.com/how-to-choose-the-best-piano-teacher-for-your-child/>

[http://pianoteachersfederation.org/Choosing\\_the\\_Right\\_Teacher](http://pianoteachersfederation.org/Choosing_the_Right_Teacher)

<http://www.dummies.com/art-center/music/piano/10-questions-you-should-ask-prospective-piano-teachers/>

<http://www.teresadybvig.com/findteacher.htm>

And of course, my own website and Facebook page:

<https://www.joanblench.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/JoanBlenchPianoStudio/>

*"Long after the toys of childhood are forgotten,  
the gift of music remains."*

