

Teaching Scales Simply and Efficiently

Piano music is a language. Like all spoken languages it has vocabulary and grammatical syntax. And like learning any spoken language, piano students must learn the language's vocabulary — starting with the most commonly used ones. Every pianist has four playing partners: the ears, eyes, mind and hands. Each of these four partners must know the vocabulary intimately if the pianist is to play competently and fluently. In other words, vocabulary must be securely deposited into the aural memory of the ears, visual memory of the eyes, analytical memory of the mind and tactile memory of the hands.

Scales — along with intervals and chords, are important vocabulary of the piano language. Teaching scales must be in gradual steps that engage all the four playing partners — eyes, ears, mind and hands. To ensure permanence and beauty of scale playing, the teacher's initial goal in students' early fundamental years of learning (preparatory level) is to develop comfort and security of scale playing before addressing issues of speed and tone. Below is a simple outline of The Well-Prepared Pianist scale teaching:

PRIMER LEVEL: Fingers, Pitch & Pulse, by N. Jane Tan (PEI 11628)

- A) Students' readiness:
 - 1) Familiarity with all white and black keys.
 - 2) Reading 4 octaves of single-note notations.

- B) Goal: To deposit the topography of major tetrachords into hands (tactile memory) and melody of major tetrachords into ears (aural memory).

- C) To teach:
 - 1) Construct major tetrachords in all keys using pattern fingering.
 - 2) Play "outside notes" of tetrachords to form perfect 4th intervals.

- D) Drills:
 - 1) Play tetrachords up and down every octave of piano keyboard.
 - 2) Play perfect 4th intervals up and down every octave of piano keyboard.

**EXAMPLE #1: Fingers, Pitch & Pulse by N. Jane Tan (PEI 11628)
pp. 36-67 (Tetrachords & Perfect 4th Intervals) follows.**

Tetrachords & Perfect 4th Intervals

1. **C:**

2. **G:**

3. **D:**

4. **A:**

5. **E:**

6. **B:**

F:

7.

B-Flat:

8.

E-Flat:

9.

A-Flat:

10.

D-Flat:

11.

G-Flat:

12.