

How will I know how my student is doing?

When someone asks "How did the lesson go?" There are two ways that question can be answered:

1. As piano students
2. As pianists

To ensure continuing progress as piano students, you just need to refine their qualities as good students: being well behaved, patient, careful listeners and note-takers who focus on their work and do their homework, etc. In short, reinforce the same qualities that make people good students, not just piano students. The best way to accomplish that is to review their notebooks with them and ask them to explain what needs to be done to you, and over time, because you're an adult and you'll learn what's expected faster, and because you're watching them objectively, you'll aggregate some knowledge that will enable you to start asking pointed, precise questions regarding their work.

You'll be able to ask questions about things like their scale playing, their pieces, their hand positions, their technique, etc. When you have questions, you can call me anytime (Even late at night. If I'm up, I don't mind.) for clarification. Their progress as students is something that I need you to monitor just like any other subject.

All of my piano students have notebooks for this same purpose, and when parents want info on how their kids are doing with regards to point one, they usually don't need to ask. They just look at the notebook, review what's been written over past weeks, and if there's need of more info, they have precise questions and they call me.

Key point: Everyone has to read and understand the contents of the notebook! If something isn't clear to you, ask the student or let me know!

Now, point #2.

Most parents don't ask how their kids are doing as pianists unless they have an ax to grind. That's a relative quality that has less to do with lessons and learning than it does with the cold hard equation of:

Proficiency = (Talent) x (Focused practice hours) + Artistry

That's the "How's my kid doing compared to all the other kids?" question, and when people ask "How are things going?" they rarely mean that. But when they do, and if that's what you meant, I'll answer:

These are samples from two brothers I've taught:

Bobkins (10 y/o) has made marked progress in his attention span and assiduousness with his playing since I've known him. He has a long way to go on the continuum of living up to his potential, and his biggest setback is his immature attitude.

Siddarth (14 y/o) came in playing at a higher level than Bobkins, and thus his progress has not been as marked. He has good musicality, but suffers from a lack of freedom or inventiveness in his improvisations, and we are working on getting him some new ideas and ways of doing things to remedy this. His biggest boon is his pleasant attitude, and his qualities as a good student. (Make sure he

remembers to read his notebook before every practice because he sometimes forgets, but this can be said of just about every piano student under the age of 40.) The hurdle he should climb next: Improving his technique through careful following of the rules of good posture and hand position at all times and more regular scale practice utilizing and enforcing those rules.

I believe in giving the full answer, because, in my experience, giving incomplete information because of time constraints (having other students I have to get to, and other obligations) can be damaging.

In summary, the answers to point two are unlikely to change in the immediate future without serious lifestyle modifications. As far as point one goes with the boys, that's a responsibility which takes place at the home. When there's an issue or a success with point one, **I will come to you** to tell you what's what. I always have, and always will.

Pierre Miller
Chicago, September, 2013.