



Play with more ease and expression

SMART FINGERING STRATEGIES



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Use this guide whenever you're planning or revising fingerings — especially when the printed ones feel awkward or unclear.

These principles are drawn from decades of teaching and are designed to help you play with more freedom, comfort, and musical expression.

Often two principles will conflict. Experiment to find what fingering feels the best to you.



“Everything depends on good fingering. It is a science and an art, which one is never done studying.”

— Frédéric Chopin

1

Minimize leaps and changes of position

Less movement is almost always easier and will go faster.

2

Use fingers 1-2-3 whenever possible

These fingers are your strongest, most agile, and most neurologically mapped. Use them whenever you can.



3

Avoid stretchy fingerings

There's almost always a better way.

Thumb on the black key is allowed — even recommended if it prevents stretching.

When necessary, leave out a note, roll the chord, or use the pedal to connect

Always try to put the largest intervals between fingers 1 and 2

4

Choose fingerings that set you up for what's next

One of my students likes to say that fingering is like playing pool — every move should set you up for the next one.

5

Repeated patterns usually work best with the same fingering

Using the same fingering helps your brain lock in the pattern and makes the piece easier to memorize and learn.

But if another principle makes a different choice feel more obvious or comfortable — like the layout of black and white keys, or needing to set up for what comes next — go with what feels clearest and most natural to you.





It's not necessary to trade fingers on repeated notes

It's fine to trade fingers for speed or to get your hand in position for what's next. But it's NOT necessary to make the music sound good, especially in early-level music.



Keep your hand size consistent

Minimize opening and closing of your hand because it is a slow movement.



Put the largest intervals between fingers 1 and 2

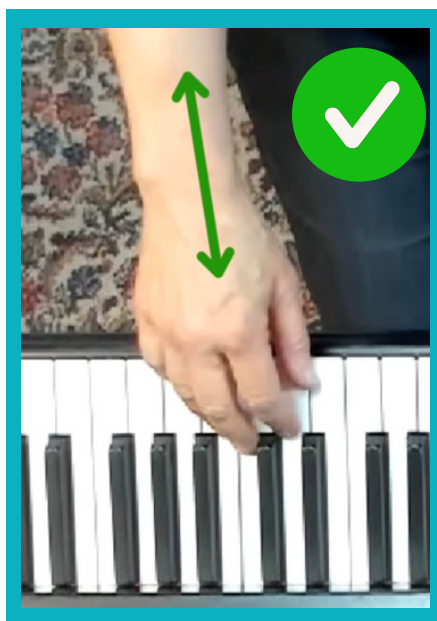
The hand opens widest between fingers 1 and 2, so try to use them for bigger intervals whenever you can



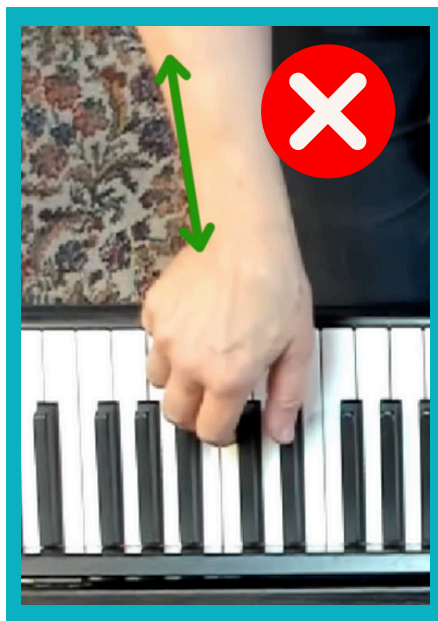
*It's OK to put your thumb on
a black key*

Don't be afraid to do it if it makes a passage easier or more comfortable.
Chopin and Bach both did it.

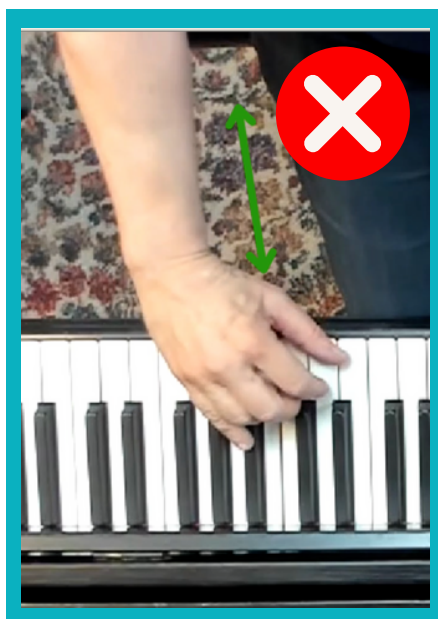
Just be smart about how you do it. Avoid bending your wrist sharply to the side. Instead, keep your forearm aligned as you move into and out of the black key area.



Keep hand aligned with arm. It should look and feel the same as when your arm rests at your side as you stand.



Not turned towards the 5th finger.



Not turned towards the thumb.

*The previous two pages are an excerpt from **The Pianist's Body Blueprint**.*

This mini-course includes 9 short videos and a 15-page PDF to help reduce tension and increase ease at the piano. You'll learn the ideal bench height, sitting distance, foot and leg alignment, and how to position your arms and elbows for comfort and control.

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