

STUDIO POLICIES 2009-2010

FOR THE STUDIO OF: SAM ECOFF

In the interest of better serving all of my students and providing fair and consistent treatment of all students and their parents, I have developed the following policies:

COURSES OFFERED

I teach a variety of different courses at the conservatory including composition, theory, music technology, and piano. (You may request a course catalog if you wish to see all of your options.) Students may enroll in more than one course at once, but students should understand that this requires an additional amount of preparation time for each lesson and should plan their schedules accordingly. As per conservatory policy, you may not sign up for a course for only one lesson to 'try the course out.' You must commit to a minimum of one month's enrollment in any particular course. This is because it is impossible to get a clear picture of a course in only one lesson. Similarly, it is very difficult to learn much in one lesson, because there can be no follow up critique, and no opportunity to cement the lesson in the student's brain. I would be more than happy to spend time with you to review course materials if there is a course in which you are interested.

Students who are enrolled in more than one course with me must take the appropriate lesson on the appropriate day. For example, a student who has a theory lesson on Monday and a piano lesson on Thursday may not show up at their Monday lesson and ask to have a piano lesson because their theory lesson isn't prepared. I prepare materials for each lesson, and to ensure the best educational experience, you must take the lesson you are scheduled to take. I am happy to be flexible with course switching when students give me at least one week's notice so that I can be prepared for the appropriate lesson.

LESSON TIME

Each student should be present at my studio door at the time of their lesson. Please don't make me look for you throughout the store. Please do not knock on my door if it is closed. I make every attempt to keep all lesson appointments on time, but from time to time I may run five minutes late. You may knock on my door if you feel that I am running more than five minutes late to confirm your scheduled lesson time. When I am ready for the next student, I will open the door. ****ALL STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO VISIT THE LAVATORY AND THOROUGHLY WASH THEIR HANDS RIGHT BEFORE COMING TO THEIR LESSON.****

If you are not present at the time of your lesson, I will wait in my studio for ten minutes, at which time I will proceed to the staff support area to check my voice mail to see if you have been taken ill and will not be present. If you are more than ten minutes late, you may look for me in my studio. If I am not there, please go to the front desk and ask them to page me. If your lesson is the last scheduled lesson of the day, I will wait for you at the conservatory for one half of the duration of your lesson. At that point I will assume that you have been detained and are unable to attend your lesson and I will leave the conservatory.

Piano lessons are forty or fifty-five minutes in length rather than forty-five and sixty minutes respectively, because five minutes are needed between lesson appointments. It takes time for students to pack up all of their books, move to or from the computer, remove coats and hats, etc. This is also an appropriate time for parents to check on their student's progress by visiting. All Music Technology lessons are fifty-five minutes in length unless otherwise noted in the course catalog. When visiting after a lesson, please be respectful of the next student's lesson time. To be fair to all of my students, I need to start lessons on time, and keep conversations between lessons brief. If you have questions which require more time, a phone call to the conservatory is more appropriate.

COMPUTER/VIDEO TIME

An optional computer time is provided to all students free of charge. During this period following their lessons, students may play educational music computer games, watch educational music videos, or participate in other activities at the computer/video workstation while I work with the next student. Computer time lasts fifteen minutes, but whenever possible, I am happy to let students stay longer with their parent's permission. My studio features a large library of computer and video titles for student use. Students are responsible to provide their own media to save original compositions. Students are encouraged to bring USB flash drives and/or iPods to lessons for the purpose of saving original compositions.

CD LENDING LIBRARY

Currently enrolled students may also make use of our studio's lending library of CDs and scores. Our library contains over 200 titles ranging from piano repertoire to orchestral masterworks. All students are expected to make at least occasional use of the listening library. Most CDs are duplicates of originals kept at the recording studio. Should they become lost, students will be assessed a nominal \$3.00 per CD to replace it. (This covers the cost of a replacement label, CD, and jewel case.) Should an original CD or a score become lost or damaged, you may (at your option) either replace it yourself, or I will bill you the actual replacement cost. Students who continually lose or damage lending library materials will lose borrowing privileges.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement is essential to the success of all students, but particularly so in the case of younger students. Because of limited teacher contact time each week, consistent practice/preparation at home is crucial to student's success. Many young students will not take the initiative to do this for themselves and need to be reminded. Some students may require parents to sit with them during their practice time to ensure excellent and consistent preparation for lessons.

While I understand it is not always possible, parents should make every effort to be present at the close of their student's lesson. If a student proceeds to the computer following his or her lesson, parents should still be present at the conclusion of the conclusion of their student's private instruction time. I do not feel that it is at all fair to interrupt another student's piano lesson to attempt to find a parent somewhere in the store whose student's computer time has ended. I am willing to make the effort to find student's parents, but I feel that I would serve my students best by spending more time teaching them than attempting to locate their parents.

While your student's safety is of great concern to me, I can not be responsible for your child's personal safety after they leave my studio. Please be prompt in picking up your student. If your student is the last student of the day, I may leave the store if you are more than 15 minutes late to pick them up. If the store is closed, I will not make your student sit outside, but rather I will stay with your student until you arrive. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will be charged for additional lesson time at the usual rate.

ATTENDANCE

A student's attendance is expected at every weekly lesson without fail unless other arrangements have been made. If your student is taken ill, please call my voice mail at 367-5333 x48 to report his or her absence. No refunds can be made for such absences (as per the conservatory's policies), but I would be more than happy to attempt to find a suitable makeup time for you. If you leave your phone number when you call, I will return your call as soon as I can (usually within 24 hours). I am present at the Waukesha County Conservatory of Music (Hartland Music) five days each week, so it is usually possible to find a makeup time for unexcused absences. You must make arrangements for makeup lessons in a timely manner, contacting me within one week of your absence, or I cannot offer you a makeup. While I will make every effort to find suitable makeup times for students who miss regularly scheduled lessons, I can not guarantee that I will be able to find a suitable makeup time for your student. If you have long-range conflicts with your regular appointment, please speak to me as soon as possible so that I can find a suitable alternative for you. If you are unable to attend a make up lesson that you have scheduled, please leave me a voice mail message at the conservatory. Missed make up lessons can not be made up. Students who repeatedly miss makeup lessons will no longer be offered opportunities to make up missed lessons.

You may take one excused absence per semester. Semesters are divided in the following way: January 1 - May 31, June 1 - August 31, and September 1 - December 31. You do not need to pay for an excused absence, but you must provide one week's notice before the date of the absence. More notice is greatly appreciated and highly encouraged. Please call me as soon as you know you are going to be absent, even if your absence is not going to be excused. This allows me to offer your time as a makeup to someone else who is unable to make their scheduled time. If all students report their absences as soon as they know about them, I will have more potential makeup times to offer everyone.

MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENTS

Students are expected to bring all necessary materials to lessons. This includes all appropriate lesson books, their 8.5" x 11" spiral-bound notebook, flashcards, contest/recital pieces, etc. It is very difficult for students to make

progress in their lessons without the appropriate materials. I may ask you to purchase additional copies of materials which have become lost. (I.e. If the student has not brought them to lessons for more than two weeks.)

Students are expected to have an appropriate instrument on which to practice at home. At the very least, this means a 61-key touch sensitive keyboard, but almost all students require an 88-key weighted action instrument, preferably an acoustic piano. Digital pianos are usually not acceptable and can take a student through only the first few months of lessons. If you have questions regarding your student's current needs, please discuss this with me. I reserve the right to terminate lessons for students who do not have appropriate instruments at home.

If you are thinking of purchasing a different instrument, it is advisable to consult with your teacher before making a purchase. I have a wealth of resources about buying pianos. Purchasing the wrong instrument for your needs can cost thousands of dollars and can cause innumerable problems for a student in lessons.

I am careful to thoroughly use every lesson book I select for each student, and we will almost always play most every piece in every book. It is rare that a book will be purchased for only one piece. Students will need a variety of books throughout the year, and the price of these materials is in addition to the price of the student's tuition. The average student will require \$75.00-\$100.00 in materials each year during their first three years, while more advanced students typically require \$100-\$250 in books and related materials each year. In certain circumstances, students may reuse their sibling's books, but this will be left entirely to my discretion. While I will make every attempt to reuse books, some books such as theory and lesson books are designed to be consumable and may not be reused. Some literature books may not be reused if the students using them have completed analysis of each piece.

BEHAVIOR DURING LESSONS

Students are expected to behave in a manner which is appropriate to a private lesson situation. The following are not appropriate behaviors and will not be tolerated: disrespect of teacher, self, or other students, drunkenness, use of a controlled substance, use of inappropriate language including profanity, racial/ethnic slurs, or derogatory remarks about gender/sexual orientation/etc., intentional destruction of the conservatory's property or the teacher's property. **Students are expected to deactivate cell phones and pagers during lessons.** Please do not waste our valuable lesson time by taking or returning calls. (There is no problem if parents take calls during lessons as long as they promptly exit the studio.)

If behavior becomes a problem, I reserve the right to stop the lesson and ask a student to sit in the hallway until parents arrive so that behavior problems can be discussed. I will not discipline students during lessons.

APPAREL/FINGERNAILS

Students are expected to dress appropriately for lessons. Appropriate footwear is very important. Sandals or "flip-flops" are not appropriate unless they have a stiff sole and buckle around the ankle in such a way that they can not pull away from the student's heel, and provide a solid base for the foot. It is otherwise difficult or impossible to achieve good pedal technique. Students are expected to wear appropriate undergarments.

Students are expected to keep their fingernails very short. Ideally, fingernails should be kept short enough that when fingers are held perpendicular to a hard surface, the fingernail should not touch the surface. Some student's hyponychia are so close to the tip of their fingers that it is impossible for students to achieve an ideal fingernail length. Such students should work to keep their fingernails as short possible. Students who come to lessons with fingernails which are too long may be unable to successfully complete assignments and may need to repeat that week's lesson because it is almost impossible to achieve good technique when fingernails are too long. I reserve the right to terminate lessons of students who refuse to keep their fingernails trimmed to an appropriate length. Artificial nails are not appropriate under any circumstances. They prevent students from playing piano with correct technique. Exceptions will be made for students who are seriously pursuing classical guitar studies as these students need longer fingernails on their right hand.

INJURIES

Should the student become injured in such a manner that it impacts their ability to perform in lessons (broken arm, sprained finger/wrist/brain/etc.) students should still come to lessons. There is a wealth of music for one hand. It is still possible for students to learn and progress while only using one hand, and there is always a wealth of music theory information which can be covered even when students are completely unable to play.

TUITION

Currently enrolled students will receive a monthly tuition statement in the mail or in person at the time of their weekly lesson. Tuition for the entire month (as well as any fees incurred during the previous month) is due on the first of each month. There is a seven day grace period. I reserve the right to deny this grace period to students who continually pay their tuition after the seventh of the month. Even if you are absent on the first lesson of any given month (excused or otherwise), your tuition must still be paid. Deadlines as stated above still apply. In the event that I cancel your first lesson of the month, your tuition is still due on the first. If your first lesson of the month falls on a legal holiday or other day in which the conservatory is closed, I will gladly accept your payment the following week without penalty. This is the only time your tuition is not due on the first of the month. If your tuition is late, you will be assessed a \$7 late fee per student per week it is late. If tuition remains unpaid more than two weeks past the first lesson of any given month, I reserve the right to deny a student a lesson.

You may pay your tuition using cash or a personal check made out to me (not to the conservatory). You may deliver your tuition payment in one of two ways: You can hand it to me personally, or you can mail your tuition payment. ***Please do not leave payments at the front counter of the music store as they do not always get to me and I can not be responsible for them.*** Because the mail can be somewhat unpredictable in terms of what day it arrives, I have established the following policy regarding mailed payments: Payments will be considered received as of the day that they are postmarked.

If you are unable to pay for lessons because of financial difficulties, you may discuss this with me privately, and I will be happy to discreetly make arrangements which are suitable to you. I believe that music lessons should be available to everyone regardless of financial situation. There are several sources of scholarships available to us, and students with the ability to do so are encouraged to participate in our partnership with local churches as paid performers.

MUSIC NEWS

Music News is my newsletter which will appear with your tuition statement most months. It is my vehicle for presenting important policy changes, and keeping students and parents informed about upcoming events. *Music News* contains important articles about upcoming events and tips on how to become a better piano student. Articles I write for *Music News* are often picked up by various magazines such as *Piano Notes*, *Keyboard Companion*, and *Music Notes* and are reprinted there. You get to read these valuable articles first, and without a paid subscription. Please take advantage of them!

The final page of each issue contains a calendar of upcoming events. Please note that this calendar changes monthly. It is important that parents (and students of an appropriate age) read the newsletter every month. There is always a copy of the current issue of *Music News* outside the door of my studio for you to read while you await your lesson time.

RECITALS

From time to time, we have recitals. There is typically one recital in both the Fall and Spring semesters and occasionally one recital in the Summer semester, but I may add additional recitals as I see fit. Some recitals are optional while attendance is mandatory for others. All piano students other than adult students are required to play in required recitals. While many recitals require students to memorize music, some do not. We have many different kinds of recitals during the course of a school year. Recitals are important because they allow students an opportunity to gain poise before an audience and to receive recognition for their musical achievement. Recitals present special challenges to students and are very important in a student's musical development, so I have developed important policies regarding recitals. For information about upcoming recitals, please consult the current issue of *Music News*.

MOST RECITALS ARE MANDATORY

Participation in the Fall Duet Recital and Spring Solo Recital is mandatory in our studio. These recitals are typically announced about a year before they occur so that you can plan other activities around them. While piano lessons can easily be rescheduled for sporting events and other family commitments, the two recitals are two of only the three annual events around which I ask you to plan other events. Recitals are a very important component to student's musical development, and provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their ever increasing

musical abilities and receive well-deserved public praise. Students work very hard all year long to develop excellent technique and musical artistry. Recitals are a great opportunity for all of us to cheer our students on and congratulate them on all of their hard work throughout the year!

There are, of course, several instances which I recognize as valid excuses for missing a recital. These include a death in your family, a family vacation or trip, or a serious illness. I appreciate as much advance notice as is possible and practical in these circumstances.

Failure to comply with this policy causes students to miss a very important performance opportunity which is key to their musical development. Students often observe the values parents put forth and adopt them as their own. Parents must therefore demonstrate by their actions that musical instruction is important and has worth. Electing not to attend a recital undermines the musical values which we try to instill in students as parents and educators. Thus, students who do not attend recitals without a legitimate excuse will face dismissal from our studio. Students who make a habit of missing recitals and other studio events, even with consistently legitimate excuses may also face expulsion from our studio because it may become clear over time that the demands of our studio's schedule do not match well with a student's family schedule and the student would thus be better served by studying with a different teacher who asks families to make fewer time commitments.

RECITAL BEHAVIOR

Recitals offer parents, students, and teachers a wonderful opportunity to praise a student's hard work and achievement throughout the year, but recitals also provide other educational opportunities. Part of the educational experience of attending a recital is learning to be a great audience member. Younger students are given the opportunity to hear not only the exciting musical possibilities that lie ahead in the next few months, but also what they might achieve through years of careful and diligent study. Therefore, it is important that each student is present at the beginning of the recital and stays until the end. The students playing first and last deserve just as many applause as your student. Being a good audience member means staying to hear all performers play. Please do not ask to be allowed to leave early or arrive late. This is not respectful to the other performers at the recital who have also worked very hard throughout the year and are equally deserving of your applause and praise. I always split our studio into two separate recitals to keep the length of each recital pleasant (typically only 30-40 minutes).

Recitals present an excellent opportunity for students to learn appropriate concert behavior. Students are expected to listen quietly while other students are performing, and to applaud appropriately when other students have finished their pieces. If an emergency arises which requires a student to leave the room before the recital has concluded, students should make every effort to wait until the current performer has concluded his or her performance.

RECITAL PREPARATION

Students are expected to demonstrate adequate preparation for each recital. Students are given months to prepare their pieces for performance, and students are expected to use this time to make excellent preparations with their parent's and teacher's assistance. To avoid an embarrassing and potentially emotionally harmful situation, students who are poorly prepared before a recital will be asked not to perform. Performing at recitals is a great honor, and every public performance a student gives represents not only his or her abilities but the artistry of our studio.

CONTESTS

Students are given the opportunity to participate in several contests each year. The National Federation of Music Clubs contest is held each year on the first Saturday in February. Another contest is the Lake Country solo and ensemble contest held at a local elementary school in Mid-March (always on a Saturday). The WMTA auditions are held in mid March. MAPTA Auditions are always the first Sunday in March. New contests are occasionally added. I typically provide all of my students with a spreadsheet detailing the requirements and dates for each contest mid way through the summer semester.

Contests are important for students because they receive a critique from another highly skilled teacher. Participation in the piano solo and theory events is mandatory for all students other than adults at the National Federation Contest, while other contests are optional. I may, at my discretion, invite certain students to participate in other contests such as the MAPTA (Milwaukee Area Piano Teacher's Association) Auditions, WMTA (Wisconsin Music Teacher's Association) contest, and other competitive events. Students are selected for these events based on their performance in lessons. Besides participation in Federation Festival, students are required to participate in one ad-

ditional contest each year.

Students who participate in contests will incur contest fees in addition to their lesson tuition. Fees are typically \$15-25 per entrant per event per contest. It is of the greatest importance that students who participate in contests keep their participation certificates, rating sheets, and theory tests in a safe location, preferably a file folder which is kept with other important papers. Students are often called upon to prove their point totals for various contests, and it is impossible to prove point totals without the associated certificates, rating sheets, and theory tests.

STUDIO CLASSES/MASTER CLASSES

From time to time, I will hold studio classes. Studio classes are typically held on Saturdays, and typically occur once or twice per semester. During studio classes, students may hear guest speakers, we may play for each other and critique each other, play music games, learn about music history, or even learn about music from other cultures. There is no fee to attend studio classes, and attendance is usually optional.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Our studio has formed partnerships with two local churches to provide music for worship services. Students who play at these churches are responsible to provide Prelude, Postlude, and Offertory music, as well as accompanying hymns and choir accompaniment. Students may also be responsible to attend choir rehearsals as well. Playing for church services is an excellent way for maturing students to gain real-world playing experience. Students are compensated for their time and talent. This is a great way for students to earn money to pay for lessons, save for college, or for a little pocket money while improving their musical skills. Students interested to serve as organist or pianist at a church should express their interest to their teacher.

CAREER COUNSELING

I am pleased to offer career counseling to students who plan to pursue college degrees and careers in the music industry. Ours is a studio which is designed to prepare students for a college degree in music. Counselling sessions are scheduled as private meetings including students and parents and are generally scheduled for 45 minutes to an hour outside of lessons. Career counseling sessions are provided once annually to currently enrolled students free of charge.

PRACTICING AT THE PIANO

Every summer, I offer a week-long class called "Practicing at the Piano." Students attend lessons every day during the week of the practicing class, and learn valuable skills about effective practicing. Students do not have a regular lesson the week of the practicing class, and students may then take up to four additional excused lessons during the course of the summer semester. These absences must be taken during the summer semester and must be submitted to me in writing by June 1st. In an event that a student takes excused absences and then discontinues lessons before the practicing class occurs, students may be charged for these lessons which were previously excused. For more information about Practicing at the Piano, please consult the April issue of *Music News*.

CALLING FOR HELP OR BECAUSE OF CONCERNS

If your student is in need of help with their lesson assignment, or if you or your student have any concerns regarding lessons, please feel free to leave me a voice mail, and I will be happy to return your call as soon as I can. My number at the conservatory is 367-5333 x48. I usually check my voice mail in the morning and early afternoon. Alternatively, you can e-mail me at sam@samecoff.com.

SIGNING UP

Twice each year (at the beginning of the fall and summer semesters) students are given the opportunity to choose a new lesson time, or to terminate lessons. A sign up form will be included in the April and July issues of *Music News* with a very specific due date. Because I need every student's form returned before I can make up the schedule, students who do not return their form by the deadline risk losing their current lesson time.

LACK OF PREPARATION

In the event that a student should continually fail to meet reasonable standards of preparation and performance in lessons, we will sit down together to outline a plan of action to help to make that student successful. Parental involvement is a very important part of helping students who are failing to make progress, so I may require parents to sit in during every lesson until students are able to show consistent preparation for lessons. Students who fail to show adequate improvement in their lessons given a reasonable amount of time will be asked to leave our studio.

TERMINATION OF LESSONS

If you wish to end your lessons, you must call me. Please do not send mail. It has a way of getting lost during delivery. There are no refunds per conservatory policy. Upon termination of lessons, I will keep your student's records for six months. If you wish, I will forward your student's records to a different piano teacher if you provide that teacher's address. I will release student records only to another music teacher.

I reserve the right to terminate our lessons at any time if students are failing to make adequate progress (see the above section) or have chronic behavioral problems. I may also terminate lessons if students fail to appear at recitals or contests. I will refund tuition for lessons which the student has not yet attended if I terminate lessons.

Students who terminate their lessons have the right to retain points earned toward WMTA, MAPTA, and NFMC awards (i.e. plaques and trophies).

CHANGES TO THESE POLICIES

From time to time I make changes and additions to these policies. Any changes which take effect midyear will be published in *Music News* or will appear as a special insert with your monthly statement. Other changes will appear with your September issue of *Music News* when the revised version of this document is distributed. I welcome your suggestions; most of what you see here was inspired by former students and their parents. :-)