

Sam Ecoff's Studio Policies

Courses Offered

I teach a variety of different courses at the conservatory including composition, theory, aural skills, orchestration, music technology, and piano. 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 conservatory. 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 bathroom and thoroughly wash their hands right before coming to their lesson.****

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.

Music lessons are twenty-five, forty, or fifty-five minutes in length rather than thirty, 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, remove coats and hats, etc. This is also an appropriate time for parents to check on their student's progress by visiting. 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 is more appropriate.

Online Lessons

I offer online lessons using the Rock Out Loud Live platform. Students may take their lesson online if they are more than a 30-minute drive from Hartland Music, if they are ill but still up to taking a music

lesson, or if there are occasional transportation issues which would prevent a student from attending lessons in person. Online lessons are not to be used on a regular basis by students who are closer than a 30 minute drive to Hartland Music Center.

Setting up a space correctly for online lessons helps me to be able to do more to help students during the lesson. Students taking online lessons must use either a computer or a tablet. Phones are not appropriate for online lessons because the screen will be far too small for the student to see if the phone is positioned correctly. The laptop or tablet should be positioned head height or a little higher, slightly behind, and to one side of the student, approximately four feet away. The keys need to be clearly visible.

It is strongly recommended that students who are taking online lessons on a regular basis because of their location should have both a hardwired (i.e. Ethernet) connection to their computer, and a USB microphone to pick up the sound of their instruments. (The dedicated microphone is not needed for students taking theory/composition lessons.) If an ethernet connection is not available, it will be very important that no one else using the wifi network in your house is streaming or even texting during the lesson. When wifi is being used to connect for lessons, every time a text is sent, it will slow the data stream and obscure most of the video on my end.

It is important that there is a lot of light in the area where the lesson will be held. The cameras in laptops and tablets aren't well suited to low-light conditions, and it's very difficult to see student's hands in a dimly lit room.

Materials like theory assignments and composition projects should be photographed with "Live Mode" turned off. If Live Mode is left on, I cannot mark up the documents to show students what they need to correct. These materials should be texted to me at 262-442-4189 or e-mailed to sam@samecoff.com well in advance of the lesson. I will do my best to get the documents opened and ready for review if they are ready at the start of the lesson, but if we have to stop and wait for documents to arrive, it is a tremendous waste of lesson time.

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. Most students require parents to sit with them at home during their practice time to ensure excellent and consistent preparation for lessons.

Parents are **always** welcome to sit in and observe lessons so as to better support their student's musical studies. While I understand it is not always possible, parents should make every effort to be present at the close of their student's lesson.

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 and Make Up Lessons

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 cell at 262-442-4189 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) four days each week, so it is sometimes possible to find a make up time for unexcused absences.

You must make arrangements for make up lessons in a timely manner, contacting me within one week of your absence, or I cannot offer you a make up. Even if you contact me within a week, if I don't have a suitable time to offer you, **I don't owe you a lesson**. Make up lessons cannot be 'banked'. You can't come to me at the end of a semester and tell me that you missed five lessons and expect me to provide makeups for them. **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 cannot attend your regularly scheduled lesson.**

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 call or text my cell. Missed or cancelled make up lessons can not be made up or credited. Students who repeatedly miss make up 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).

Piano students are expected to have an appropriate instrument on which to practice at home. For most students, this means owning or renting 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 an instrument, it is advisable to consult with me 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 often play many pieces from each book. It is rare that a book will be purchased for only one piece, but it is sometimes necessary. 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 or share 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. My studio is an LGBTQ safe space, and everyone is accepted and respected.

Students are expected to deactivate cell phones 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.)

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 one 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 via e-mail around the 17th of each month. 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 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 a personal check made out to me (not to the conservatory) or by signing up for ACH direct withdrawals. If you sign up for direct withdrawals, the amount shown on your statement issued on the 17th will be withdrawn automatically from your account on the first of the following month. When paying by check, 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.

Recitals

From time to time, we have recitals. 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.

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. There is also usually a mid-Winter

recital for students playing piano concerti and piano ensemble works. Some recitals are optional while attendance is mandatory for others. **All piano students (other than adults students) are required to play in at least two recitals per year.** There are typically 4-5 different opportunities for students to play in a recital each year, so in the event that a student cannot play in one of our required recitals, students need to be sure to play in a different recital. While many recitals require students to memorize music, some do not. We have many different kinds of recitals during the course of a year. For information about upcoming recitals, please consult the current calendar posted outside our studio.

Most Recitals are Mandatory

Participation in the Fall and Spring Recitals is mandatory in our studio. These recitals are typically announced months 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.

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 in Mid-March (always on a Saturday). The WMTA auditions are held in mid March. MAPTA Auditions are always on a Sunday in March. New contests are occasionally added. I typically provide all of my students with a calendar 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 additional contest each year.

Students who participate in contests will incur contest fees in addition to their lesson tuition. Fees are typically \$20-35 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.

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. Counseling 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.

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. The best place to reach me is weekday mornings at the recording studio (262) 696-6459. My cell phone is 262-442-4189. Alternatively, you can e-mail me at sam@samecoff.com. I do not answer calls during lessons, but you're more than welcome to leave a message and I will get back to you at an appropriate time when I finish teaching (usually the next day because I typically teach past an appropriate hour to return phone calls).

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. I will contact you either via phone or e-mail to confirm your intentions for the following semester.

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 that student to become more 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 appear as an e-mail with your monthly statement. I welcome your suggestions; most of what you see here was inspired by former students and their parents. :-)