

Piano Ensemble Tips (revised, 2018)
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1. Before teaching a duet, every measure should be numbered.
2. Each student needs to learn his/her part well. At some point in the process, it is good for the teacher to have each student look at the other student's part (slowly and thoughtfully).
3. Learning each part is very time consuming during lessons. Students **HAVE TO PRACTICE** at home! Preparation is a **MUST!**
4. The teacher also needs to know each part well. During the learning process, the teacher often has to model (play) each part.
5. When a student is playing with a student partner, both students need to be on approximately the same playing level. However, matching a student with a more proficient player can often work well.
6. It is sometimes convenient for brothers and sisters to play a duet together; however, be sure they can get along with each other. This point leads to the next ensemble tip.
7. Playing partners must be compatible in all ways. Being compatible and contented leads to adequate preparation. Playing a duet well is a wonderful and gratifying musical experience!
8. Right from the beginning, both players need to identify the **melody** of the piece. The melody is important and has to be heard! (*Exception – motor pieces – some pieces have little melodies and have a lot of motor action– ex. Robert Vandall duets. In these pieces, some melodies may be imbedded; yet difficult for some students to hear.
9. The accompaniment is important and must be solid. The accompaniment lies **BEHIND** that **IMPORTANT MELODY**. The accompaniments (often in the secondo part) aren't always as fun to play, yet they must be learned well!

10. Some students are POWER PLAYERS. They want to play everything LOUD! And some of them want to play everything FAST! Yet, the melody has to be heard! They must realize they are not playing a solo! They can't be stars all of the time!
11. Very early in the process of learning the duet, students need to understand the structure of the piece (ex. ABA, transitions, modulations to other keys, 1st and 2nd endings, etc.).
12. Decide on “**jumping points.**” Plan for the possibility of a problem in a performance. If both players have to HALT the performance, where are places they can return to and begin playing again? The teacher needs to mark in these jumping points on the score. (If time allows, these jumping points could be rehearsed in lessons.
13. Of course! It's most convenient for both students to learn and play the duet at piano lessons with their teacher. However, WHERE is another place both players can practice ON THEIR OWN? The best place is most likely at one of the student's homes. This practice can be extremely valuable.
14. Decisions need to be made on “who' turns what pages? (Tape the pages together!!!) Some publishing company's years ago would staple the pages together. Today, this is done less with publishing companies. Taping helps students make page turns more easily and keeps loose pages from flying off of the piano and hitting the floor. (Even using three-ring binders can work well).
15. **Tempo and Counting** – Both players have to count and FEEL THE BEAT! At all times, they have to be in sync with each other. As the saying goes, *“There is no prize for finishing first!”*
16. Beware of those hidden rests lurking in the shadows. They are just as important as the notes.

17. Usually, the Secondo player uses the Damper Pedal. In today's published scores, the pedal is usually notated clearly. However, the teacher should feel free to mark in pedaling, when needed and it is not indicated. *Of course, not all pieces require pedaling.
 18. In addition to the melody being vital to hear, early on, students need to become aware of all *dynamics and articulations*. **Let this process be student-led.** Have students LOOK for all articulations and highlight the dynamics. The key is: when students **locate** the dynamics themselves, they will usually pay more attention to them!
 19. TEMPO – Choose a tempo that both players can maintain consistently. Consistency is THE KEY! Keep in mind that the tempo notated is **just a suggested tempo**.
 20. At lessons, practice parts together in short sections, **slowly and evenly**. Eventually raise the tempo to the designated tempo on the score. As always, we piano teachers know that **SLOW PRACTICE PAYS OFF!**
 21. Very early on in the learning process, decide what students will do with repeats and/or first and second endings.
 22. **Mental Practice** - Encourage both student players to look frequently over their individual parts WITHOUT playing the piece. Studying the piece (silently) is another way to practice. Even use this strategy in lessons.
 23. When the piece has peaked and appears to be ready for performance, have students sit at the piano and play the piece in its entirety *without stopping*. Then, both players should take a minute or two break. Then, repeat the same process several times in a row. . *This process is much like a dress rehearsal.
- *It's PERFORMANCE DAY - Relax and enjoy. Audiences love to hear duets! And, students will never forget a great performance!**