

From the author

Play it again: Piano is a progressive piano course consisting of graded piano pieces for anyone who has played the piano before and wishes to rediscover this fulfilling pastime. *Book 1* starts almost at the beginning, with a look at the musical basics, musicianship and a step-by-step guide on how to learn each piece effectively. *Book 2* follows on progressively from *Book 1*, so you can use *Play it again* whatever your current level of playing ability. You could start with *Book 2* or *3* if you feel confident enough, but I would always recommend first reviewing the fundamentals of music and piano technique in *Book 1*.

Each book contains carefully selected pieces which gradually increase in difficulty and cover a wide variety of styles and musical periods. By the end of the second book, you should be able to tackle early advanced pieces comparable to Grade 8 standard of the leading British exam boards.

For this second book I have selected 21 piano pieces which I hope you will find both interesting and rewarding to play. The pieces are divided into four sections: Late Intermediate, Early Advanced, Advanced and Late Advanced, with the following approximate comparisons to the exams (of the Associated Board, the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London and London College of Music (LCM)).

Late Intermediate Grades 5 to 6
Early Advanced Grades 6 to 7
Advanced Grades 7 to 8
Late Advanced Grades 8 to 9

I have included photographs and many musical examples to illustrate key aspects of piano technique such as posture, hand positions and flexibility. I will also outline the most effective approaches to practice and how to break pieces down in order to help you tackle the most difficult sections. Once you have completed *Play it again: Piano* course you will be able to select, analyse, practice and perform with confidence and enjoy making real progress in your playing. You can also find a selection of teaching videos on my YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/SchottML.

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How to use *Play it again: Piano*

The first part of this book is a refresher section covering Piano Technique and Practice Advice. This aims to quickly assimilate the core fundamentals of playing the piano; I will refer back to these during the course of the book.

Even if you consider yourself reasonably musically competent, I would recommend reading and reviewing this section; keeping these concepts and ideas in mind will pay dividends when working on repertoire.

MUSICAL REMINDERS

The Theory section at the end of the book is a good refresher, the bedrock of all music-making. It may be helpful to review this section before you do any work on the pieces. Musical terms have been written in bold text where they first appear in the book.

A NOTE ON REPERTOIRE

After the refresher section, each of the units in Book 2 (Late Intermediate, Early Advanced, Advanced and Late Advanced) consists of selected piano pieces, a technical study, and various styles and genres of Classical piano music.

Each piece is accompanied by a list of points in terms of technique and musicality, preceded by useful information including preparation, practice technique, hand-made exercises and ideas for your own exploration.

Piano technique

Posture, hand positions, flexibility and alignment

Technical proficiency becomes increasingly important in this book as we are working at a relatively advanced level. The following suggestions and exercises are intended to provide a helpful foundation for practice sessions and for the gradual improvement of technique, and should ideally be worked at regularly in conjunction with each piece in Play it again: Piano – Book 2.

Correct posture and hand positions were covered in the *Piano Technique* section at the beginning of *Book 1*; these aspects are generally absorbed at the start of the learning process. With this in mind, I would recommend a revision of this section if possible. Once posture and hand positions have been covered, we can work at different exercises to create strong finger independence and flexibility.

Tension is one of the most prevalent problems in piano technique, and it's one which is difficult to correct. Stiffness can cause inaccuracies both in notes and rhythm, and creates a less than ideal sound quality. Therefore, this refreshment section includes many ideas to help you eradicate tension as much as possible.

First, as you sit at the keyboard, ensure that your neck and arm are relaxed, like

FLEXIBILITY AND FINGER INDEPENDENCE

The key to playing the piano flexibly is to move with flexibility, and the wrist plays the important role when it comes to being more flexible. A common mistake is to have too much tension in the wrist when playing, and this can lead to injury, or holding it too long.

To develop flexibility, begin by moving both the hand and wrist away from the keyboard, making circles in the air, using the wrist as a hinge, with the hand following the wrist's movement (see page 8 of *Book 1*).

Now play middle C with the thumb and release any tension in the hand and wrist; in other words, allow the whole arm to go loose and floppy, but still hold the thumb in place (as shown in the photo below where the wrist is completely floppy and relaxed). Try this exercise with each hand in turn.

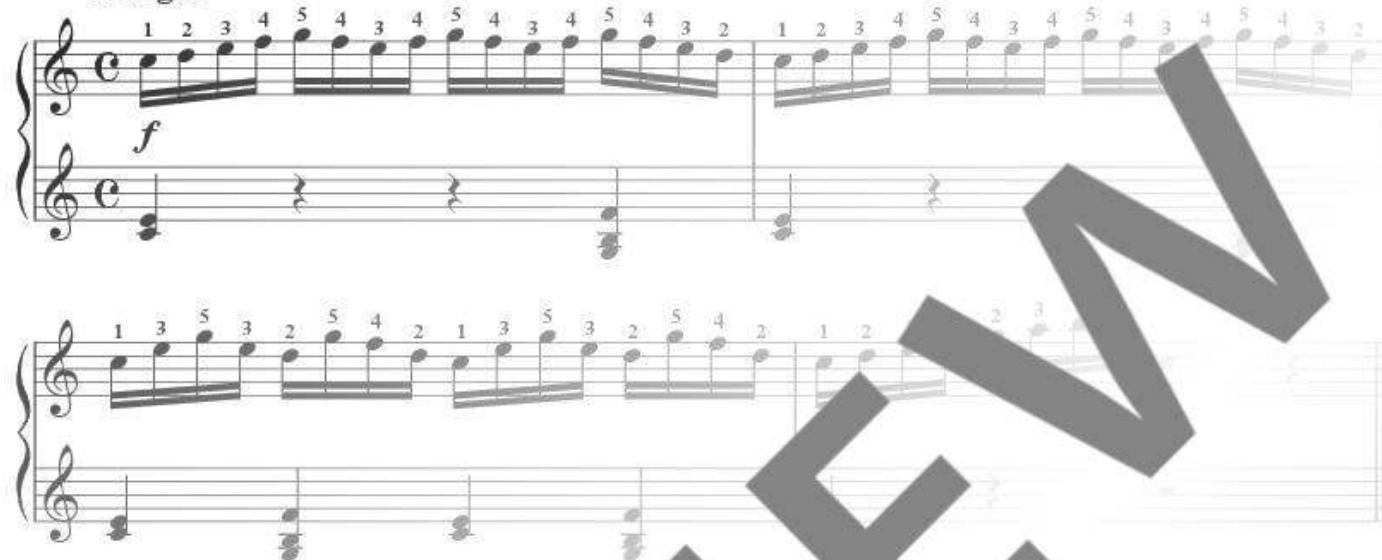


Relax from the neck and shoulders downwards – raised shoulders are a sure sign of tension. If you can encourage your body to feel relaxed, then, as you play, you will become accustomed to a more flexible, loose feeling. This takes practice!

Study No. 1 in C major, from 101 Daily Exercises (Op. 261), Carl Czerny

The following study is a helpful exercise for developing a free wrist and finger independence.

Allegro



1 Take the first five sixteenth notes (semiquavers) of the right hand and play each note very slowly, encouraging the hand and wrist to flop down between each note, whilst keeping the key depressed. Note the feeling in your hand and arm as you relax your muscles; this is the flexibility and freedom which must be gained and developed.

2 Once five notes have been successfully played, work at the entire right hand, this time playing each note slowly and applying every note to the key. Move the wrist in a wavy motion between each note to encourage flexibility and a sense of freedom. This is the feeling of freedom in the hand and arm, which is the key to playing smoothly, easily and accurately.

Apply a downward motion with each finger (with the thumb leading the way) and keep the hand and wrist behind every note, ensuring that the hand is powerful and every note is played with a sense of 'key bedding'. The tips of your fingers should be active, with the joints fully engaged. It's important that joints don't collapse but instead support the finger, as shown in the photos (below).

This, combined with a flexible, tension-free hand and wrist, will encourage strong fingers that work independently. The fourth and fifth fingers will need extra care and attention as they are naturally weaker, but if you allow them to 'stand' on their tips rather than collapse, and they are constantly supported by the hand, wrist and arm, they too will eventually become stronger.



Correct



Incorrect

- 4 Take note of your hand; be aware of muscle tension between the knuckles and the wrist, as rigidity here can cause discomfort whilst playing. Your muscles should feel pliable and soft; if they are firm and taut, then practice 'letting go' and dropping your hand and arm at your side as you sit at the piano.
- 5 Now let's work at playing groups of notes with one wrist motion, instead of one note at a time. The movement will be a swift 'rotation' to free your hand (and release any tension) after every group. Play with a gap of a second or two between each group of four sixteenth notes at first, allowing the wrist and hand to rest, as indicated by the quarter note (crotchet) rest in the example *below*. Over time and with practice the pauses between each group of sixteenth notes will eventually become progressively smaller and won't disturb the pulse at all.
- 6 Remember to play deeply into the key bed, paying attention to finger positions; aim for a very steady, solid rhythmic pulse and an even tone (counting every sixteenth note aloud as you play will help to develop an accurate sense of rhythm). You need to be aware of the 'feeling' in your arm, wrist and hand at all times.
- 7 When you feel confident you can increase the speed. To do this effectively, tighten your wrist to attain even and rhythmic motion (your fingers should skip over the keys rather than push them down). This technique is the basis for what follows in this study, so it's important to get it right.



Study No. 2 in C major (from 101 Daily Exercises for the Piano) Carl Czerny
Repeat this process for the left hand.

Allegro