

6. Common mistakes made by students

Throughout my years of teaching and doing piano accompaniment, I notice some common mistakes made by students:

Counting: I notice that many students do not have the habit of counting. They tend to play what they think is correct. They do not take note of the time signatures and note values. If they do not know how to count a certain rhythm, they would usually fake through it and hope that it is correct. When I ask them to count out loud while playing simultaneously, they cannot do it. Their pulse would be like that of a drunkard, and their rhythm would be all over the place. This is why I always encourage practising with the metronome as mentioned in article no. 2, *“Benefits of practising with a metronome”*.

Key-signatures and accidentals: I have seen students who do not take note of key-signatures, accidentals, or both. They do not bother to find out the key of the piece, for example, is this piece in D major, or G minor? And when they encounter accidentals, they usually forget this important rule: if the note in a particular bar has an accidental, this accidental applies to the rest of the exact same note in that bar. For example, if middle C in this bar has a sharp in front of it, the rest of the middle Cs in this same bar will be played as C sharps, assuming there is no change in accidental. Similarly, if the G above middle C has a flat in front of it, the rest of the exact same Gs in the same bar will be played as G flats. To remind yourself of any key-signature or accidental, simply take a pencil and write them in beside the “affected” notes. This way, you will always be reminded to play the notes accurately.

Not listening to themselves: Many students I’ve encountered practise their instruments without listening to themselves. They simply let their hands move automatically while staring blankly at the score. It is not surprising that they do not notice their mistakes and they keep practising the wrong things. One important thing to take note is that, if you do not bother to listen to your own playing, do not expect people to want to listen to you play. Simple as that. So if you want people to sit down and listen to you play, or even pay to attend your concert, then please start by listening to your own playing, and do your best to practise as accurately as you can.

Not finding out the meaning of foreign terms: Please refer to article no. 3, *“Know your foreign terms”*.

Very limited basic theory knowledge: Basic theory knowledge is very important. It can help you to understand the piece better. The fundamentals can be found in theory from Grade 1 to Grade 5. It is important to know the value of every note and rest, different time-signatures, key-signatures of all the scales, the technical names of the notes of a scale, the basic chords and many others. The theory books I recommend are Lina Ng’s theory books, Grade 1 to Grade 5. The instructions are easy to follow and the exercises are easy to do. After you have completed every grade, please do past years exam papers to test yourself. Start by choosing papers from the most recent years and work backwards, that is, 2016, 2015, 2014 and so on. You do not need to do all the way till year 2000. So long as you score 90 marks and above for every paper, you can proceed to the next grade.