

ABSOLUTE BEGINNER · YOUR FIRST TERM

Piano Pack

Six short lessons for someone who has just sat down at the keys: the parts of the piano, how to sit and shape your hands, finding your way around the keyboard, your first hand position, how long notes last, and the marks that tell your fingers what to do. A test paper and answers at the back.

Every pianist you have ever heard once looked for middle C.



Wikimedia Commons

Frédéric Chopin

A pianist and composer who wrote almost all his music for the piano. He published his first piece at seven and gave his first public concert at eight.

How this pack works

Every lesson has two pages. The first one teaches; the second has exercises to write straight onto the page. Lessons one and two are about you and your instrument, three to six about reading and playing. Sit at the piano as you read — and when this pack and your teacher disagree, your teacher wins.

01	Meet the piano	Pages 3–4
02	Sitting, hand shape, and finger numbers	Pages 5–6
03	The keyboard and middle C	Pages 7–8
04	C position, both hands	Pages 9–10
05	How long notes last	Pages 11–12
06	Playing marks, and your first tune	Pages 13–14
—	Test paper, then the answer key	Pages 15–16

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

	Lesson read on	Tried at the piano on
Lesson one	_____	_____
Lesson two	_____	_____
Lesson three	_____	_____
Lesson four	_____	_____
Lesson five	_____	_____
Lesson six	_____	_____

WHAT YOU NEED

A piano, or a digital piano with 88 full-size weighted keys and a sustain pedal. An adjustable bench or stool, a footstool if your feet don't reach the floor, and a pencil.

WHEN YOU FINISH

Try the test paper on page 15 without looking back, then mark it with the key on page 16. After that, the theory packs take your note reading further.

Meet the piano

A piano is a large wooden case full of strings. Press a key and a felt hammer strikes them — so the piano is a string instrument and a percussion instrument at once. Upright or grand, the parts are the same.



Find each part on your own piano as you read.

LOOKING AFTER IT

Wash your hands before you play and close the fallboard after. Nothing to drink on top, ever. Keep it away from heaters, sunny windows and damp.

TUNING

A piano tuner visits once or twice a year — you never tune it yourself. A digital piano never needs tuning.

The piano

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Lid — the top cover; on a grand it props open to let the sound out</p> | <p>6 Strings — over two hundred; most notes have two or three strings each</p> |
| <p>2 Music desk — the ledge that holds your music</p> | <p>7 Dampers — felt pads that stop the strings sounding when you let go</p> |
| <p>3 Fallboard — the hinged cover that folds down over the keys</p> | <p>8 Soundboard — a wide, thin sheet of wood that makes the strings loud enough to hear</p> |
| <p>4 Keys — 88 of them — 52 white and 36 black</p> | <p>9 Frame — cast iron, strong enough to hold the strings' enormous pull</p> |
| <p>5 Hammers — felt-covered heads that strike the strings when you press a key</p> | |

The pedals, left to right

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>10 Soft pedal — on the left — makes the sound softer</p> | <p>12 Sustain pedal — on the right — lifts every damper, so notes ring on after you let go</p> |
| <p>11 Middle pedal — on a grand it holds chosen notes; on many uprights it mutes for practice</p> | |

Name that part

1 Write the name of the part that does each job.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|---|---------------------------------------|-------|
| a | Covers the keys when you finish | _____ | e | Holds your music | _____ |
| b | Strikes the strings | _____ | f | Makes the strings loud enough to hear | _____ |
| c | Stops the sound when you let go | _____ | g | The left-hand pedal | _____ |
| d | The right-hand pedal | _____ | h | Holds the strings' enormous pull | _____ |

2 True or false? Circle T or F.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a | A full-size piano has 88 keys. | T | F |
| b | Pressing a key makes a hammer strike the strings. | T | F |
| c | Tune the piano yourself whenever it sounds wrong. | T | F |
| d | The sustain pedal is the one on the left. | T | F |
| e | There are more white keys than black keys. | T | F |
| f | A drink on top of the piano is fine if you are careful. | T | F |

3 Why is the piano both a string instrument and a percussion instrument?

4 Ask your teacher, then fill in.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------|---|------------------------|-------|
| a | My piano is (upright, grand, digital) | _____ | c | My teacher's name | _____ |
| b | I will practise each day at | _____ | d | My first lesson was on | _____ |

Sitting, hand shape, and finger numbers

A good sound starts before you play a note. Set yourself up in this order every time, slowly, until it happens without thinking. Your teacher may change a detail to suit you — follow them.

Sitting

- 1 Centre the bench opposite middle C, and sit on its front half.
- 2 Set the height so your forearms are level with the keys.
- 3 Sit far enough back that your elbows are just in front of your body.
- 4 Feet flat on the floor — or on a footstool if they don't reach.

Hand shape

- 1 Let your arms hang loose, then lift your hands with their natural curve.
- 2 Curve your fingers as if holding a small ball.
- 3 Play on the fingertips; the thumb plays on the side of its tip.
- 4 Knuckles up, wrist level with the back of your hand, shoulders loose.

Finger numbers

1 Thumb	2 Index finger	3 Middle finger	4 Ring finger	5 Little finger
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Both hands use the same numbers, so both thumbs are 1 — pointing towards each other — and both little fingers are 5.

ARM WEIGHT

Let the weight of your arm sink into the key rather than jabbing with the finger. The key goes down, the hammer flies up, and the sound follows.

LEFT AND RIGHT

The right hand usually plays the higher notes, to the right of middle C; the left hand plays the lower ones. You will see why in lesson three.

Four things that go wrong, and the fix

Flat, straight fingers

Curve them and play on the tips.

Wrists drooping below the keys

Raise the bench, or lift the wrists level with the hand.

Knuckles caving in

Firm fingertips; let the knuckles stand up like a bridge.

Sitting so close your elbows are behind you

Slide the bench back.

Set-up check

1 Put these steps in order. Write 1 to 5 in the boxes.

- Check that your forearms are level with the keys.
- Centre the bench opposite middle C.
- Place your fingertips on the keys, wrists level.
- Sit on the front half of the bench, feet flat.
- Let your arms hang, then lift your hands with their curve.

2 Write the finger number for each finger.

a Thumb b Little c Middle d Index e Ring

3 What should each player change?

a Ali plays with flat, straight fingers.

b Maya's wrists droop below the level of the keys.

c Leo sits so close that his elbows are behind him.

d Priya's feet dangle in the air.

4 A week of set-up checks. Look at your hands and your seat before you practise, and tick each one you get right.

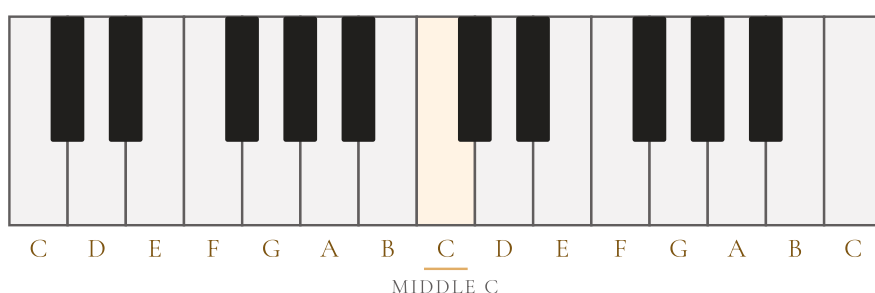
CHECK	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Bench opposite middle C							
Forearms level with the keys							
Feet flat, or on a footstool							
Curved fingers, on the tips							
Wrists level, shoulders loose							

The keyboard and middle C

Eighty-eight keys look alike at first, but the black keys make a pattern that tells you exactly where you are. Learn the pattern, and every key has a name.

Twos and threes

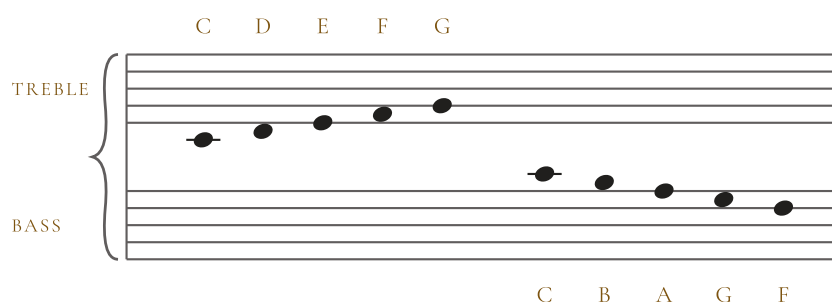
The black keys come in groups of two and three, all the way up. The white keys are named with seven letters, A B C D E F G, over and over. Every C sits just left of a group of two black keys; every F just left of a group of three.



Middle C is the C nearest the middle of the keyboard, usually right under the maker's name. Going right, notes get higher; going left, lower.

Two staves for two hands

Piano music is written on a *grand staff*: two staves joined by a brace. The top, treble staff is usually for the right hand; the bottom, bass staff for the left. Middle C sits on its own short *ledger line* between them — just below the treble staff, or just above the bass.



Treble lines from the bottom: E G B D F — *Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit*. Bass lines: G B D F A — *Good Boys Deserve Fudge Always*.

OCTAVES

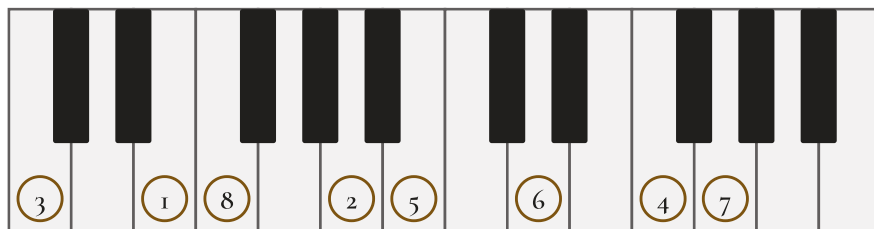
From one C to the next is an *octave* — eight white keys, counting both Cs. A full piano spans seven octaves and a little more, with eight Cs in all.

FIND IT BLIND

Close your eyes and run a hand along the black keys: two, three, two, three. Find every C, then every F, without looking.

Finding your way

- 1 Name each numbered key. Use the black keys to find your place.

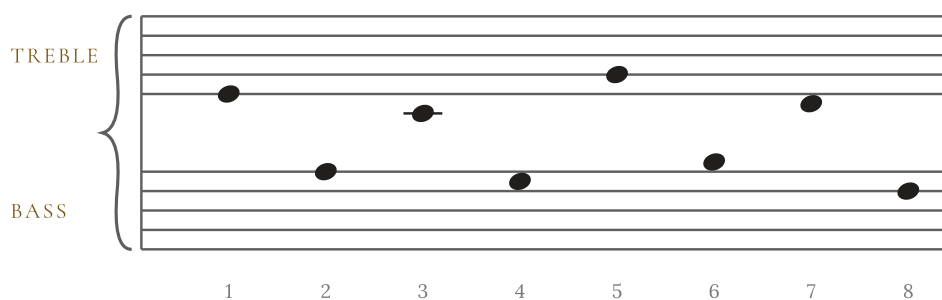


1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

- 2 Answer in one word, letter or number.

- a Which white key is just left of two black keys?
- b Which is just left of three black keys?
- c How many different letter names are there?
- d Which note sits on a ledger line between the staves?
- e Which hand usually reads the bass stave?
- f Going to the right, do notes get higher or lower?

- 3 Name each note on the grand stave.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

- 4 At the piano, play each of these and say its name aloud. Tick when you can do it without looking.

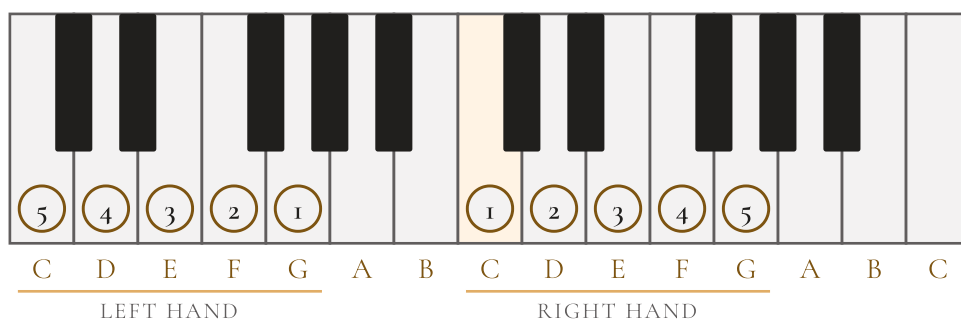
☐ Every C ☐ Every F ☐ Middle C, eyes shut

C position, both hands

Now both hands go on the keys. In a *hand position* each finger has a key of its own, so you can read and play without looking down. C position is the first one most pianists learn.

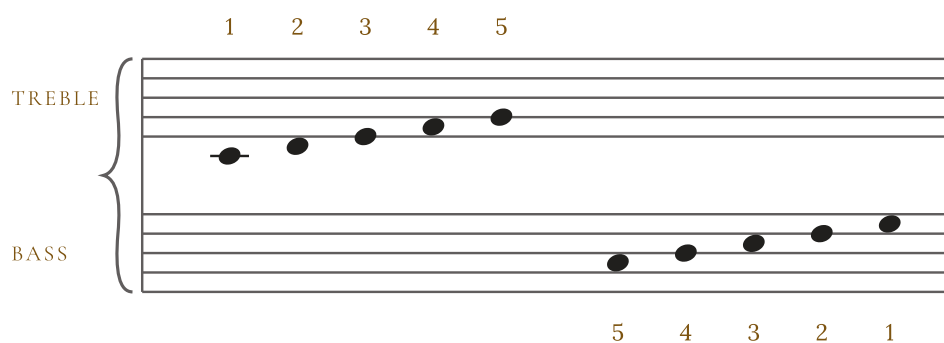
Where the fingers go

Right hand: thumb on middle C, and fingers 2 3 4 5 rest on D E F G. Left hand: little finger on the C below middle C, and fingers 4 3 2 1 rest on D E F G. Both hands play the same five notes, an octave apart.



C position on the grand staff

Finger numbers are printed above the right-hand notes and below the left-hand ones. The right hand counts up 1 2 3 4 5 from middle C; the left hand plays the same letters, C to G, but its fingers count down 5 4 3 2 1.



STEPS AND SKIPS

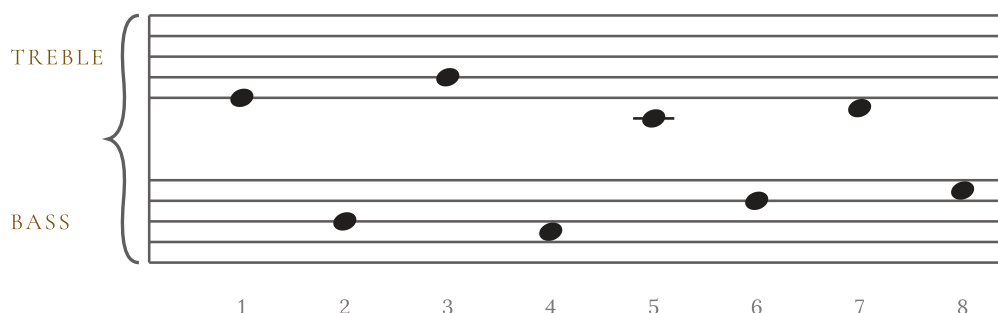
Moving to the very next key is a *step* – on the stave, line to space. Missing one key out is a *skip* – line to line, or space to space. Spot which it is before you play.

SAY IT, THEN PLAY IT

Before each note say its name, hand and finger – “E, right, three”. Keep your eyes on the music, not on your hands.

Name, hand, finger

- 1 For each note, write its name, which hand plays it, and its finger number in C position.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Note								
Hand								
Finger								

- 2 In C position, which note does each finger play?

a Right hand, finger 3

d Left hand, finger 1

b Left hand, finger 5

e Right hand, finger 1

c Right hand, finger 5

f Left hand, finger 3

- 3 Answer these.

a Which right-hand finger plays middle C?

b C up to E – a step or a skip?

c D up to E – a step or a skip?

d Which left-hand finger plays F?

- 4 Play C to G and back in C position, slowly, saying each note's name and finger. Tick when it is even and unhurried.

☐

Right hand

☐

Left hand

☐

Hands together

How long notes last

Where a note sits tells you *which* note to play. Its shape tells you *how long* to play it, counted in steady beats — like footsteps.

The note shapes

	Semibreve — an empty oval, no stem	4 beats
	Dotted minim — the dot adds half again	3 beats
	Minim — an empty oval with a stem	2 beats
	Crotchet — filled in, with a stem	1 beat
	Quavers — two to a beat, joined by a beam	½ beat each

In 4/4 time

The time signature **4/4** at the start means four crotchet beats in every bar. Barlines divide the music into bars; a double barline marks the end.

Count out loud, steadily, and keep counting through long notes — the beats you hold are shown in brackets below. Two quavers share one beat: say “1 &”.

Every note value has a matching *rest* — a silence of the same length. You still count through a rest.

Counting four bars

4

4

1 2 3 4 1 (2) 3 (4) 1 & 2 3 (4) 1 (2) (3) (4)

HOLD FOR THE FULL COUNT

A note lasts as long as you hold the key down. Keep a semibreve down for all four beats, then lift exactly as the next note goes down — no gaps, no early lifts.

TRY IT NOW

Clap the four bars above while counting aloud. Then play them on middle C with your right thumb, and on the C below with your left little finger.

Counting beats

1 Note sums. How many crotchet beats in total?

a minim + crotchet

d dotted minim + crotchet

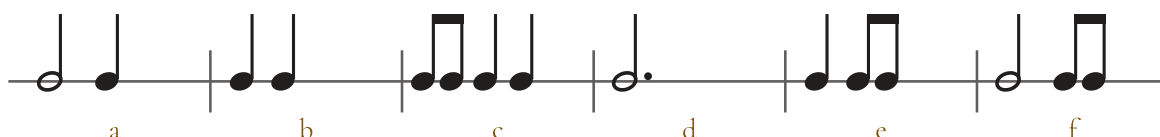
b one semibreve

e minim + minim + crotchet

c two quavers

f crotchet rest + minim

2 Each bar should hold four beats, but every one here is short. Write how many beats it has, then the one note that would finish it.



Beats

Beats

Beats

Beats

Beats

Beats

Add a

Add a

Add a

Add a

Add a

Add a

3 Write the counting under each note – 1, 2, 3, 4, with & for the second quaver and brackets for held beats.



4 Answer these.

a Which note do you hold down the longest?

b How many crotchet beats fill a bar of 4/4?

c How many quavers make a minim?

Playing marks, and your first tune

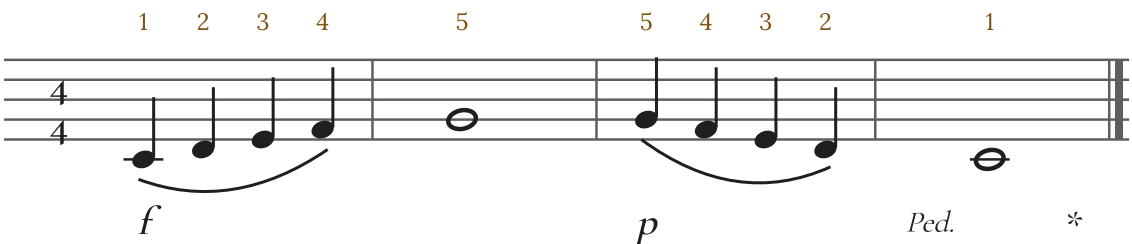
Piano music carries signs that tell your fingers how to play each note — smooth or short, loud or soft, held on or pedalled. With no mark at all, play each note for its full value.

	Slur	A curved line over or under different notes: play them smoothly, <i>legato</i> , each key held until the next goes down.
	Staccato	A dot above or below the note: play it short and detached — spring off the key.
	Accent	Play this note louder than the notes around it.
	Pause	Also called a fermata: hold the note longer than its value, until it feels finished.
<i>Ped.</i> *	Pedal	<i>Ped.</i> — press the sustain pedal with your right foot; * — let it up.
<i>f</i>	Forte	Loud — more arm weight into the keys.
<i>p</i>	Piano	Soft — a lighter touch. (It is also where the instrument's name comes from: <i>pianoforte</i> , soft-loud.)
	Repeat	Go back and play the passage again.

A warm-up, fully marked

Right hand in C position. Finger numbers sit above the stave; dynamics and the pedal mark sit below. There are no sharps or flats at the start, so this is C major — white keys only.

TREBLE



READ BEFORE YOU PLAY

Find your hand position from the first finger number. Count one bar out loud. Then play slowly — even, curved fingers are worth more than speed.

Mark it up

1 Name each sign.

A 	B 	C 	D <i>Ped.</i>	E <i>p</i>	F 
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2 *Hot Cross Buns*, a traditional tune, for the right hand in C position. Bar 1 is fingered. Write the finger number above every note in bars 2 to 4.

3 2 1

TREBLE



3 Now play it with your left hand in C position, an octave lower. Which left-hand fingers play E, D and C?

E D C

4 Answer these.

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| a | How do you play a note with a dot above it? | _____ |
| b | Which foot works the sustain pedal? | _____ |
| c | How are notes under a slur played? | _____ |
| d | What does a pause sign ask you to do? | _____ |

5 Play *Hot Cross Buns* with the fingering you wrote. Tick when you can play it without stopping.

☐ Right hand ☐ Left hand ☐ Hands together

Show what you know

Name _____ Score _____ / 30

QUESTION 1 · PARTS

5 marks

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------|---|----------------------|-------|
| a | Covers the keys | _____ | d | The right-hand pedal | _____ |
| b | Strikes the strings | _____ | e | Holds your music | _____ |
| c | Stops the sound | _____ | | | |

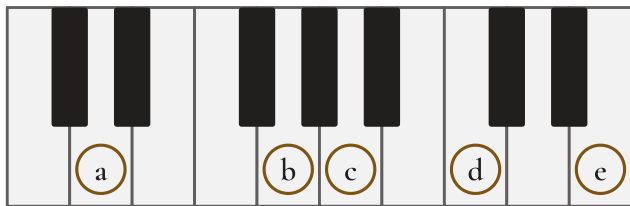
QUESTION 2 · SITTING AND HANDS

5 marks

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| a | Sit on the bench opposite middle C. | T | F | d | Wrists should droop below the keys. | T | F |
| b | Play with flat, straight fingers. | T | F | e | Forearms level with the keys. | T | F |
| c | The thumb is finger 1 in both hands. | T | F | | | | |

QUESTION 3 · NAME THE KEYS

5 marks

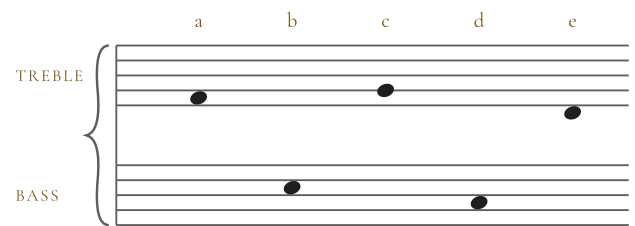


a b c d e

QUESTION 4 · C POSITION

5 marks

Under each note write its name, hand and finger — all three right for the mark.



QUESTION 5 · NOTE VALUES

5 marks

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|---|-------------|----------------------|---|----------------|----------------------|
| a | a minim | <input type="text"/> | c | a semibreve | <input type="text"/> | e | a dotted minim | <input type="text"/> |
| b | 2 crotchets + minim | <input type="text"/> | d | two quavers | <input type="text"/> | | | |

QUESTION 6 · SIGNS

5 marks

a 	b 	c 	d 	e 
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Answers

LESSON ONE · THE PARTS

1 a fallboard · b hammers · c dampers · d sustain pedal · e music desk · f soundboard · g soft pedal · h frame.

2 a T · b T · c F — only a piano tuner tunes a piano · d F — it is on the right · e T — 52 white, 36 black · f F — one spill can ruin the inside.

3 Its sound comes from strings, but they are struck by hammers, like a drum.

4 Your own answers.

LESSON TWO · SET-UP

1 In the order printed: 3, 1, 5, 2, 4.

2 a 1 · b 5 · c 3 · d 2 · e 4.

3 a Curve the fingers and play on the tips · b Raise the bench, or lift the wrists level with the hand · c Slide the bench back so the elbows are just in front · d Use a footstool.

4 Your own ticks.

LESSON THREE · THE KEYBOARD

1 1 E · 2 A · 3 C · 4 F · 5 B · 6 D · 7 G · 8 F.

2 a C · b F · c 7 · d Middle C · e Left · f Higher.

3 E A C G G B D F.

4 Your own ticks.

LESSON FOUR · C POSITION

1 1 E, right, 3 · 2 D, left, 4 · 3 G, right, 5 · 4 C, left, 5 · 5 C, right, 1 · 6 F, left, 2 · 7 D, right, 2 · 8 G, left, 1.

2 a E · b C · c G · d G · e C · f E.

3 a 1 · b A skip · c A step · d 2.

LESSON FIVE · NOTE VALUES

1 a 3 · b 4 · c 1 · d 4 · e 5 · f 3.

2 a 3, crotchet · b 2, minim · c 3, crotchet · d 3, crotchet · e 2, minim · f 3, crotchet.

3 1 · 2 & · 3 (4) | 1 (2 3) · 4.

4 a Semibreve · b 4 · c 4.

LESSON SIX · PLAYING MARKS

1 A staccato · B pause (fermata) · C slur · D sustain pedal down · E piano, soft · F repeat.

2 Bar 2: 3 2 1 · bar 3: 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 · bar 4: 3 2 1.

3 E 3 · D 4 · C 5.

4 a Short and detached · b The right · c Smoothly joined, legato · d Hold the note longer than its value.

TEST PAPER · 30 MARKS

Q1 a fallboard · b hammers · c dampers · d sustain pedal · e music desk.

Q2 a T · b F · c T · d F · e T.

Q3 a D · b G · c A · d C · e E.

Q4 a F, right, 4 · b E, left, 3 · c G, right, 5 · d C, left, 5 · e D, right, 2.

Q5 a 2 · b 4 · c 4 · d 1 · e 3.

Q6 a slur · b staccato · c forte · d pause · e accent.

25 or more — you are ready for your first pieces; try the Beginner Theory Pack next. **Under 25** — go back to the lessons where you lost marks, then try again next week.