

What should an adult be able to do in a year?

I'm going to base my answers on the following hypothetical student: *You practice 60-90 minutes a day at least 6 days a week.* If you practice 30 minutes daily, your progress will be cut approximately in half, probably more.

Other criteria for this example: you are starting from scratch as an adult; maybe you had some lessons (piano or other instrument) as a kid but have forgotten everything. You have a real piano to practice on. You're motivated to learn and have average "talent." You see your teacher once a week (for an hour lesson).

After a year, I would call you an advanced beginner or an early intermediate, if there must be a title put on things. (Note: I do not consider *Für Elise* to be early intermediate literature, by the way; to play it all and to play it well, it's really lower advanced; the first section standing alone might be termed early intermediate.) More specifically:

Reading

You would be able to read fluently from C (two octaves below middle c) to c'' (2 octaves above), including sharps, flats, double sharps, double flats, and naturals.

You would have started a program of sight-reading at about 6-9 months of study. You'd read 1-2 pages daily, going for accuracy only and forgetting about speed.

I would have you reading key signatures by now and would expect you to remember altered notes 70% of the time without writing them in, but I certainly wouldn't object if you needed to write in some of them you kept forgetting (but not all, at this point).

Counting

You'd be able to count fluently quarter/half/whole/dotted-half/double whole notes. You'd be about to start learning eighth-notes You wouldn't be undone by a meter change or hemiola (or a key change).

Technique

You'd be working from Schmitt and Hanon. Also chromatic scales. We'd probably be starting an octave exercise regimen soon if we hadn't already. When you start playing Clementi sonatinas, we'd start diatonic scales. We'd have been playing hand-over-hand triad arpeggios since month one, and I'd expect you to have finished the major group, be somewhere near the end of the minors or even part-way through the augmenteds (diminished is last). There are 48 triads, total.

You would be fluent in playing staccato in one hand and legato in the other and vice versa. Also the same with forte and piano. I doubt I would have said anything at this point about voicing, though we might have played Burgmüller's "Clear Stream" (from

Op. 100) if you could read eighth-notes already (which is unlikely). Perhaps we'd have touched on portato, but probably not.

You'd have good control over dynamics, although playing softly would probably still be difficult at pp and ppp - - but then, that's tough for us all! You would be able to play smooth cres. and dim. and be able to do that in one hand while holding the other at a steady dynamic level.

You'd understand the basics of fingering and be unafraid to toss out the editor's suggestions.

Pedaling

You'd have begun use of syncopated pedaling, although you would not be too experienced with it. We'd have discussed touch pedal, too.

Practice Techniques

You'd know how to use a metronome to speed up a piece systematically. You'd know how to select a speed for the goal you have. I'd have harped again and again about working on a small section instead of roaring through the whole piece! You'd know how to practice efficiently by setting goals for your practice. You'd use other practice techniques, such as blocking an arpeggiated piece. You'd know about rhythms and when it's good to use them as a practice tool.

We'd have talked about being stymied and why you seem to play better at home.

Theory

You'd know how to build any of the 48 triads, even if you hadn't played them all yet. You'd be able to recognize printed triads in root position easily (and maybe some inversions, too, but probably not), whether blocked or arpeggiated or scrambled. Also I-V-I patterns. We'd be beginning to talk about V-I cadences and structure. ABA form. Rondo form. Variation form. You'd be able to tell the key of most any piece you played (secret: what is the triad in the last measure?). We may have talked about modulation and transposition, but not in any fashion other than to point out that the key of the music changed even though the key signature didn't.

We might have discussed the harmonic series and temperaments, but this isn't likely unless you're a physicist or acoustician or otherwise had an interest in this. Maybe I would have begun discussion of the circle of fifths (although you probably wouldn't understand it fully yet), why certain keys have sharps and flats, and how scales are built. You would have derived all intervals in half-steps and would have written down all possible names for them. For example: an augmented unison is the same as a minor second; and a major third sounds the same as a diminished 4th

Ear-Training

You'd easily recognize consonance/dissonance and octave/not-octave. I wouldn't expect you be able to recognize harmonic or melodic intervals by ear. You probably could tell the difference between a major and minor triad, although if you had not already finished the majors and begun the minor triad arpeggios, such as discussion would be meaningless.

Literature

We would have done material from all musical periods by now: Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionistic, and Contemporary. You'd be able to play contrapuntal music as well as chordal.

Ornamentation

You'd be quite fluent with mordents and turns and pretty comfortable with trills, including those with Nachschläge (the quick notes that follow the repercussions of the two trill notes). We'd perhaps have touched on whether "those little [single] notes" are grace notes, acciaccaturas, appoggiaturas, or quick appoggiaturas, but maybe not. We would not have discussed trills with turned beginnings, although we might have touched on French Baroque notion of *inégalité*. (That is, "unequalness" of the smallest prevailing note value; usually this is the eighth-note. Played in this style, instead of two eighth-notes, you'd play one dotted-eighth and one sixteenth for that quarter-note value. There are different types of unequalness, but this is the form 90% of French Baroque music takes).

Performance

You would have played in at least one formal piano recital with my other adult students. To dispel fear of public performance, I would have asked you to make it a point to play for guests in your home. I also would have encouraged you to attend the monthly piano parties my adults hold to give themselves the opportunity to play for "an audience."

Remember what I said at the beginning of this litany: All this is based on *60-90 minutes' daily practice*, which, in turn, correlates with speed of progress.

Ask your Instructor what you can reasonably assume to be able to do in a year. Be prepared to give the teacher the minimum practice time you will have to devote on a *daily* basis.