

ELBOW MOTION

The Role of Elbow Motion in Piano Technique

Elbow motion is essential for smooth transitions across the keyboard. It helps to execute large leaps in a fast and accurate way.

Elbow motion allows you to shift positions quickly and helps prevent the build-up of tension or stiffness in the wrist. Without this motion, the hand is often forced to stretch or hold an extended position, which gradually leads to discomfort. Over time, this creates inefficient angles in the wrist and causes the hand to carry more strain than it should.

As you play, your hand and wrist are constantly moving. If you lead these movements with the hand alone—without the support of the elbow—your hand becomes the “head” of the whole arm. This puts pressure on the wrist and fingers, disrupting the natural flow of motion. By allowing the elbow to lead during position changes, you bring your hand into each new place in a relaxed and balanced way. The hand simply follows, free of tension and effort.

The same applies when playing leaps.

If the entire arm jumps as a single, heavy block, the motion feels unstable and tense. But when the elbow initiates the leap with a quick, light gesture, the forearm follows effortlessly—like a soft tail—without fixation.

Letting the elbow guide both shifts and leaps helps the whole arm stay integrated. It lightens the hand, stabilizes motion, and keeps your technique secure.



FINGERING

Fingering Notation

Establishing fingering is a foundational step in learning a piece. Without it, it's difficult to identify position changes or develop consistent muscle memory.

Write your fingering directly into the score—this not only reduces confusion but also accelerates the learning process. Once you've chosen a fingering, fixing it in the score helps stabilize your physical approach and avoid unnecessary re-learning.

*The goal isn't to find the "perfect" fingering, but to clearly commit to one.
What matters most is clarity and consistency.*

Clear fingering also plays a crucial role in mental practice.

When you read the notes and imagine the music internally, your mind will naturally associate certain fingers with each note. This association may be subtle, but it's essential.

If the fingering isn't defined in your mind, your mental image of the passage will feel vague—and when it comes time to play, translating your inner rehearsal into sound will be less fluid and more effortful.

Going forward, I recommend keeping two copies of your score:

- A "working" score, where you freely mark fingering, position changes, phrasing, and form as you explore the piece.
- A "practice" score, where you neatly copy your final markings.

This visual clarity supports mental clarity—and both are essential to confident, efficient learning.

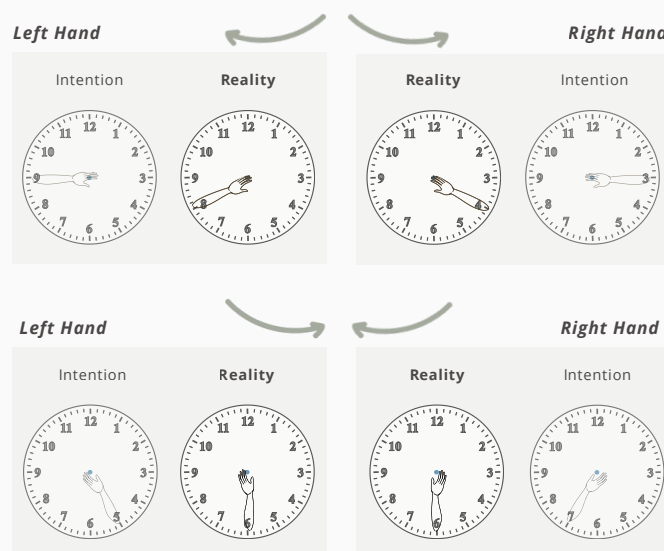
A Clock-Based Approach to Elbow Motion

Keep your forearm and hand aligned in a straight line—like the hand of a clock.

It's important to recognize the difference between your *mental intention* and your *actual physical movement*. To cultivate a broad, flowing elbow motion, imagine reaching further than you physically do. This mental extension helps open the gesture while keeping the body relaxed.

For example:

When moving outward, aim mentally for 3 o'clock (RH) and 9 o'clock (LH), but expect your arm to actually reach closer to 4 and 8 o'clock to stay relaxed.



When moving inward, aim for 7 (RH) and 5 o'clock (LH), but expect to land around 6 o'clock with both hands.

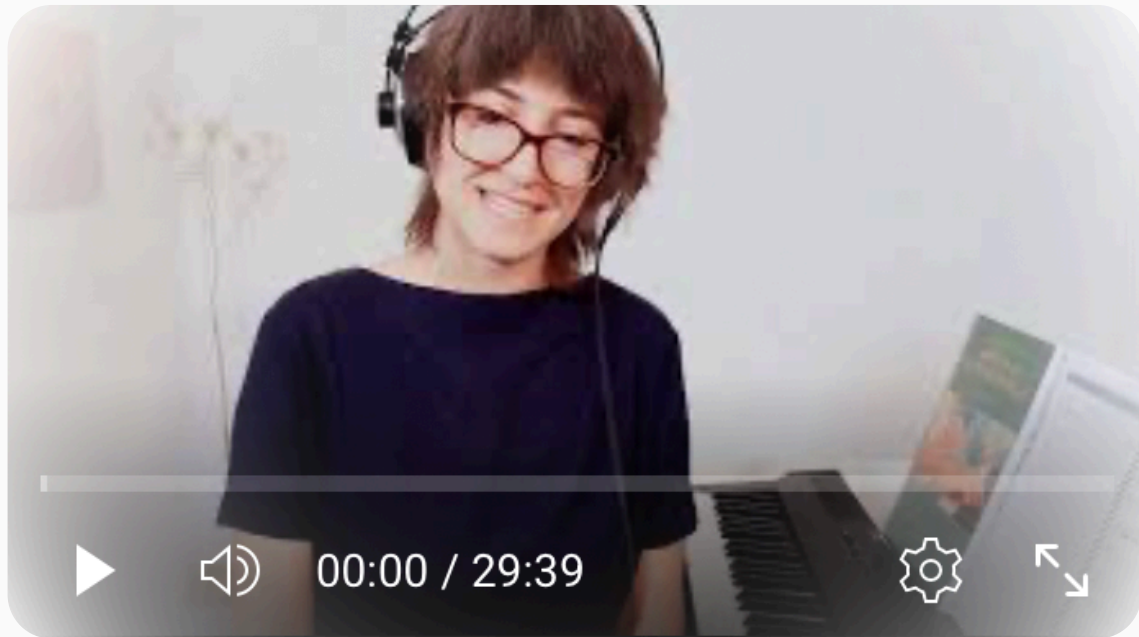
This approach helps avoid awkward angles and unnecessary tension, allowing the motion to stay smooth, centered, and natural.

Key Release and Elbow Motion Across Tempos

Release each note with a quick, light touch, making sure your elbow motion remains swift and effortless—regardless of the tempo.

Reserve 3D 'roll and double swing' motions for very slow tempos (around one note per second), where full amplitude is possible. As the tempo increases, the motion naturally becomes more 2D. The faster you play, the lighter and quicker the key release must be, with minimal effort and maximum ease between positions.

OPEN LESSONS





Elbow motion

by The Art of Piano Technique — PianoWell System

Playlist • Public • 26 videos • 273 views