

## PIANO

# 10 Things You Should Know About the Piano

By Hoffman Academy Team

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Learn how many keys on a piano, all the piano key notes – including the amount of black and white keys on a piano – and so much more!

How well do you know the piano? Here are 10 things about the piano that everyone should know!

## 1. How many keys on a piano keyboard?

The standard piano has 88 keys: 52 white keys and **36 blacks keys**. Keyboards can have between 25 and 88, with many clocking in at 61. *Fun fact:* The **Imperial Bösendorfer**, a specialty grand piano built by the Bösendorfer company, has *ninety-seven* keys – a total of 8 full octaves!

## 2. Why are piano keys black and white?

Keys on a piano (like other keyboard instruments) are arranged in patterns of black and white keys so that we can more easily identify them. Why are keys on a piano black and white? Because of the original materials used to make them: ebony and ivory. (Hence the phrase, “Tickle the ivories!”) Today, the wooden keys are coated in colored plastic, but the traditional coloring continues. *Fun fact:* until the mid-19th century, the colors were reversed!

## 3. How many keys in an octave?

An octave is the span between, say, a C and the next C – a total of 8 tones (CDEFGABC). However, if you count the exact number of keys, including black keys, you'll find 13!

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## 4. Is the piano a string instrument or a percussion instrument?

The answer is: Both! Percussion instruments involve one item striking another to create sounds. String instruments are instruments that, well, have strings. When the strings vibrate, either through plucking (like a guitar), bowing (like a violin), or striking (like a piano), they create sound. The piano contains hammers that strike metal strings, making it part of both categories. Sometimes it's also classified as a “keyboard instrument” along with the **organ**, **harpichord**, and **clavichord**.

## 5. How many strings are on the piano?

Acoustic pianos have metal strings inside. When you press a key, a hammer hits the string, causing it to vibrate. That is what makes the sound. Most of the piano keys have 3 strings, though the lowest have just one or two. As a result, the average piano has around 230 strings total.

## 6. How about where the piano came from? **Who invented the piano?**

Bartolomeo Cristofori invented the piano around the year 1700 in Italy. Think about it: the piano has been around since before the American Revolution!

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## 7. Where did the piano get its name?

The piano's original name was the *gravicembalo col piano e forte*. Roughly translated from Italian, that means “keyboard instrument that plays soft and loud.” Over the years, it was shortened to *pianoforte* or *fortepiano*, and eventually, just to *piano*.

## 8. What are the piano key notes called?

The white keys are named after letters or solfege syllables, depending on which country you're in. White keys are also referred to as the “natural” keys. If using letters, they are named from A through G, and then the series of seven repeats itself. The black keys are named “sharp” or “flat” after the white key they are closest to, so each black key actually has two names. For example: If you go from C to the black key on its right, you have C sharp. If you go from D to the same black key (now on the left), you have D flat. Which name you use depends on what scale you're using or what is written on the staff.

## 9. What on earth is the middle pedal for?!

We've done an **entire post** on the pedals! The short answer: It depends on the piano. On grand pianos, the middle pedal holds only the **piano notes** being played when the pedal is pressed, leaving any notes played afterward “dry.” On some uprights, it will only sustain notes from the bass section of the keyboard. A few upright models, like the **Yamaha U1**, have a completely different purpose for their middle pedal. It acts like a “mute,” quieting the entire instrument by moving a long piece of felt between the hammers and the strings. That way, you can practice normally without worrying about getting too loud!

## 10. Why is piano so popular?

This could be a blog post of its own, because there's a fascinating history involved in the answer! Simply put, it's one of the easiest instruments to learn. Anyone can press a key to make it sound, and the visual layout makes it easier to learn which keys are which notes. Other instruments require skills like breath control and precise finger placement just to play a note correctly. Additionally, you can play almost ANY music on the piano, even music originally written for other instruments! What have you always wanted to know about the piano, or about music in general? Did any of these surprise you? Let us know in the comments below!

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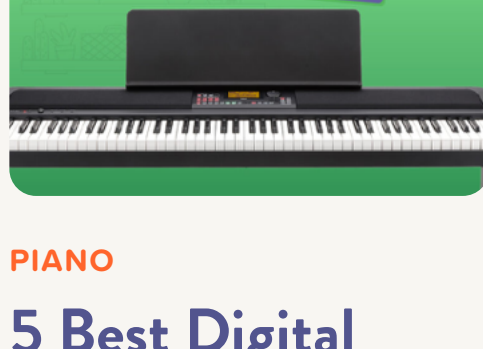
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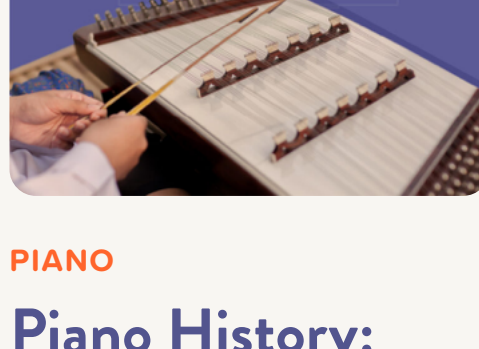


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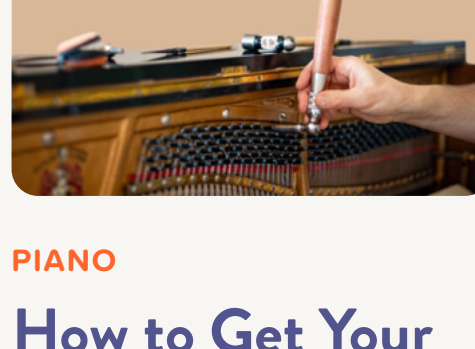


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