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### ***How do I make hands do different things on the piano?***

This is a subject I'm asked a lot, both online and offline. So I've got 5 piano exercises to share with you, in the hopes of remedying the situation. ( Here is the [sheet music](#) you can download.)

# Hand independence on the piano

Moving hands differently (i.e. hand independence) is one of the biggest challenges in piano, for both beginners and advanced players. For beginners, the challenge is making sure your hands don't copy each other (where one goes, the other follows).

For advanced students, it's being able to make 3 or 4 part melodies and harmonies come through clearly, with correct volume and phrasing.

An example I like to use is: Can you pat your head and rub your belly at the same time?

That's hand independence. That's basically what we have to do x100 on the piano.

Today's piano exercises are made for relative beginners. I wouldn't give them to someone just starting – if you can play a C major scale with both hands fairly well, then you'll be able to handle these exercises.

Just to make sure you're at that level, I did a video on [5-finger scales](#), which you can check out here. Once you've got the hang of those, check out this video on the [C scale](#). In that video we don't do the C scale with both hands, but it walks you through the finger patterns if you need a refresher.

## Piano Exercises

Today we'll look through each of the 5 piano exercises, and talk about their purpose – why I bothered to include them.

I'll also show you how to play them, of course! You can also review my [hand independence](#) video walking you through each of these exercises.

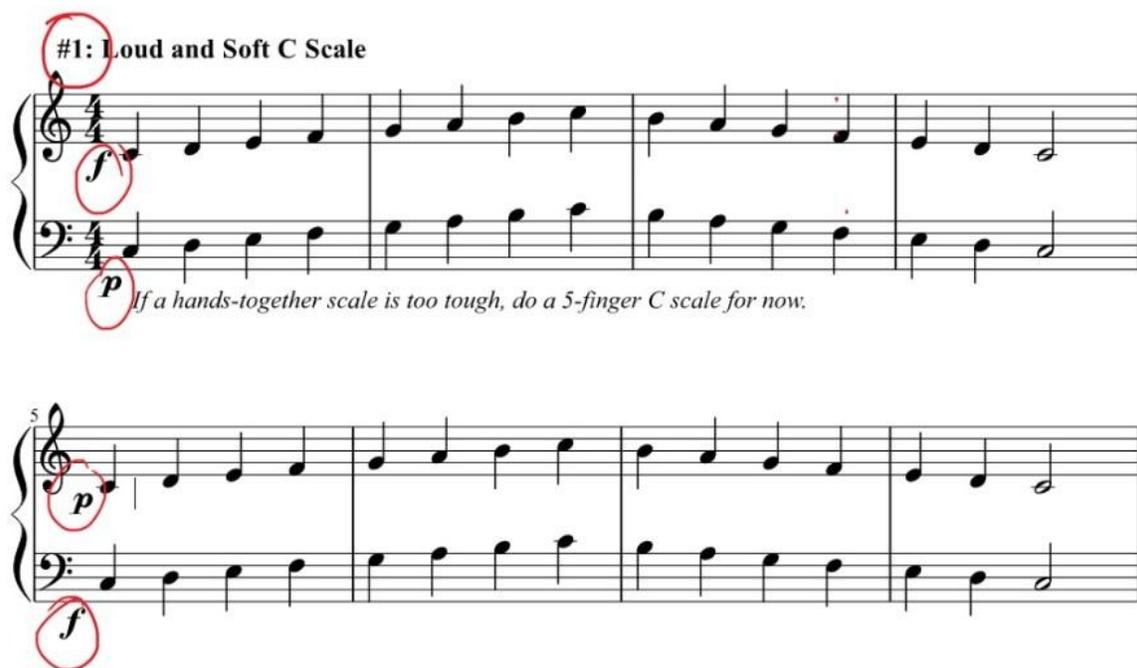
# Piano exercise #1: Dynamics

The first exercise is a two-handed scale. But instead of playing C scale with both hands and calling it a day, we're going to go a step further.

In the first part of the piano exercise, the right hand is loud while the left hand is quiet. This is very difficult!

The roles reverse in the second line (left loud, right quiet).

**#1: Loud and Soft C Scale**



*If a hands-together scale is too tough, do a 5-finger C scale for now.*

I've used this simple but powerful exercise in my studio a lot. The reason is that skilled playing often requires your hands to be at different volume levels.

## Why learn this technique?

Like say you're playing a basic melody/chords song. What's the most important part? The melody, of course. The melody needs to ring out

– if it gets lost in the chords, no one will know what song you're playing. So you need to play the melody louder.

A lot of people don't know how to do this – it certainly doesn't come naturally to most of us. And sometimes it can be very difficult to learn the technique *while* you're also learning a song. So I'll have my students do this finger exercise.

## Piano Exercise #2: Legato and Staccato

This exercise is similar to #1 in a couple of ways. It centers around a C major scale, played by both hands. But instead of changing the volume, this time we're playing *legato and staccato*.

**#2: Slur and Staccato**

I teach this technique about as commonly as #1. It's simple to understand – one hand plays smooth while the other plays staccato – but difficult to execute. Your hands will really want to copy each other. Give it time, and don't neglect this one – so many pieces require us to use this kind of coordination for them to sound right.

# Piano Exercise #3: Canon

Next, we're going to go in a completely different direction and take a look at a canon. A canon in music is where one hand leads, and then the other one copies it exactly, usually by a delay of one bar.

**#3. Childhood melody in Canon Form**



The image shows a musical score for exercise #3, titled "#3. Childhood melody in Canon Form". It consists of two staves of music. The first staff (treble clef) contains a melody of eighth notes with slurs. The second staff (bass clef) contains a similar melody, starting one bar later than the first staff. Handwritten red annotations include the word "same" above the second staff and "time" with an arrow pointing to the beginning of the second staff.

*For more variation, try starting with the left hand. Or try a different familiar melody.*



The image shows a musical score for exercise #3, titled "#3. Childhood melody in Canon Form". It consists of two staves of music. The first staff (treble clef) contains a melody of eighth notes with slurs. The second staff (bass clef) contains a similar melody, starting one bar later than the first staff.

So as you can see here, we first do the tune in the right hand (which is Frere Jaques), and then the left hand comes in with the tune a bar later.

Again, it's easy to understand, but difficult to execute. Being able to master this technique with simple kids' songs will take you in the direction of evolving to Bach's inventions, which are pretty much a staple collection of piano teachers and students everywhere.

Because once you master the inventions, you can master the sinfonias. And once you've mastered the sinfonias, you can master the Crème de la Crème of piano music – **Bach's Preludes and Fugues**.

# Piano Exercise #4: Different Rhythms

Our fourth piano exercise switches up the rhythm. We've simplified the pattern for this one – just a C 5-finger scale instead of a full octave scale – but if you master this one, challenge yourself by playing it a full octave.

**#4: Different Rhythms**

try swinging the 8th notes

This one is tricky because one hand is moving steadily, while another hand is doing dotted and 8th notes. You'll notice that the 8th notes don't align with anything – they're played *in between* the quarter notes, and that is the main challenge of this exercise.

## Piano Exercise #5: Articulation

Our fifth and final exercise today is a variation on #4. It's the exact same notes – you've got a steady rhythm in one hand, and a dotted/8th rhythm in the other – but the articulation changes.

**#5: Different Rhythms and Articulations**

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In my mind, this is the most difficult of all the exercises, because it's bringing in components of the other ones. One hand is staccato while the other one isn't. You're doing slurs in one hand, but not constant slurs – short slurs that require a break in the sound between each set.

I didn't mark this on the score, but you can make it more challenging by also playing one hand louder or quieter than the other.

## Hanon exercises

Just a quick note on Hanon exercises – I know a lot of people really enjoy these, I'm personally not a huge fan of them – I'd rather do finger exercises that still have musical value. But some people swear by them.

## Czerny exercises

Another option are Czerny's many, *many* finger exercise collections. I quite like these, as you learn various piano techniques through songs, not just repetitive patterns. I've done some [videos on Czerny](#) and his exercises, if you'd like to go beyond the 5 piano exercises we talked about today.

If you're interested and learning more about Hanon and Czerny and why I prefer one and not the other, you can check out the [Hanon vs. Czerny Showdown video](#).

## Complete beginner

If you're basically a complete beginner, and these piano exercises are still a little much for you (and no shame if that's the case!), you can also check out the play-through video I did on [Bartok's Mikrokosmos](#) – it's a collection of pieces starting from a complete beginner level, getting progressively more challenging.

They've got a really *interesting* sound (you'll get it if you know anything about Bartok) and they're not for everyone, but they're also great for getting your hands independent.

# Conclusion

If you're well past the beginner stage, and all of these exercises are way too easy for you, the gold standard of hand independence training are **Bach's 2-part inventions**. A 2-part invention is basically where one hand leads, and the other hand follows. Kind of like an advanced form of Exercise #3.

His inventions are around a grade 7-8 level, and are quite difficult if you've never spent much time with Baroque music, or music where you have to do drastically different things with your hands.

Thanks for stopping by today, and I'll catch you next time!

xo,

Allysia