

Lesson 4: Default Touch Quality

When you depress a key on the piano, you have the option of using a smaller amount of force (speed and pressure) or a greater amount of force. If you use more force, you will get a louder sound. If you use less force, you will get a softer sound.

If you routinely play your piano with significantly more force than necessary (“pounding”), it will cause your piano to be out of tune sooner than normal.

Unless the music being played indicates otherwise, you should use a moderate amount of force. The note should be clear but not overbearing – make sure to push down with just enough force to get a clean sound, but not any harder. This "default" or "normal" level of force creates a consistently strong but pleasant sound.

Legato is a Latin term meaning “joined up” – in other words, a quality of playing that has a smooth, connected feeling. To play “legato”, release one note at the exact moment you play the next note -- in other words, replace one finger with a different finger. There should be no gaps (choppy sound) and no overlaps (muddy sound).

This is the "default" or "normal" way to play – technically speaking, you should play differently only when the music specifically indicates otherwise.

For the Younger Student

New vocabulary: **moderate, legato**

"Your playing can be loud, soft or moderate"

- 1) Have your child practice creating loud sounds and soft sounds on the piano – maybe even emphasize the contrast between loud and soft with other mechanisms such as singing or clapping.
- 2) Have him/her practice using moderate force on the piano – emphasize the idea that this is the "normal" volume used in piano playing.

"Your playing can be choppy, muddy or legato"

- 1) Have your child practice playing a series of adjacent keys in a "choppy" manner (with gaps of silence between the notes). Then, have him/her practice playing a series of adjacent keys in a "muddy" manner (where one key is still being held down when the next key is depressed and the sounds overlap).

He/she may continue holding down the keys once he/she has played them until he/she is holding them all down at the end. You could encourage him/her to hold down a maximum of one and two keys at a time (just at the point of overlap). This better demonstrates the "muddy" concept and is also an excellent opportunity to improve his/her finger strength and dexterity.

- 2) Ask him/her to close his/her eyes (or move to another spot away from the piano) – then, you play some notes, alternating between choppy and muddy sounds – have him/her identify the manner in which you are playing each time.
- 3) Have him/her practice playing "legato" – emphasize the idea that this is the "normal" manner used in piano playing.