



How to Shop for a Digital Piano Keyboard

Welcome to Cassia's Piano Music Studio! We are so excited for you to begin lessons. For those who are new to playing the piano, it is important to have a good instrument available at home in order to have consistent and enjoyable progress towards your musical goals. Some people may choose an acoustic (or traditional) piano. For others, this choice might not be right. A digital piano keyboard is a wonderful alternative - it may be hooked up to headphones for quiet practicing, and may also take up less space and be easier to take home or move from place to place.

There are a lot of instruments on the market that are inferior quality, or don't have all of the features that you will need in order to refine your playing technique and explore new ideas. Here are a few tips to help you to select a keyboard that you will be able to enjoy for years to come.

1. What Size?

Keyboards come in a lot of different shapes and sizes. We care about the **number of keys**, and the **width of the keys**. We recommend a minimum of **61 keys**, ranging all the way up to **88 keys** (the number on a real acoustic piano). Please be careful to note that your keyboard also has **standard width** keys. This means that the white keys should be right around 23.5mm wide across the wide edge towards the player.

Before bringing your new keyboard home, be sure to look around and find a quiet corner where it can be placed - away from television/radio or other loud noises and distractions, and out of the way of foot traffic. Measure the entire width of the instrument, plus a couple of extra inches on the left and right side. Be sure to leave room for a chair or bench in front.

2. What Features?

Keyboards sold today often list a dazzling array of included features. You should avoid light-up keys, flashing lights, or other visual distractions. You won't need any built-in lessons or learning aids, and these could lead to confusion or difficulty following the your lesson materials - be sure you can turn these features off if they cannot be avoided. Look for a headphone jack if quiet practices are important. Having a place to plug in a sustain pedal is also important for long-term use as a student progresses.

Most importantly, look for a keyboard that has **touch sensitive** keys. This means that a hard key press will result in a loud noise, and a soft touch will lead to a quiet one. **Fully weighted** keys are even better, meaning that they keys offer resistance to touch in a manner similar to an acoustic piano. This is important for building finger strength and dexterity, but is not always necessary for the first year or two.

3. What Price?

Price is going to vary quite a bit depending on the features that are important to you, but I suggest that you expect to spend **no less than 2-3 months' worth of lessons** on this essential piece of equipment. Whether students are enrolled in ice hockey or dance, there will be costs associated with obtaining the necessary equipment, and piano is no different in this respect. There are many inferior instruments on the market that could potentially cost less, but without the features mentioned earlier, they will not allow a student to gain the muscle memory and auditory experiences necessary to progress in their musicianship. It is important to note that buying a substandard keyboard at the beginning will result in upgrade costs down the road that could be avoided if you buy a sufficiently featured instrument from the beginning. However, as long as students are aware of and capable of absorbing future costs, it is perfectly fine to practice on a smaller and simpler instrument in the beginning.

4. Are Brands a Factor?

For many years, **Yamaha** and **Casio** have been considered the frontrunners for digital keyboard production, with **Roland** coming in as a challenger. These days, I would also add in **Williams Allegro** and **Alesis** to my list of trusted brands. Why do brands matter? When purchasing a keyboard, you should try to purchase the best quality for the price. Long standing brands usually remain popular because they continue to deliver consistent quality over their competitors. Unlike acoustic pianos, digital keyboards can often be difficult or expensive to repair. It is therefore very important to select an instrument that is made from quality parts that will not break easily or wear down too quickly over time. In the case of breakage, you may qualify for repairs under a warranty, but a warranty from an unknown brand may not be reliable or prompt, resulting in frustration and loss of practice time over weeks or months as you attempt to resolve the problem. Trust me, going with a well known brand will give you the best chance of having a superior practice instrument in your home for years to come.

5. Other Considerations

In addition to the instrument itself, you will also need a **stand or table** to place it on, and **someplace to sit**. Keyboards can range from only a few pounds to more than 50, so be sure to purchase a stand that is strong and stable enough to support your instrument without breaking or dropping it on the ground. Ideally, the height of both the stand and the chair should be adjustable in order to have the correct ratio for the player, and this is especially important for a child who is still growing. Having correct distances is very important to support proper ergonomics and avoid fatigue or injury while playing. I suggest that you plan to leave your keyboard and chair or bench up permanently so that height need not be adjusted every day before practicing.

A keyboard will need a power source, usually either **batteries** or an **AC adapter**. If using batteries, be sure to have a backup set in a nearby drawer, or opt for rechargeable batteries. A proper set of **headphones** and/or **amplifier** may be necessary in order for sound to be produced by the instrument, although most modern keyboards come with built in speakers. Be sure to check on both of these requirements prior to purchasing your keyboard. As a student progresses in their study, they will eventually need one or more **sustain pedals**. Your keyboard should also have a strong **music stand** to hold sheet music and books. On some models, this is flimsy and may need to be reinforced or replaced.

Finally, there is something to be said for personal choice. We want for your experience practicing piano in your home to be a good one, and that means choosing the instrument that looks, feels, and sounds the best to *you!* Even very advanced concert pianists have their own brand and model preferences, and there is no right or wrong answer provided you find an instrument that will meet our minimum requirements of **61+ full sized keys** and at least **touch sensitive** if not fully weighted. Shopping for a keyboard can be a lot of fun, and we suggest you take your time testing out different models in person before making your final choice.
Good luck, and happy shopping!