

True or False?

1) “My 4 year old is really interested in piano: he plays every time when we come to Grandma's house.
He is ready for piano lessons.”

- Maybe yes, maybe no. If a child plays a familiar tune, probably yes. But when a child plays random keys on the instrument, he experiments with sounds and even can express some mood (quiet, peaceful – or loud, aggressive), but may not be ready for STRUCTURED lessons yet. Is he really ready to follow instructions for 30 minutes? Another factor is fine motor coordination. A child has to be able to recognize and isolate each finger on demand. Most four year-olds are not ready for this.

2) “My child cannot sing a single recognizable tune. She's definitely tone-deaf. **No point teaching her piano.”**

- Most probably it's not true, because a person (either a child, or an adult) who cannot sing may actually have a good ear. What she is missing is coordination between her ear and vocal chords. It may happen because of insufficient exposure to singing, or – very often – because of hearing negative comments, “Oh I hate your voice” or even “Can you please stop, I am tired and cannot hear it anymore.” Even one comment like this is enough to make a child believe she cannot sing. Actual physical deficiency that would be a reason for “tone-deafness” is very rare, 4 in 1000 people.

3) “Piano is great for brain development. **The earlier to start, the better.”**

- Piano and music in general is really great for brain development. Research shows that music lessons significantly improve language development and spatial reasoning, the area that is responsible for math and engineering aptitude. The most impressive experiment consisted of the following: A regular preschool class was divided into three groups. All three were taught a standard pre-school curriculum, but one group had music (not piano) lessons every day, another group had age-appropriate computer instruction, and a third group didn't have any “extra” instruction. After 9 months all three groups were re-tested for spatial reasoning (puzzles). The music group showed improvement of 34% compared to both “computer” and “no-extra-activities” groups.
However, if formal lessons are started too early, it's very probably that a child may lose interest before she will learn anything. A big percentile of drop-outs is due to starting too early. Another thing to consider is HOW young a beginner is taught. If a young child is being taught using a traditional method book approach, she can lose interest very quickly because traditional method books are reading-based, while a young child needs a strong aural foundation prior to reading, similar to mastering conversational language prior to reading.

As a rule, 6 year old children are ready for traditional lessons, and children younger than 4 are not ready. Between 4 and 6, their readiness varies. However, many parents want to start early – before school work becomes more time-consuming and a child gets involved in sports and other activities. So many parents ask for a preliminary assessment where different aspects can be evaluated: attention, fine motor coordination, steady beat feeling and abstract thinking, to assure that a young child is ready to start a successful, long-lasting learning.

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