



Suggestions for Testing a Piano



Does each note in the scale make sound? Does each key sound like one note?

As a home service piano technician, I frequently find myself interacting with people that play the piano at vastly varying degrees of skill. I work with people who have had their first piano lesson only the day before to professional pianists that have been playing for decades. At the end of a service call/tuning appointment, I will test out my work for my own reassurance, but I will also ask whomever plays, if they are available, to “give it a go” and briefly explore their piano in a repaired state. Many times I get blank stare. Other times people will play three notes randomly and give me the “okay”. Maybe what I play before they try their piano is enough, but there are ways that one should examine their piano after a service appointment or if they are searching for a new piano to purchase.

one note? Do the notes progress from one to the next in a way that makes sense, or do they descend in pitch as you move up the scale or is each note in some universe other than the previous? Play your scale and listen. Does it sound like a scale?

Everyone that plays the piano at any level should be familiar with a scale. A scale can tell you a lot. Does each note in the scale make sound? Does each key sound like



In addition to the scale, most piano playing humans know some chords that belong to the scale: usually I → IV → V → I (in the key of C major this progression is Cmaj to Fmaj to Gmaj to Cmaj). These chords can tell you a significant amount as well. Do these notes sound good together? Am I able to play these notes and hear all of them at the same time or does one of the notes have a delay? Is one note louder or quieter than the others? Also make sure to play these chords, or whichever chords you choose, at different places on the keyboard. Do not only play in the middle or the keys on the ends of the piano will feel sad that you left them out. Don't forget about the black keys either; they need love too.

If you are satisfied with the piano so far, it's time to play a piece that is familiar to you. This tune should be memorized mostly because you love it so much. Play it at a comfortable speed, you don't need to show off, and focus on what the piano sounds and feels like. Do all the sections of your tune sound right? Did all the keys work? Are there any new sounds you haven't heard before? Not all new sounds are bad. Were you able to play through the music without stopping?

Testing a piano can seem daunting, especially when someone is watching you. Take a deep breath and focus on the instrument, not the observer. This isn't a performance. If you play wrong notes, no one will care. You are sitting there to make sure that you are happy with your instrument. If everything is in order and you are satisfied, that is what truly matters.

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