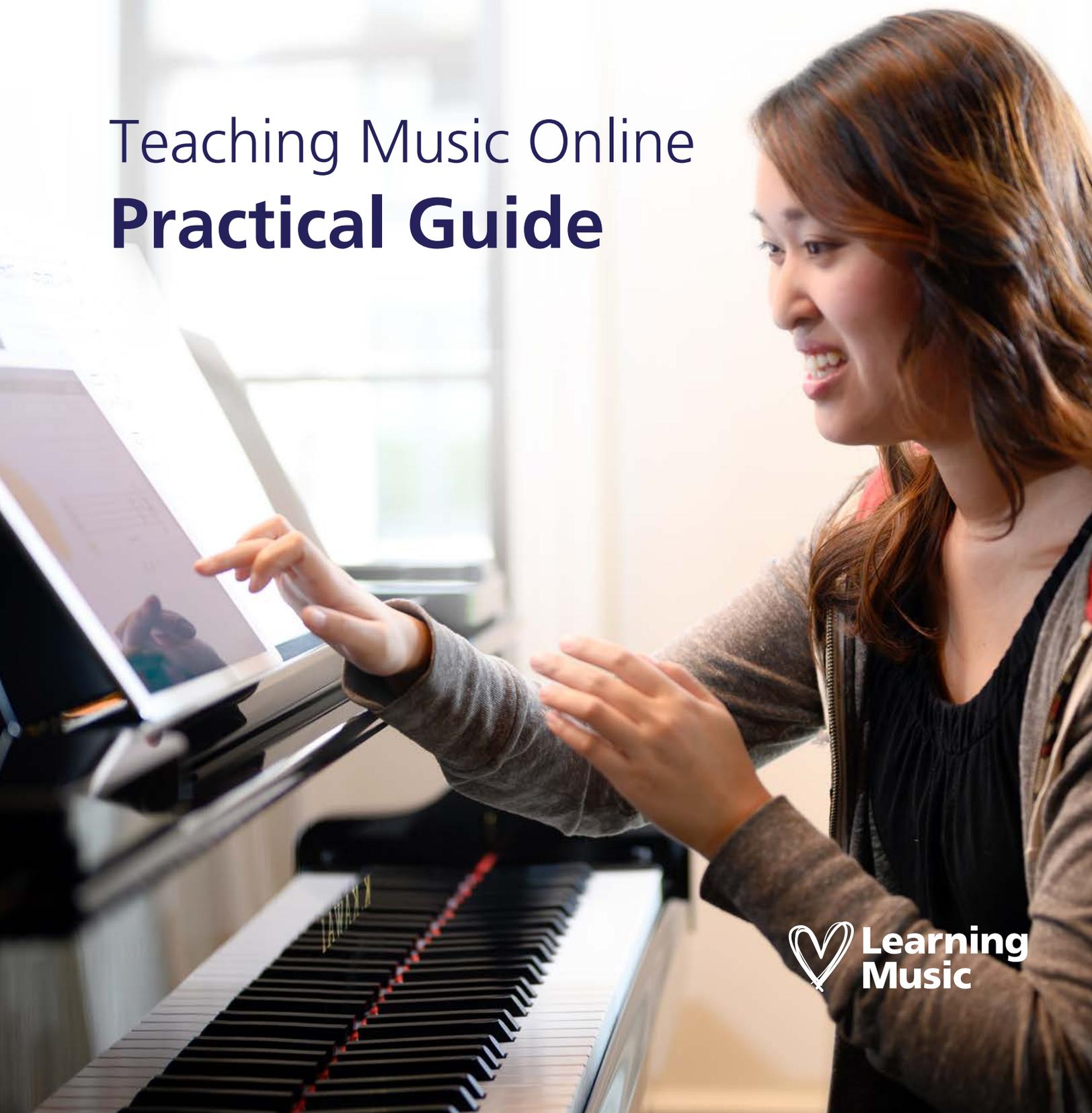


The Royal  
Conservatory®



# Teaching Music Online Practical Guide



 Learning  
Music

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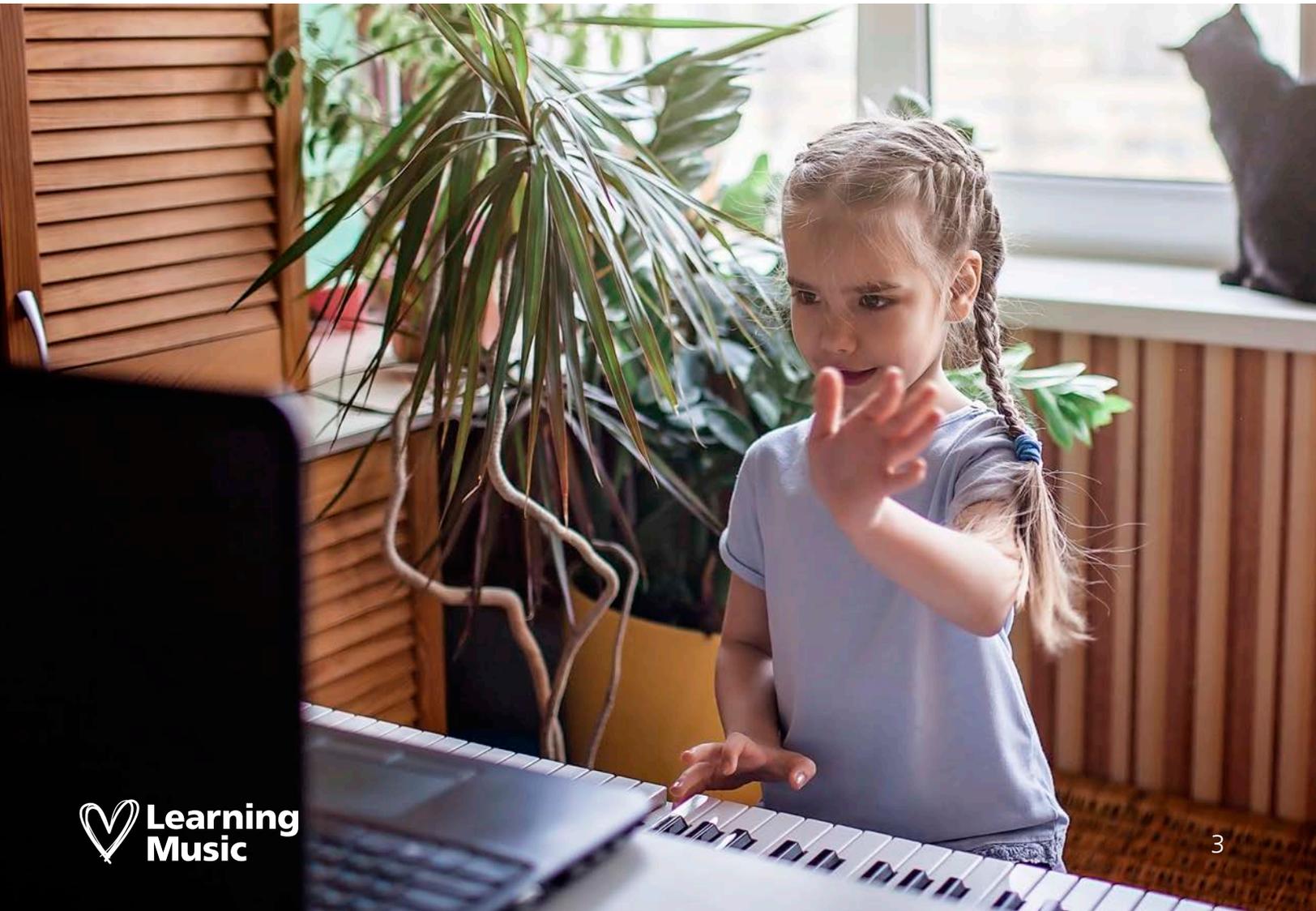
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## The importance of teaching music online

Music is a way for us to creatively connect with each other. As a dedicated music educator, you know the value that music can play in the lives of your students.

Music lessons provide:

- Consistency, familiarity, and a sense of normalcy in your students' lives.
- Continuity in their musical development.
- An opportunity to see what your students' practice environment is like. This allows you to take that into consideration when assigning them practice work and help set them up for success.
- The chance to continue with recitals (from home), which are important milestones in your students' musical development.



## Enhancing your students' online learning experience

Teaching in an online environment is not just a translation of your in-person lessons with a computer in between you and your student. To expand your music educator skills into the online realm, we encourage you to reevaluate your music teaching process and adapt it where necessary, to keep your students more engaged and learning successfully in the digital environment.

This document offers suggestions that can enhance your online teaching. You can decide which ones are possible for you to incorporate into your online music teaching practice. Consider the following aspects of teaching in a digital format:

### Focus on engagement

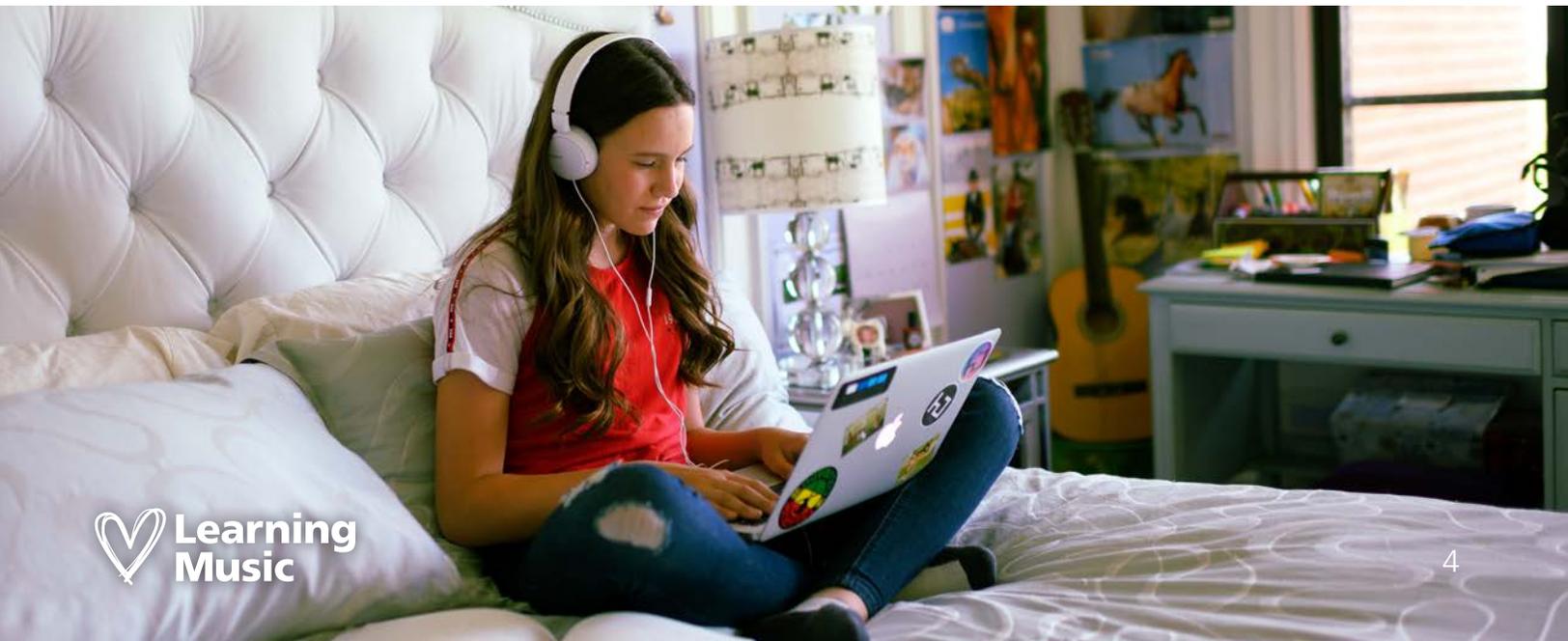
- Early on in your online lessons, focus on making strong connections in your online environment with your students before looking for perfection.
- Use online tools and resources in your lessons to make the learning more accessible and participatory for your students.

### Differentiate for online study

- As much as possible, try to accommodate for the different learning styles of your students in your choice of lesson content, online learning tools, and resources. Use visuals, audio, video, text, verbal, and hands-on activities to make the learning more open and accessible to all.

### Design lessons with students in mind

- Consider that your students are likely doing many activities throughout the week. Think of how to make music lessons “not just one more activity” in their day – make sure it is the one they look forward to.



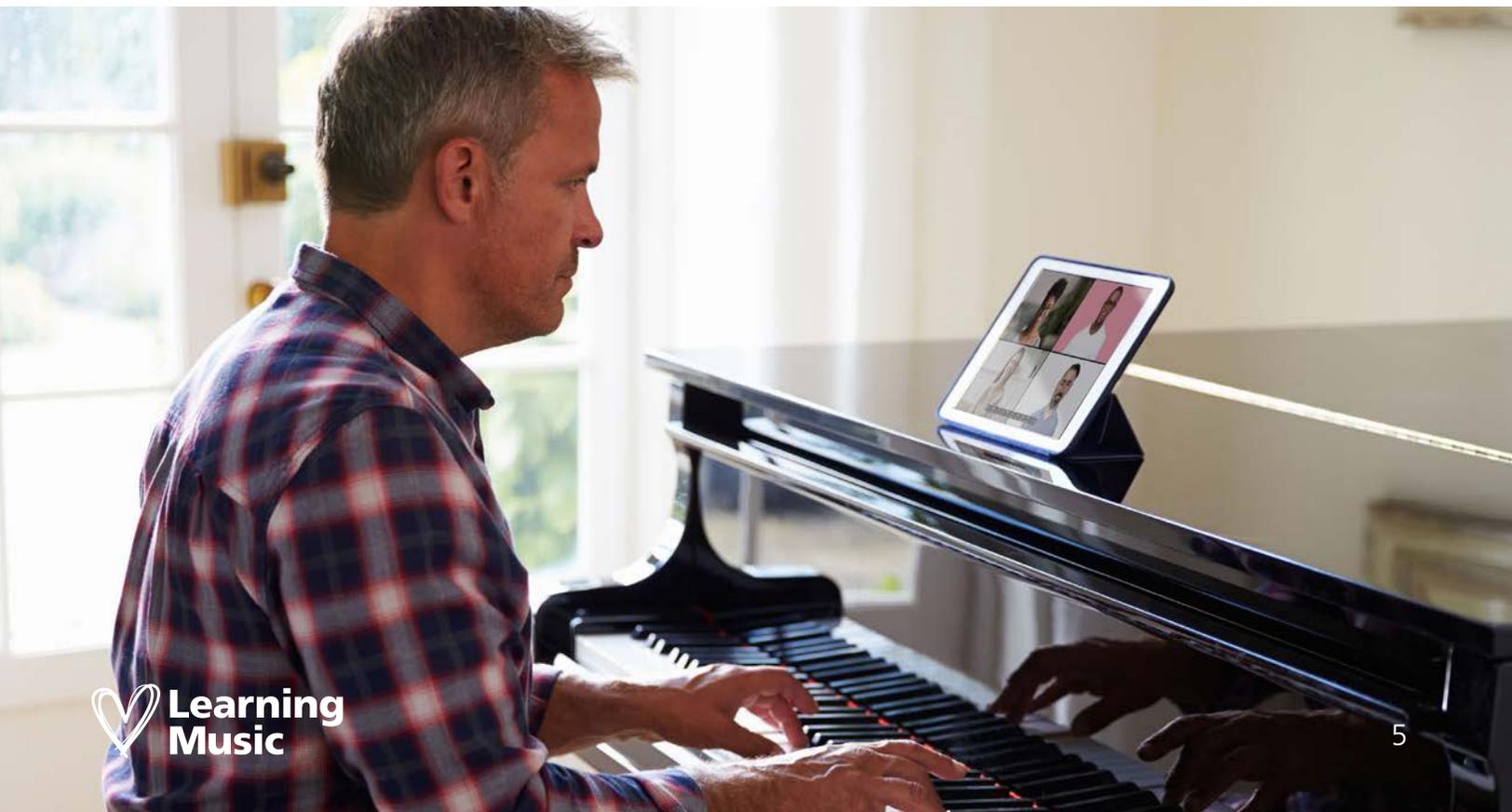


## How do I start?

It can be challenging to shift your teaching approach from in-person to online, and it will take time and effort.

Start by adjusting small things for your online teaching, for example:

- Set up your teaching studio so you can be seen and heard well by students.
- Do mock run-throughs of lessons to understand how to set up teaching resources and student interaction.
- Take time to help your students get familiar and comfortable in the online environment before exploring the learning and performance part of your lessons together.
- Encourage the parents of younger students to be involved in the lessons and practice, giving them a role such as writing comments on the score as practice reminders.
- Allow yourself to make the bigger online teaching transition over time as you develop more skill and confidence in your digital teaching.
- As you transform your practice and expand the range and methods by which you teach online, you will enhance your ability to connect with your students and for them to grow as musicians.



## Planning for online music lessons

Good teaching and effective lesson planning have numerous crossover points between in-person and online environments.

There are a few approaches specific to digital learning that can make your online sessions more dynamic and engaging for your students, for example:

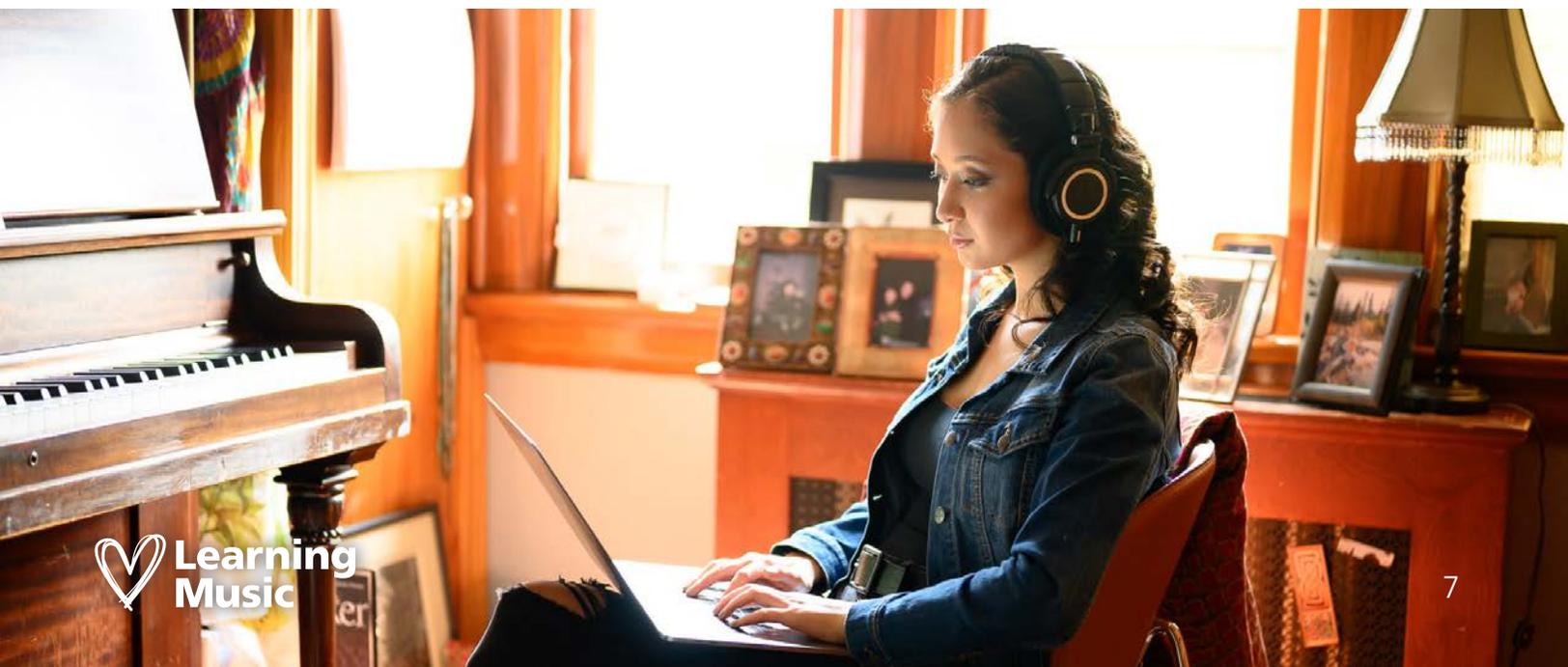
- Keep your plan for your online lessons agile and flexible so that you can accommodate for how your students are doing that day. Have contingency plans in case students are struggling with their learning in the activities that you have arranged.
- Create or provide simple learning resources (e.g. short videos, audio files, learning documents, links for additional resources) that will allow multiple ways for your students to access the learning content.
- Make sure to alternate practice, discussion, listening, singing, and other activities to keep your students engaged and intrigued.
- Encourage asynchronous approaches to learning for your students to complete outside of the lessons. For example, students can record themselves performing and submit videos for teachers to view and comment on during the lessons.
- Use traditional, hands-on and digital, synchronous approaches to learning during your online lessons, such as:
  - Live demonstrations and performances.
  - Showing recorded material.
  - Have students annotate a musical score on screen or use hands-on manipulatives (paper notes on a drawn staff) to represent their learning.
- Follow up the lesson with a quick email or text to parents/guardians with instructions for practice and preparations for the next lesson.
- Ask for feedback (e.g. what your students liked the most, what they would like to avoid or reduce, etc.)
- Involve them in planning the lesson (e.g. let them choose the activity, switch teacher/student roles, etc.)

- After ensuring that you have gained permission from the students and their families/guardians, you may wish to record a lesson to allow students who missed the session to view the content. Student progress can also be accomplished by comparing an earlier recording of their practice/performance to a more recent one. Mini recitals can also be recorded and shared with families. These recordings can be deleted once the learning for that lesson has been completed.

## Preparation for your online session

Your teaching environment will help to set the stage for successful online learning. Consider the following when setting up your home teaching studio:

- Create a welcoming and inviting learning environment for students.
  - Make your space bright and uncluttered.
  - Without causing distraction, reflect some of your personality in the teaching space. This allows students to connect with you as a person and a teacher.
  - Chose a “focus” object for the day (flowers, picture, reference to a memorable event from music history, etc.), and alternate these objects to avoid visual monotony.
- Place your computer/camera so that you and your instrument can be easily seen and heard.
- Ensure that the lighting on you is bright and diffuse (soft and evenly spread with minimal shadows) so that students easily see you and your instrument when appropriate. Avoid back lighting that will make it hard for your face to be seen clearly.
- Set up in quiet space with minimal background sound to avoid distractions and disruptions.



- If possible, set up an external microphone so that you will have better sound quality than from the built-in mic on your computer.
- Have enough space for you to be able to move back from your computer in case you need to do a physical demonstration during your lesson.
- Have access to a strong internet signal. If necessary, ask other people sharing your Wi-Fi to refrain from activities that require large bandwidth (e.g. streaming videos, gaming) during your lesson to maintain a stable connection.
- If possible, try using a cable connection rather than Wi-Fi to provide a faster, more stable, and more reliable internet connection.
- Consider having additional cameras to show different views of you simultaneously, e.g. a close-up view of your hands on the keyboard or instrument, as well as a front view of your face and upper body. This can be accomplished by entering the Zoom call as another participant on a separate device such as a smartphone or tablet. Make sure that you mute the Zoom audio on this second device to prevent an echoing feedback sound.
- Have your teaching aids close at hand. This could include:
  - A small whiteboard or large paper and markers.
  - Musical scores and workbooks.
  - Manipulatives to demonstrate musical concepts in a visual way.
- Have your digital tools (music apps, digital files, learning resources, etc.) open and organized on your computer for your session. Test them prior to starting.
- Preparing yourself:
  - What are you wearing? Do you look like you have dressed for the lesson?
  - Wearing vivid colours will make you stand out better against your background.
  - Do you have props close by to make sessions more fun and interactive?
  - Remind yourself to smile. Your facial expressions will be a focus in an online interaction.
  - Remind yourself to communicate non-verbally as well as verbally.

## Making your learning interactive and multimodal

Design your teaching as an active exchange with the students, and present learning concepts through a variety of formats. This will better engage and more successfully inform your students.

Here are a few ways to accomplish this:

- Encourage interactions in multiple ways. In group classes, there are many options:
  - Have students ask and answer questions in the chat.
  - Have students use Zoom's "raise hand" function to indicate that they have a question so that you can respond when there is a natural break in your teaching.
  - Exchange ideas and notations on documents shown on screen.
  - Hold small group discussions in breakout rooms to promote more participation.
  - Have students use their hands to indicate responses to questions, e.g. make the shapes of notes or letters.
  - Use "polling" option for short quizzes, fun activities, silly games, etc. to make the lesson more engaging. These tricks can help students with short attention spans to stay focused.
- Use multimodal approaches (video, audio, text, verbal) for more variety in lesson content to support your teaching.
- Use [RCM online resources](#) and other apps for sharing information and exploring lesson content.
- Use hands-on manipulatives such as paper cut-outs or tangible objects to represent their understanding of a musical concept, e.g. coins moving on a hand-drawn musical staff.
- If appropriate for your participants, have your students get up and move by including "off the bench" activities to demonstrate their understanding of a musical concept.
- Record your lesson to be used as a model of the performance of a piece of music. You can also use that lesson recording to purposely show inaccuracies in playing a certain musical piece. Ask students to identify the incorrect parts and what to do to remedy those mistakes.
- If you have to share the same information to different individuals or groups of students (e.g. new techniques or information about assignments), create brief, clear instructional videos. These videos can be shared multiple times with different students when needed.
- Have students make and share their own videos of their practice for the teachers to comment on during the lesson time.

## Communication with students in lessons

As with all good learning interactions, strong communication is at the heart of successful teaching. These suggested strategies overlap between in-person and online teaching.

- Have a soft start to class, with time to connect and become comfortable with the online learning environment before starting the main learning activities. This can include asking students to show you their practice space, their favorite part of the house, their room, pet, backyard, window view, etc.
- Look directly into the camera when interacting with your students to make a more personal connection.
- Be casual and relaxed. If your students feel that you are confident and positive, they will become more comfortable. Take any technical slips with humour, show enthusiasm for new opportunities the online format has to offer.
- Be specific in your communication using verbal and non-verbal ways of sharing your message.
- Use nonverbal cues for your students while they are talking, including body language and facial expressions. This indicates that you are listening and understanding what they are saying without interrupting them and encourages students to continue speaking.
- It is difficult to see subtleties of interactions on a computer screen. Slightly exaggerate your facial expressions and body language to express your thoughts and feelings along with verbal communication.
- Check frequently for understanding from your students. It is not as easy to communicate clearly through on-screen interactions. You need to confirm that the learning is being absorbed. Have students demonstrate the concept themselves by playing when possible or articulate it in words.



- Be conscious of and sensitive to nonverbal communication from your students. Are they looking uncomfortable, unsure, or like they need to review some information?
- Side coaching: use gestures and other nonverbal cues for your students to indicate your responses while they are performing so that you don't interrupt them.
- Have a list of main lesson activities and content to reference and help keep you on track to ensure that you don't miss important sections of the online learning.

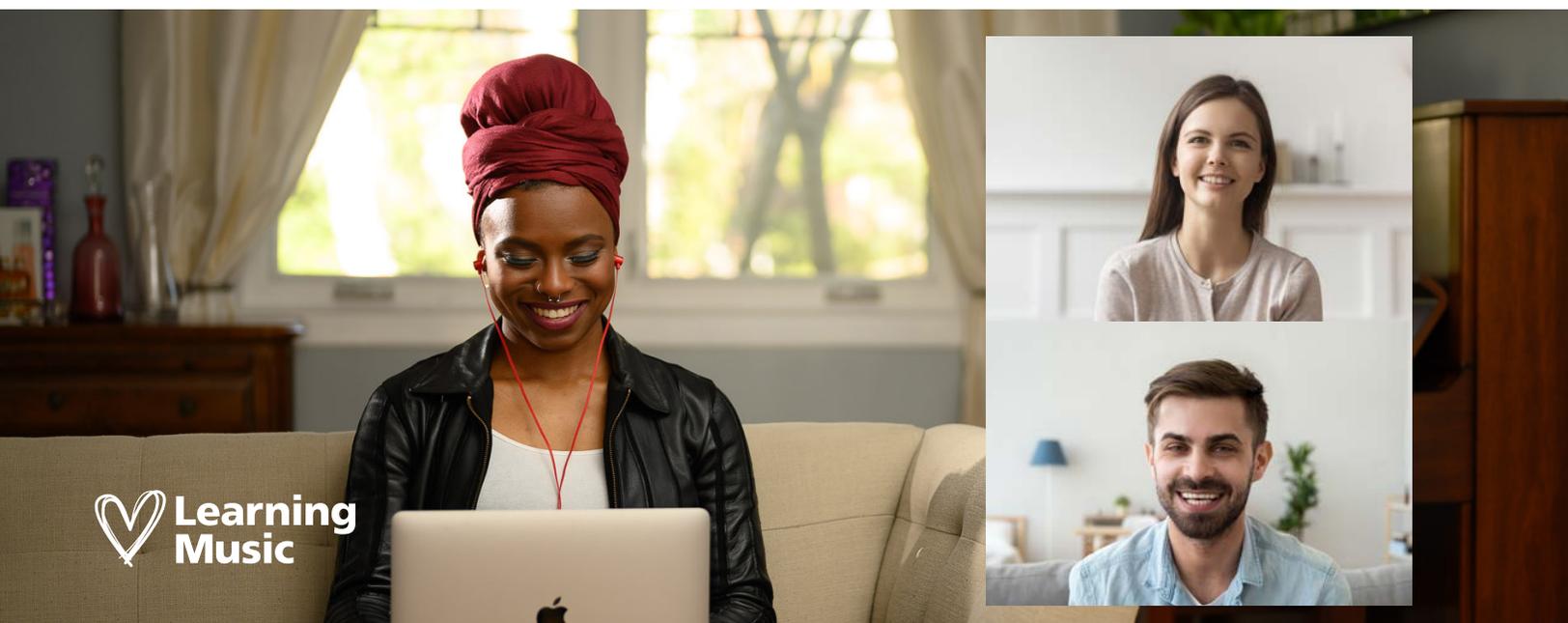
## Tips for group lessons with students

- Performing as a group in an online video session can be quite technologically challenging. The sound of all players will not come through the video call at the same time. One strategy for students to collectively play at the same time is to have the teacher lead a performance while the students mute their computers and perform along on their instruments. This is not ideal because all performers cannot be heard at one time, but it does allow for the groups of students to continue playing simultaneously.
- For group theory classes:
  - Project as much as possible of the lesson content on screen.
  - Create short examples.
  - Use note-writing programs to illustrate theory concepts in real time.
  - There are many useful music theory video clips online. Find and demonstrate them to make the lesson more entertaining.
- Students can go into breakout rooms in small groups and perform for each other individually and provide feedback. Before sending students into breakout rooms:
  - Ensure that they have very clear guidelines for what they are to accomplish.
  - Have set timelines for how long they have to complete those tasks.
  - Have them designate a breakout room leader to help keep everyone on task and participating.
  - Let them know that the teacher will move through breakout rooms to check on progress, answer questions, and provide feedback.

## Online class management

Leading your class online may require different procedures than in person, but the goals are the same. There are many ways to successfully manage a class in an online environment:

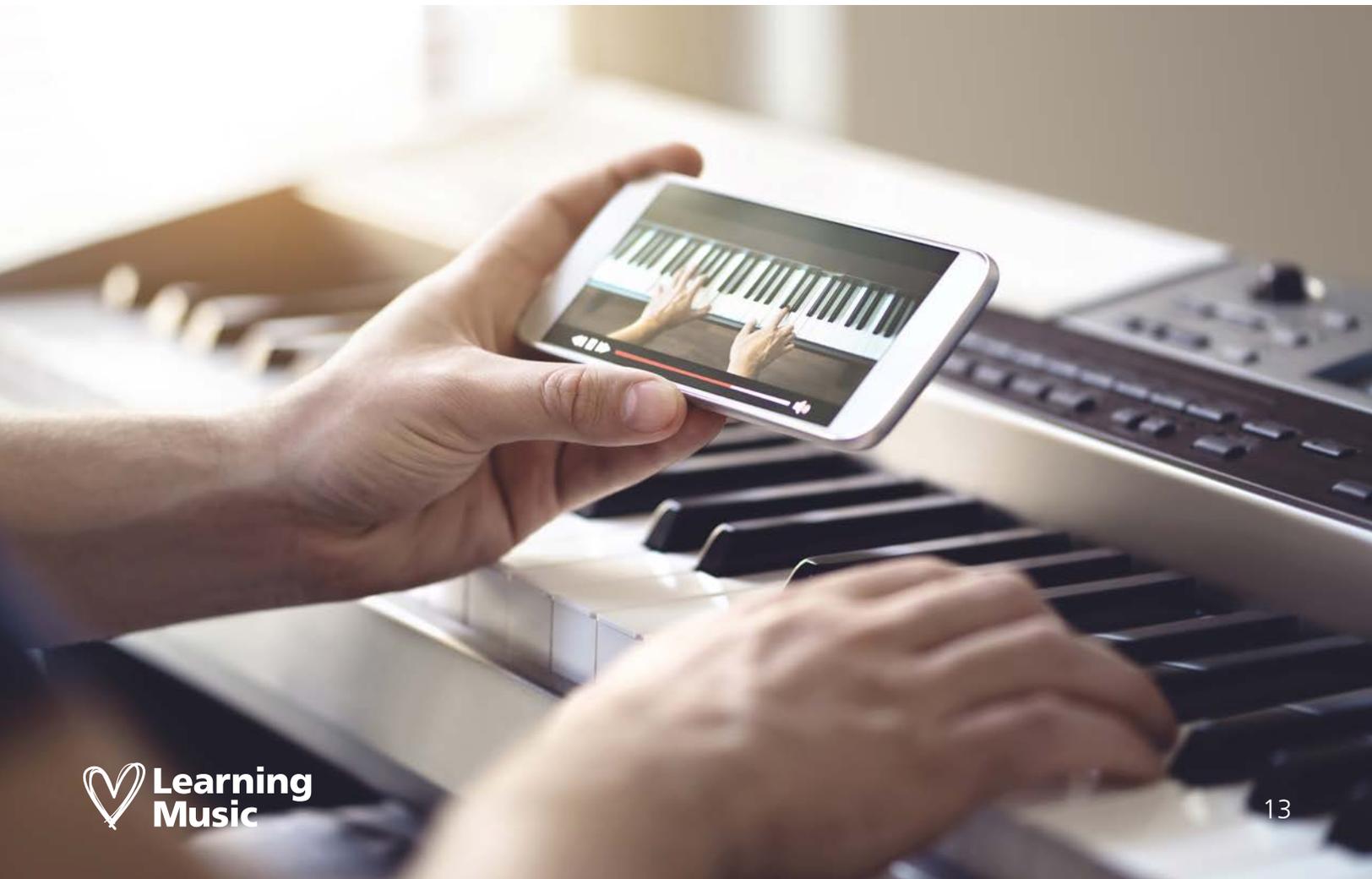
- Make a clear and secure protocol for joining the online lesson that is shared with students with the lesson invite. This can include the following:
  - Having a password to log in into the meeting.
  - Having a Zoom waiting room where participants will wait to be checked in by the host or cohost.
  - If appropriate, lock your session after the participants have entered so that no unintended people can come into your lesson.
- Establish ground rules early on, including:
  - Who can share screen
  - Who can annotate on the screen
  - Using the chat function to ask questions and provide responses
- Allow students to contribute to the ground rules so that they are more willing to follow them and will feel empowered in their participation.
- If you have multiple students in one class, appoint one of them as a co-host or co-instructor to take some of your responsibilities during class (e.g. opening a new document for you, removing annotations, etc.). This will ensure more active participation in the learning process.
- Recognize that using technology will affect the pace of your lessons and how you can share information and provide feedback. Make sure that you accommodate appropriately in what you plan to accomplish.



## Preparing for your lessons technologically

Here are a few suggestions to help make online teaching go more smoothly:

- For group lessons, ask for student volunteers to act as technical support for each session. You can allot them extra points for being a “tech guru” for the class.
- React calmly to any technological challenges, e.g. a certain app or resource will not open. Be flexible and accommodate by going to a different part of your lesson plan when necessary.
- Try out all off the technological steps necessary to lead an activity prior to delivering the lesson with students. Think of it like rehearsing for a musical performance. The only way that you get better is to do it repeatedly:
  - Practice leading your lesson for colleagues, friends, or family members and receive feedback. Have them try out the activities and see what happens for them. Revise your delivery as needed.
  - Record yourself leading a lesson. Review the video and make revisions to enhance your delivery.



## Communication with students and families between lessons

Just as communication during the lesson with students is vital to good teaching, so are the follow-up interactions with learners and their families/guardians between sessions.

Here are a few considerations:

- Be empathetic and sensitive when you listen to the concerns of the students' families/guardians. Extra care and attention may be necessary to help them feel safe, supported and comfortable in this online music learning process. This type of communication can be time-consuming at first, but it is essential in continuing an open and trusting relationship with your students and families/guardians.
- Reinforce the value of the lessons that you are leading and the benefits for the students in continuing to make music. The format of the lessons may be different, but the core content and interactions are still the same.
- Keeping a practice and lesson routine is important for students to maintain and even increase their musical skills. Ask for support from home in keeping the students on track and invested in the musical progress. This can include asking parents to sit in on lessons so that they know exactly what the student needs to do before the next lesson.
- Set up a clear communication schedule with families/guardians so that they know how they can easily get in contact with you and when they can expect to receive a response.
- Ask students to create practice plans that will chart their process for accomplishing specific goals in their musical development throughout their online lessons.
- Inform parents/guardians of younger students that they need to be more involved in the online lessons than in the in-person sessions. Provide tasks that they can perform, e.g. marking up the score, writing down practice notes, etc.





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