Online Class Piano for non-music majors  
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Teaching piano online presents unique challenges: the instructor not only has to convey information, but teach the student how to synthesize the concepts on their own through frequent feedback and guidance, and help students to learn to express themselves through music. Students were required to watch instructional videos, practice the music, and post a video recording of their assignments daily over a period of five weeks. Three new concepts were incorporated into this face to face course in order to teach it online: MIDI accompaniment, a rubric for grading and improvisation.

- **Playing with MIDI accompaniment** - Students used MIDI recordings that contain both hands recorded separately, as well as various instrumental accompaniments from rhythm sections to a jazz band to a symphony orchestra. They were required to play along with the MIDI background in order to develop ensemble-playing skills. Playing in an ensemble helps the student to learn to play with other parts that sound different than their own, reinforces sight reading ability, and fosters the ability of a student to hear how their own part works in relation to the whole piece. This practice helped lead them to synthesize their understanding of rhythm, harmony and melody in a way that is different from playing alone. Their collaboration with the MIDI disk mimicked what they would do in an ensemble setting – in a sense, the students had to “cooperate” with the MIDI disk in order to fit their performance into the existing music.

- **Rubric** – Every playing assignment was graded with the rubric above. A perfect score of 12 = A+, 11 = A, 10 = A-, etc. The instructor gave feedback for each playing assignment to either explain what was well played or what could be improved. Breaking up the grading between Pitches, Rhythm, and Expression/Dynamics/Hand position helped the students to understand the importance of each aspect of playing.

- **Improvisation** – Students learned a simple pattern and then used it to create a small piece of music without writing it down. Improvisation transforms the process of making music from simply repeating the notes as they appear on a page (passive exercise) into the creation of something new that is owned by the student (active exercise). Students must analyze the harmony to understand how it works as it does, interpret that passage of music from their own perspective, and finally create music that is an expression of themselves.

**Conclusion** – Students performed successfully on final exams – the MIDI accompaniments proved indispensable.

- Although this was the first experience of improvisation for all the students, they were able to successfully perform a brief improvisation after only a few days of class.
- The rubric provided a clear picture of exactly what the students needed to improve.
- All developed a solid sense of rhythm. Rather than guessing when to start after the beginning count off on the disk, students quickly learned to establish a pulse and anticipate when to start.
- By the end of the 5 week semester, all the students used a solid and predictable pulse for everything they played.