

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Am I too old to learn?

People can learn at any age, provided they're open to learning. In fact, the Taubman Approach has become known for its success in applying principles of coordinate movement to reverse a declining technique. Age has nothing to do with a technique deteriorating; poor physical habits have everything to do with it. What's not often known is that correct movements not only reverse a troubled technique, but are also responsible for creating healthy skills which can lead to high-level playing. It's one and the same thing.

2. Is the Taubman Approach only relevant for injured musicians?

No. The Taubman work is primarily a means for growth for a musician— for developing good skills, maintaining them, and progressing to the next level of technical and artistic mastery. Learning the Taubman Approach is about removing the obstacles in the way of that growth.

The Taubman Approach can assist:

- i. Those who are not injured but looking to prevent injuries. Through studying this technique, one can prevent problems before they occur through a “diet” of correct positions and motions.
- ii. Musicians who are injured who want to solve their problems.
- iii. Those who are looking to learn how to produce an infinite range tone and color at the piano, especially a beautiful cantabile, which many find difficult.
- iv. Musicians who are seeking more freedom in their playing: from greater speed, security, reliable leaps whether legato or staccato, and / or to solve passages in the repertoire that have always seen insurmountable, to name but a few benefits.

One of the most exciting aspects of this knowledge is that the Taubman Approach can be of help at any level – from beginners to seasoned players. It's never too late to make positive changes to your playing.

3. What can I gain from studying the Taubman Approach?

Any pianist can benefit through studying the Taubman Approach, regardless of their current performance standard. Apart from overcoming technical limitations, many pianists find they develop greater facility, control, timbral palette, security, reliability in memory and performance. Intuitive performers can become more conscious of what they naturally do well, allowing them to grow further as well as help others. Others report they can practice fewer hours, yet achieve higher-level and more consistent results. As students come to lessons with a wide range of backgrounds and varied learning goals, Taubman teachers tailor lessons to addressing each student's particular needs at that point in time.

4. Why do many people choose to study Taubman long-term?

Many Golandsky Institute teachers and students undertake long-term learning.

Apart from Teacher Training requirements, many students choose to undertake long-term Taubman study as they continue to find benefits. Many believe that one's facility, timbral palette and freedom at the instrument can continue evolving. Faculty member and acclaimed pianist Ilya Itin (see YouTube video below) describes learning the Taubman Approach as a "complex development and ever deepening education altered by the grasp of experience" (Oltuski, 2009). As with any field, there are degrees of knowing and understanding. To acquire a deep embodied, intellectual and pedagogical understanding of the Taubman Approach requires absorption, practice, and training.

Taubman teachers constantly work on their own technique to embody what they teach; they "never stop refining their skills" (Bloomfield, cited in Oltuski, 2010). This is reflected in the Teacher Training Program requirements, which stipulates ongoing individual lessons, attending Symposia and presenting students for feedback across all certification levels. Ongoing learning also reflects the focus in the Golandsky Institute on constantly refining the pedagogy, new strategies in teaching and learning. Through this process of ongoing analysis and reflection, new insights emerge.

Reference List:

Oltuski, I. (2009). Crafting the well-tempered pianist: Introducing the Taubman Approach. Retrieved January 9, 2010, from <http://blogcritics.org/music/article/crafting-the-well-tempered-pianist-introducing/>

Oltuski, I. (2010). Crafting the well-tempered pianist: Teaching the Taubman Approach. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from <http://blogcritics.org/music/article/crafting-the-well-tempered-pianist-teaching/>

5. Is the Taubman Approach about relaxation?

No. One needs to understand that the opposite of tension is not relaxation, which causes its own set of problems and tension. Taubman's work clearly identifies the root causes for tension. Resolving these particular issues results in a tension-free technique, which is not relaxation. When the whole playing apparatus is relaxed, fast, efficient movement becomes difficult. There are often consequences, including resultant tension, backache, and carpal tunnel syndrome due to playing with a low "relaxed" wrist.

6. How long does it take?

There are many answers to this question. One is that there can be a change in one encounter. Pianists often come to me in the midst of a busy concert season. Unless there's a severe injury, just putting into place a few changes can make a profound difference.

The following few items are examples of some of these common changes:

- i. correcting the chair height
- ii. explaining how the finger, hand and forearm must be connected
- iii. showing the correct wrist level
- iv. showing the correct height of the forearm when playing
- v. making them feel the freedom of the forearm (a missing link for most players)
- vi. feeling the support and freedom of the forearm in putting down a key
- vii. feeling the support of the forearm in helping to move from finger to finger without stretching

This is the short answer. The long answer is that there are many complex skills involved in playing the piano. As in any other discipline, it takes time to learn, deepen and make a habit of those practices, which can improve the playing in ways that are surprising and unexpected.

7. What are the common steps in learning the Taubman Approach?

Students who are not injured may work immediately through repertoire in combination with pure technical concepts to develop greater freedom. The inherent positive aspects of the playing are encouraged and made conscious. In these cases, students report rediscovering their "natural" and "instinctive" playing. While this works well for some, in other cases it is faster to confront core issues within the basic movements. For profound improvement, partial

or full retraining may be required to “learn the system underneath what is natural”, which in Golandsky’s experience is learnable, and teachable.

Depending on the student’s situation, establishing comfort may mean beginning with single note drops before moving to rotation. When this is working well in combination with other basic movements, such as the lateral “walking hand and arm” and movements of the finger, hand and arm unit in and out towards and away from the fallboard, the next stage is to incorporate these new skills into repertoire. Characteristically, a “scaley” piece at an appropriate level in close position is chosen as a practice vehicle, such as Mozart, Haydn, or Scarlatti.

Throughout the learning process, the student is allowed to experience and thoroughly consolidate each step. With time, new skills become automatic, requiring less conscious attention. Minimising the technique begins, as rotation works best when small in combination with other movements. An essential step is (re)integrating the fingers’ lively movement with the support of the hand and forearm. Attention is also turned to incorporating elements of musical expression if not already present, including adding shaping, tone production, and rhythmic expression, thus beginning the transformation of craft into artistic playing.

8. Is it true that retraining requires only playing the C Major scale for 2 years?

No way! On the rare occasion whereby a Taubman student has spent two years on the basic movements, it is often due to the student only taking very few lessons during the year, or working with an inexperienced Taubman teacher.

It is an unfounded myth that Taubman retraining is necessarily long and arduous (cited in Durso, 2011).

In fact, retraining can be fast, depending on the situation. Taubman also reassured that the body can adjust quickly if given the experience of movement aligning with the playing apparatus’ physiological principles rather than against them (see Schneider, 1983, p. 20; Rezits, 1998, pp. 21-22).

Reference List:

Durso, R. (2011). Robert Durso Website. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.robertdurso.net>

Rezits, J. (1998a). Dorothy Taubman, miraculous mentor. *Piano & Keyboard*, 190(1), 21-24.

Schneider, A. (1983). Dorothy Taubman: There is an answer. *Clavier*, 22(7), 19-21.

9. How often should I have lessons at the beginning?

As with anything new, immersive learning can be very helpful, particularly at the outset. Understandably, progress can be slower and motivation may decrease if lessons are irregular or months apart. Feedback from Taubman students confirms satisfaction with the speed of learning is linked to the frequency of lessons. To enable this, many pianists travel large distances for lessons, even within the US. Similarly, Taubman teachers also make a considerable effort in travelling regularly in an attempt to meet demand (see

http://www.golandskyinstitute.org/teachers/find_a_teacher_in_your_area).

Skype is another means to continue the process in between lessons in person.

10. How can I help myself in retraining?

Undertaking retraining requires patience, an open mind, and willingness to change one's technique. The process is easier when one maintains a positive mindset, and commits to consistent, quality practice. People are often surprised by the logic and clarity of the principles presented, and thrilled by the positive and unexpected results emerging in their playing. Passages that were previously difficult suddenly become easy.

Learning something new requires a willingness to risk being temporarily dislodged from the familiar, even from skills that are functioning to some degree. To combat this displacement, Taubman teachers emphasise giving the student alternatives that actually work and are symptom free. Thus, when initially learning the Taubman Approach, certain principles from earlier training may need to be temporarily suspended. Later, these concepts may again be incorporated, understood from a different perspective, or dismissed.

If someone is stubbornly unwilling to make changes, retraining can be very difficult and learning the Taubman Approach may not be for them.

Taubman understood the need for the student to rebuild a relationship with the instrument, believing that "The piano should become something very loving to you. You should want to touch it all the time. That's very important" (Taubman Institute, 1995, see DVD 2). Trust and courage are required to resume playing when there is pain. With a skilled teacher, an injured student begins to experience Taubman's revelation that correct movement is therapeutic.

Learning new skills can also be aided if one is not stressed by the conflict of a looming performance. A common reaction after overcoming pain is to succumb to the pressure of prior

commitments, returning too quickly to preparing for performances or other pressing commitments. However, if the fundamentals are shaky, or issues unresolved, symptoms may recur until completely addressed.

Thus, for thorough retraining, it is often best, and faster in the long-term, to prioritise establishing healthy movement patterns over preparing for performances.

However, other pianists manage to incorporate new aspects to their playing while preparing for a performance, and do so successfully. It really depends on the individual.

11. Is it possible to play old repertoire again?

Although some value the enjoyment of practising familiar repertoire, it is advisable to initially suspend playing old pieces, particularly in the case of severe injury. The learning is faster and healthier that way. However, after retraining many pianists find it possible to return to old repertoire.

12. How does the Taubman Approach compare to the Alexander Technique?

There are quite a few commonalities between Alexander's work and the Taubman Approach. Alexander and Taubman were innovators in insisting that one's use is the source of one's physical problems, and in advocating improved physical function as the only means of complete recovery. In both disciplines, overcoming injury is a side effect of improved use, requiring the full commitment of the student, and study with a skilled teacher. Many parallels can also be drawn with the fundamental principles of alignment, balance, and efficient, coordinate use of one's body.

Neither Taubman nor Alexander had formal medical training, yet both were decades ahead of their time in challenging long-established attitudes held by performers, teachers, and the medical profession (see Gelb, 1994, p. 21; de Alcantara, 1997, p. 275). As Alexander found, medical practitioners do not always "recognize the relationship between misdirection of use and that unsatisfactory standard of functioning which is always found in association with disease" (1931/2001, p. 88). Additionally, he recognised that a typical medical approach is diagnosing the problem, but not necessarily building healthy skills (1931/2001, p. 90). In this way, both Taubman and Alexander were unique in realising that it is insufficient to say what *not* to do; incoordinate patterns of movement need to be replaced with effective, healthy ones.

One key difference is that the Taubman Approach is absolutely specific to the requirements of playing the instrument and the requirements of the music. So for example, the Taubman Approach deals with how the fingers are able to move with ease, speed and power, how a singing tone is produced, how the hand can open to play chords. While the Alexander Technique may bring a musician to a certain point wherein their body will intuitively seek these precise details, it is not specific to the demands of playing the instrument.

- The same is true for Feldenkrais and other whole-body approaches.

Reference List:

Alexander, F. M. (1931/ 2001). *The use of the self: Its conscious direction in relation to diagnosis functioning and the control of reaction* (Rev. ed.). London: Orion.

de Alcantara, P. (1997). *Indirect procedures: A musician's guide to the Alexander technique*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gelb, M. (1994). *Body learning: An introduction to the Alexander technique* (New ed.). London: Aurum Press.

13. What is the impact of combining whole-body disciplines with learning the Taubman Approach?

While studying other disciplines may be complementary with Taubman lessons, it is also important to recognise that each discipline is complete in itself, and to understand what each discipline achieves. Differences in language must also be addressed. Terms such as “alignment” or “free” may overlap, but other concepts can be contradictory. Alexander practitioner Gelb also cautions that combining the Alexander Technique with other disciplines is a “formula for failure”, as “each discipline is best pursued under independent auspices” (1994, p. 153).

Reference list:

Gelb, M. (1994). *Body learning: An introduction to the Alexander technique* (New ed.). London: Aurum Press.

14. How can a piano technique be translated to the violin or another instrument?

The laws governing coordinate motion that enable the fingers, hand and forearm to move with ease, speed and power are the same. For example, as pianists need to depress keys and move over the keyboard, violinists need to depress the strings and move over the fingerboard. While each instrument has its own specific requirements, the fundamental principles of motion are the same.

15. Why are some movements large at the beginning?

For pianists with a history of isolated finger technique, a temporary “training wheels” stage of large rotation may be a necessary step to experience freedom of the forearm and hand. For others, it can be more effective to immediately begin training with smaller movements.

Emphasising the forearm’s role reconnects the forearm with finger movement and releases the tension accumulated by isolated, raised finger technique (Taubman Institute, 2003, see DVD 2). As soon as is appropriate, the movements are gradually minimised, at which point they begin to feel much more natural. That is hugely enhanced when the minimised rotation is combined with other movements such as shaping, in and out, and the walking hand and arm.

Reference List:

Taubman Institute. (1995). *Virtuosity in a box: The Taubman techniques*, Vols. 1-5. [DVDs]. Medusa, NY: Taubman Institute.

16. How do I become a Golandsky Institute certified Taubman instructor?

The requirements for certification in the Golandsky Institute can be found here:

<http://www.golandskyinstitute.org/teachers/teachercertificationprogram/requirements>

17. Are there any Golandsky Institute certified teachers in Europe or Asia?

At the moment, there are no Golandsky Institute certified teachers currently based in Europe or Asia, although it is hoped that will change in the near future. We do have certified teachers based in the USA, Canada and Australia. Ilya Itin is currently based and teaching in Tokyo, Japan, and Elizabeth Swarthout occasionally teaches in Granada, Spain.

If you cannot travel to have lessons in person, it is possible to take Skype lessons with one of the Golandsky Institute teachers. See <http://www.golandskyinstitute.org> for more information on certified Taubman teachers.

18. How can I take lessons if I live far away from a certified teacher?

Skype lessons can be invaluable if one lives at a distance from their teacher. Since 2009 Skype has enabled students to continue study with certified instructors. Additionally, through Skype, participants in the teacher certification program can also present their students to instructors for feedback on their teaching.

Though it is a helpful tool, there are undeniable limitations, including restricted vision and imperfect sound quality. These elements can vary, seemingly at random, according to the connection. Another drawback is not being able to guide the student through touch, an essential component in learning the Taubman Approach, particularly in the early stages.

It is often helpful to supplement Skype lessons by taking an extended period of time to stay in a teacher's locality and take several lessons or by regularly interspersing in-person lessons.

For more information on taking lessons via Skype, please see http://www.golandskyinstitute.org/teachers/online_lessons.

19. Why are some of the demonstrations in the DVDs exaggerated?

Many of the DVDs were tailored to feedback at the time that Taubman students wanted to *see* the mostly invisible movements comprising the Taubman Approach, as the technique merely looks “natural” or “effortless” when minimised. To suit this need, some demonstrations are exaggerated and are thereby unrepresentative of the integrated technique. The large rotation is often a necessary stage in the learning, but is not the final result.

20. Why is it important to have lessons in the Taubman Approach rather than just watch the DVDs?

Learning the Taubman Approach is an experiential process of embodying coordinate movement. One can certainly learn aspects of the Taubman Approach through studying the DVDs, and become familiar with the vocabulary and key concepts. However, problems may

arise if the individual disregards crucial information, exaggerates or misunderstands instructions, or adds variants that contradict the fundamental premises of the technique. Each individual has to be seen by a skilled teacher in order for their specific problems to be diagnosed and addressed.

The teacher's role is central in diagnosing inefficient or harmful positions and movements, and assisting the student in incorporating healthy, coordinate alternatives into their playing. It is with this expert guidance that a student can transition from the more pronounced practice of the Taubman Approach's central components to the more subtle integration of these movements into a healthy high-level technique. Thus, DVDs can supplement but not replace individual tuition with a certified Taubman teacher.

21. What is the role of the student in Taubman lessons?

Taubman lessons are student-centred and are adjusted to the student's needs. Although guided by the instructor, the student is required to assume a high degree of responsibility and ownership in their learning. The student largely directs content and control, along with the teacher's insights and feedback, particularly after moving beyond early retraining.

When acutely injured, the student may feel security, or even relief, in entrusting their learning to a professional. However, as retraining can require making dramatic changes to one's playing, it is vital that the student actively engages in and values the importance of their learning and private practice. Golandsky Institute teachers rely on continuous feedback from the student to guide the learning process; therefore, blind compliance will not yield the same results as active participation. At all levels of studying Taubman, the learning process requires commitment from both the teacher and student.

22. Why do some people find the Taubman Approach controversial?

Taubman was one of the first to acknowledge playing-related injuries in the 1950s, and to correlate specific problems with particular incoordinate movements at the instrument. For some, her claims posed a major threat to the piano establishment. As one Taubman student summarised, "If she's right, a lot of traditional training is wrong" (cited in Dyer, 1995, p. B21).

Taubman called for unchallenged traditions of piano pedagogy to be "weighed, codified, and tested against our contemporary knowledge of the basic principles governing body movement and the mechanical laws governing the piano" (cited in Schneider, 1983, p. 21). However, this

was greeted with “hostility” (Taubman, cited in Del Pico-Taylor & Tammam, 2005, p. 47). At that time, there was little interest in musicians’ problems; “Teachers denied any such thing existed” (Taubman, cited in n.a., 1986, p. 40). Apart from a handful of specialists, the medical profession has also been largely reluctant to embrace her work. One of the exceptions is Dr. Frank Wilson, a neurologist, who asserted that “She has challenged the medical establishment with remarkable results” (cited in n.a., 1986, p. 40). Other testimonials from medical professionals can be found at <http://www.golandskyinstitute.org/about/doctors>.

Reference List:

Del Pico-Taylor, M., & Tammam, S. (2005). The wisdom of Dorothy Taubman. *Clavier*, 44(10), 19, 46-47.

Dyer, R. (1995, August 13). Dorothy Taubman teaches piano without pain. *Boston Globe*, p. 21

n.a. (1986, Sunday, July 27). Piano school tones up the hands on the keys. *New York Times*, p. 40.

Schneider, A. (1983). Dorothy Taubman: There is an answer. *Clavier*, 22(7), 19-21.