



# Penelope Roskell's Essential Piano Technique



*'Revolutionary! These books will transform the way piano is taught in the early stages.'*

**Jenny Macmillan, Director, Cambridge Suzuki Training**

*'I cannot state urgently enough how highly I rate and strongly recommend these three volumes. Beautifully presented, but modestly priced, they indisputably establish a new benchmark for teaching children a healthy piano technique. Ignoring them is not an option'*

**Andrew Eales, [pianodao.com](http://pianodao.com)**





# Penelope Roskell

## About the author

Penelope Roskell is recognised as one of the world's leading exponents of a natural and healthy piano technique. She is currently Professor of Piano and Piano Pedagogy at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London as well as Piano Adviser to the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine. Her series **Essential Piano Technique** draws on the principles of her award-winning book, **The Complete Pianist**, to develop a strong foundation of healthy piano technique at the early stages.

*"I believe strongly that every piano student can be taught to play musically and with good technique. It saddens me to see many young pianists playing with a distorted hand position, with tense wrists and shoulders and with little real enthusiasm for the music they are playing. They are missing out on so much! As a teacher of very advanced players, I become even more concerned when I witness at first-hand how habits acquired at the early stages can lead to serious problems such as debilitating tension or injury later on."*

*'Following the success and acclaim of The Complete Pianist, Penelope Roskell continues to make a vital contribution to piano pedagogy. Her new children's technique books... lay the crucial foundations for a lifetime of secure technique coupled with immense pleasure at the piano. I cannot recommend them too highly.'*

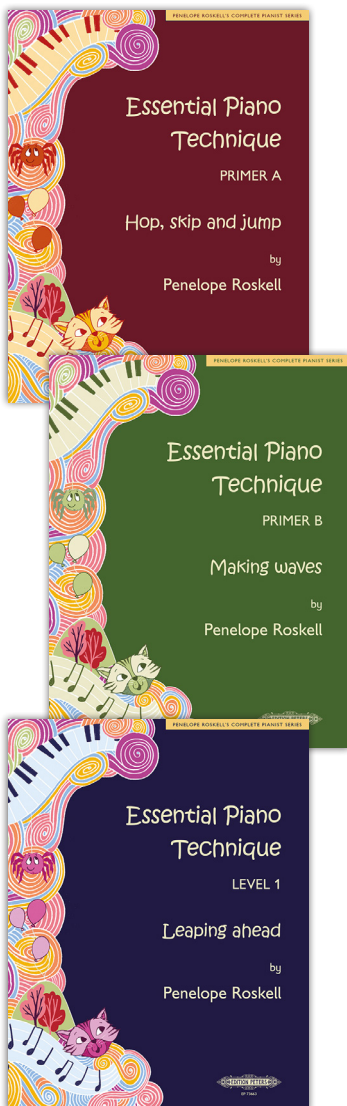
The Cross-eyed Pianist blog



# Essential Piano Technique: An Overview

The **Essential Piano Technique** series puts Roskell's healthy piano playing philosophy into practice.

- Three carefully curated books are filled with practical exercises, pieces, tips, and teacher support.
- Incorporating current research into best pedagogical practice.
- The primary focus is on developing good co-ordination, freedom of movement, finger independence.
- Delivered using appealing imagery making technique fun!
- Can be used alongside any method book.
- Supported by resources for teachers including learning objectives, teaching tips and access to instructional videos.



## Primer A

- Introducing the fundamentals of healthy playing by encouraging warming up, good posture and optimal hand position
- Exploring the full range of the keyboard
- Using a range of dynamics
- Experimenting with basic articulation

## Primer B

- Building on techniques learnt in Primer A
- Developing phrasing and articulation
- Practising finger strengthening
- Delving into scales, broken chords and glissandi

## Level 1

- Further development of techniques learnt in Primers A and B
- How to approach playing chords
- Introducing hands together playing
- Developing scales including 2-octave scales and chromatics
- Looking at fingering, turning under and over, and leaps

# Warming up

Before playing the piano, remember to warm up (just like a sports person would).

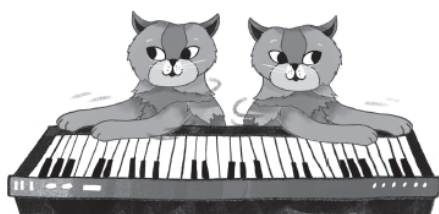


## Windmills

Swing your arms in a big circle like a windmill, then shake your arms loose.

## Skateboarding arms

Imagine your hands are skateboarders swishing apart along the surface of the keyboard, then meeting back together. Can you feel your arms stretching out like elastic?



Colour in one of the boxes of this windmill sail each time you practise these warming up exercises at home.



## Swishing

Swish both hands towards one end of the keyboard then back towards the other.



Each technique is taught first as a fun activity away from the piano followed by a simple exercise at the piano.

This then leads to a short piece - first sung, then played - that focuses almost exclusively on that particular technique.

In contrast to most tutor books, beginners are encouraged to play all exercises and pieces with a detached 'bobbing' technique initially, rather than playing legato.

This way, the arm supports each finger as it plays, in a well-coordinated movement.

## Bobbing on a D

Tuck your thumb behind finger 3 to make an eagle's beak, then bob on a D with finger 3 to this rhythm:



Most of the exercises and pieces are pattern-based, as in *Can you catch a kangaroo* below. This approach has been found to develop excellent sight-reading skills, as the students become familiar with looking ahead at whole groups of notes rather than reading individual symbols. Pattern-based learning also helps with memorising.



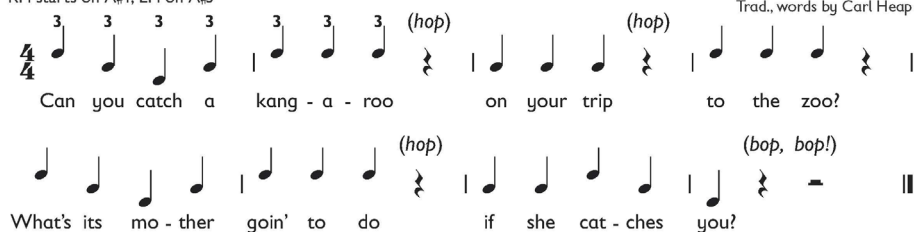
## Can you Catch a Kangaroo?



Stand up and sing this song with your teacher, clapping (or hopping) in the rests. When do the notes go higher and lower? When do they bob on the spot?

RH starts on A#4, LH on A#3

Trad., words by Carl Heap



Starting to teach mainly by rote while gradually introducing simplified 'stick notes' is a well-established practice. It gives students the freedom to explore the whole keyboard and experience full range of piano sound, without being restricted to the notes they can identify on the stave. This facilitates faster progression onto musically satisfying pieces without being held back by overly complex note-naming.

## Finger 2

### How do you do?

Tap this rhythm on a flat surface.

Bob your arm up and down, landing on finger 2.

RH 2 2 2 2

How do you do? I'm fin - ger 2.

LH 2 2 2 2

I'm fin - ger 2 too, pleased to meet you.

Now, at the keyboard, play the rhythm on a high D (RH) then low D (LH). Then soar around the keyboard, playing high notes and low notes with finger 2.

Colour in one of the eagles on this page each time you practise this.

Making an 'eagle's beak' will help you keep finger 2 curved.



Piano-related injuries often begin with imbalances that have been embedded at the earliest stages. These books help children start their piano journey with the best possible hand position, a healthy ergonomic relationship with the keyboard and a well-coordinated arm that allows free movement around the keyboard.

Here we use the image of spiders in different positions, corresponding to the relaxed hand, the playing hand and the 'squashed spider hand'.

### Feel your wrist

Rest your Wide-awake Spider hand on a flat surface. Float your wrist up and down, but leave your fingers on the surface.

Does your wrist move smoothly? Aim to keep your 'just-right wrist' soft and floaty whenever you play, especially when you land on your finger 5, or pinkie.

### Wiggle my pinkie

Now flop your Sleepy Spider hand onto your lap. Rest this relaxed hand while you wiggle your pinkie and say:

Words by Carl Heap

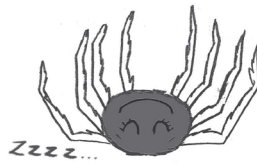
LH 4 4

Give a wig-gle and a wave, here's fin-ger 5.



## Finger gym

Time to go to the finger gym! These exercises will make your fingers stronger. Colour in one of the spider's legs each time you practise these exercises at home.



### Where are you?

Rest your hand on your lap, upside down like Sleepy Spider. Wiggle each finger as you sing or say these words with your teacher:

**RH**

Trad.

Tom - my Thumb,	Tom - my Thumb...	Where	are	you?
Pe - ter Pointer,	Pe - ter Pointer...			
To - by Tall,	To - by Tall...			
Ru - by Ring,	Ru - by Ring...			
Ba - by Small,	Ba - by Small...			
Fin - gers all,	Fin - gers all...			

**LH**

Here I am,	Here I am...	How	do	you	do?
Here we are,	Here we are...				

Which fingers find this most difficult? Wiggle those fingers every day to make them strong.

Every exercise and piece is repeated in both left hand and right hand.

To develop both hands equally from the outset, finger strengthening exercises are also introduced.

## Singing phrases

Here you will learn to play beautiful phrases that seem to sing!

### Breathing wrist

Place your hands on a flat surface, in playing position. Breathe *in* as your wrists float upwards very slowly (leaving your fingertips dangling on the flat surface). Breathe *out* as you let your wrists float slowly back down.



Keep doing a smooth 'breathing wrist' movement as you breathe in and out normally.

The books also cover skills that are generally considered 'musical' rather than 'technical', such as playing cantabile; shaping a phrase and breathing between phrases; playing with rhythmic impetus and with dynamic contrast.

Wonderfully imaginative and varied accompaniments by composer Aaron Burrows give students the opportunity to have a satisfying musical experience while still playing most pieces hands separately.

### Viennese Whirl

A **waltz** is another elegant dance in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time.

Clap the rhythm first, then play this waltz with your RH, then with your LH. Remember the down-up movement and imagine your arm is dancing when you play.



RH starts on F4, LH on F3

### Waltz Tempo

Aaron Burrows

**Teacher** (student RH/LH starts on F5):

### Waltz Tempo

Aaron Burrows

*p grazioso*

## The C major scale – outwards

### Fingering the groups

The C major scale contains every white note from C to C. It can be divided into two groups. Say the fingering aloud as you play both groups:



Notice that the fingering is the same for both hands, but the RH is going up the scale (**ascending**) and the LH is going down (**descending**). Both hands are moving outwards, away from middle C.

### Skiping under 3

The skipping rope movement that you learned in the last section will help you join the two groups together legato. Swing your arm loosely to help your RH thumb skip under finger 3:

The five-finger position is introduced before approaching the thumb-under action and playing full octave scales. Good technical habits instilled in these first few scales will stay with the student for life.

Chord playing is introduced later than most methods, again using imagery such as the parachuting monkey, to allow for the natural shape of the hand to have been firmly established first.



### Monkey landing

Now land on the flat surface with just two fingers – 1 and 5 – like a monkey landing on its two feet.

Move around, landing in different places. Then, at the piano, parachute down onto fingers 1 and 5. This is the interval of a fifth. Repeat this interval several times, landing with a soft wrist. Do this with each hand separately, then hands together.

Then play the next exercise, making flowing rainbow movements as you move between the fifths:

## Hands together

These will exercise both your fingers and your brain!

**Contrary motion** means the hands move apart in *opposite* directions.

First, look at your hands on the keyboard. They are symmetrical – like a reflection in a mirror.

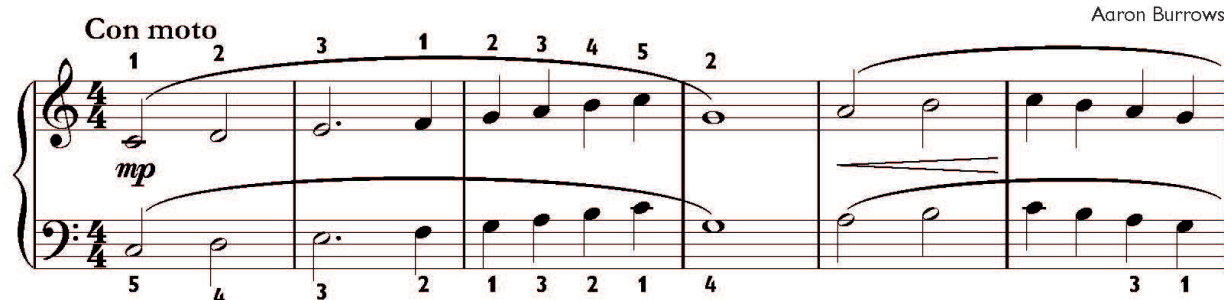
These exercises are all in contrary motion – the RH and LH play the same fingering, like in a mirror. Which hand position are these exercises in? Look at the note patterns, then play them detached (bobbing), then legato. Play them slowly, then a little faster.



The challenge of playing two hands together often defeats even the most determined of players, and can create tension. Practising hands separately is especially important for beginners, who have so many new concepts to process simultaneously. Level 1 starts by playing hands together in contrary motion.

Specially composed pieces allow students to practise techniques in the context of a piece rather than as boring exercises. Here, students are encouraged to play scales expressively.

Never play scales like boring exercises. Play them expressively, as in this flowing piece.  
(Write in more fingering, if you find that helpful.)





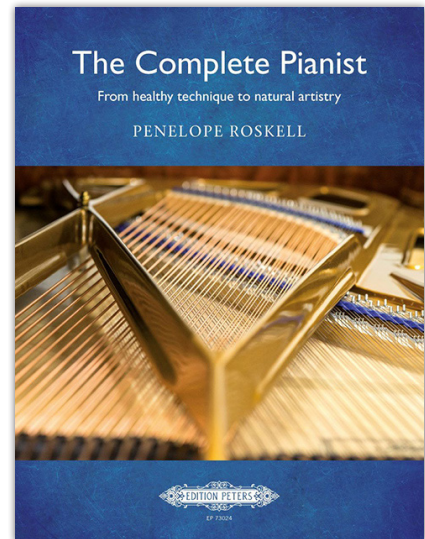
# The Complete Pianist

## from healthy technique to natural artistry

Penelope Roskell shares a lifetime's experience of teaching, performing and ground-breaking research into healthy piano playing. Containing more than 500 pages of text, 300 videos and 200 exercises newly devised by the author, this is the most comprehensive book ever written on piano playing.

**The Complete Pianist** has something new to offer to all pianists and keyboard players – student and teacher, professional and amateur.

Available to buy now in store and online.



## How to buy

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