

The Concert Piano Technician  
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**A Proven Routine**

The piano technician should be a collaborator with the pianist in creating a successful concert. The object is to provide the artist with an instrument presenting no obstacles to the expression of the music. If the action is heavy or doesn't repeat well, if there are twangs and busses, if the voicing is uneven, the pianist will be forced to fight through the instrument instead of letting the music flow naturally. I've developed the following routine over the past 24 years, and feel that it gives me the best chance to fulfill my part of the collaboration. On many occasions, I've been greeted with a hug or a "Bravo!" from the pianist at the end of the concert, letting me know that I did my part well. This kind of response is the most important payment I could receive for my work.

- 1. Learn all you can about the artist and the repertoire well before the event.**
- 2. Tune the piano and go through the concert checklist before the rehearsal.**
- 3. Meet with the artist either before or after the rehearsal.**
  - Do:**
    - Be brief.*
    - Be positive.*
    - Ask their opinion of the piano.*
    - If you have questions about the repertoire, program order, or rehearsal schedule, ask.*
    - Let them know when you'll be back to re-tune, ask them to leave any notes for you.*
  - Don't:**
    - Shake hands unless the pianist offers first.*
    - Give unsolicited advice.*
    - Give solicited advice unless it's about the piano or the hall.*
    - Talk about yourself.*
    - Spend more than a minute or two unless the artist is doing the talking.*
- 4. Listen to part of the rehearsal.**
- 5. Touch up the tuning after the rehearsal.**
- 6. Attend the concert.**
- 7. Greet the artist following the performance.**

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**The Concert Checklist**

At the time of the main pre-rehearsal tuning, the technician should run through the following checklist. No particular order need be observed; the items are all pretty equally important, as any one of them could mar the concert in some way if not right. If this list is followed at each service, it should be possible to tune and prep a concert instrument in two or three hours. If concert services fall too far apart, it could take a full day to bring the instrument back into concert-ready condition. Tuning is considered a given – but a very important one. Before running through the checklist, remove the fallboard and keyslip and replace the cheek blocks in their normal position.

❑ **Key bushings/pins**

Test for side-pressure on keys. Lubricate rail pins & bushings.

❑ **Pedal Noises**

With the fallboard out but the cheek blocks in, test the pedals.

Diagnosis: where is the sound coming from?

“Don’t grease the grease.”

Clean the glides before lubricating with ProLube.

Apply VJ lube to the end pins & shift lever.

Work teflon powder into the wood by the right shift lever spring.

❑ **Damper pedal timing; damper up-stop rail**

Press on a sharp and the damper should come up 1/16”.

Sharps lift the damper wire higher than the white keys.

Push the pedal down and retighten the screws.

❑ **Shift pedal: no overshift**

Push shift, then step on right pedal while listening.

❑ **Keyframe bedding: Glides and front rail**

Tap to hear knocking.

Induce the knock by putting hand beneath the let-off buttons & lift the action.

Push both right and left pedals simultaneously and listen for knock.

Steps for Bedding the Keyframe

1. Turn up the end glides several times to get them out of the way.
2. Induce the knock so that 2, 3, 4, & 5 knock. Turn them up. Go back and check in case they change.
3. Go back to 2 and start turning until the knock is gone. Do this back and forth on 2,3,4,5.
4. Turn 1 down until 2 knocks.
5. Turn 1 back slightly until knock on 2 goes away.
6. Do the same on 6 and compare to 5.
7. With right & left pedals down, check for knocking. If there is knocking, turn down the middle four.

If the glides are too high:

- dip is deeper
- repetition is terrible
- jacks can break

❑ **Cheating jacks**

Block hammers & give each not a couple hard blows.

Adjust jack to knuckle.

If jack cheats, it’s too close to the front. Move it back.

### ❑ **Let-off & drop**

Push the key to where the resistance begins, then bottom it out and it should play.

Turn the let-off screw by sound and feel. Make them all consistent.

Now to check for too close, press sostenuto, hit hard, then trip the jack softly.

### ❑ **Voicing**

The technique of voicing is easy. The judgment is the hard part.

Stand up to get a truer sound.

Check string level: pluck & feel.

File with curved file to fit hammer to string.

Harden with 3:1 acetone to lacquer (or 1 key top to 8 oz. Acetone)

Lacquering at 10:00 & 2:00 on shoulders helps with the attack, and at 10:00/11:00 helps with the support.

If on the strike point, use a tiny drop.

To voice the shift:

- carbon paper on hammers to get string impression
- 2 hard blows
- roll tiny needles over the string marks
- or single needle through the crown, deep on the string mark if loud note (isolate the string)
- older hammers: 10 strokes per shoulder

### ❑ **Backchecks**

### ❑ **Repetition springs**

### ❑ **Buzzes & rattles**

### ❑ **Keyslip: No keys hitting or binding**

### ❑ **The bench**