

## Grace Nielsen: Harp Studio Plan and Policies

Thank you for your interest in harp lessons! I am excited to share my passion for music-making with you and your family. Below is an overview of my studio policies, my method and philosophy, and some frequently asked questions.

### Location and layout

My harp studio is in my home near downtown Salt Lake City, UT. I have three harps: a concert grand, a semi-grand, and a lever harp. Lessons are primarily given on my semi-grand and lever harp. I also have a computer and a piano keyboard in the studio, which I use to illustrate music theory concepts. This layout also facilitates my arranging and publishing work.

I also offer an in-home lesson option. If you prefer, I can come to your home for lessons for an additional fee, which will be assessed based on the time I am required to travel (one-way) at a rate of \$30/hr. For example, if you live 20 minutes from my home, I charge an additional \$10 per lesson.

For students away from the Wasatch front, I can also offer lessons via Skype.

### Student-teacher interviews

Our first meeting together will be a “get-to-know-you” interview, and I expect the student and, if the student is under 18, a parent to be there. We will discuss the student’s interest in the harp and specific goals and needs as well as my teaching philosophy and studio policies. I will also introduce you to the harp and teach both the student a short song. This interview is free of charge and you are not committed to continue lessons with me afterward.

### Acquiring a harp

I recommend most students take advantage of the Lyon & Healy rent-to-own and bounty programs. Beginners can rent a lever or petite pedal harp for 6 months with an option to purchase or finance at the end of that rental period. Beginner harps rent for between \$50 and \$90 per month.

The primary advantage of buying a lever harp through Lyon & Healy is that the full value of the lever harp can be applied toward the purchase of a pedal harp when you are ready to move up.

When you are ready to purchase a pedal harp, you have a few different options. If you plan to purchase a brand new instrument, contact Lyon & Healy West. New concert grand pedal harps begin at about \$22,000. You may also wish to purchase a used instrument. If so, I recommend contacting the local American Harp Society chapter in addition to browsing KSL and Craigslist classifieds. Especially with pedal harps, always play an instrument before you agree to purchase!

Once you've chosen your harp, please also consider purchasing an insurance policy for the instrument. Your homeowner's or renter's insurance will not cover damage incurred while the harp is outside your home and most at risk. I recommend harp insurance through the Anderson Group (<http://www.anderson-group.com/harp-insurance.html>), which requires membership in the American Harp Society. AHS membership is also required for students who participate the annual spring harp festival hosted by the Utah chapter of the society, discussed below, so most families will need AHS membership anyway. More on AHS membership here: <https://www.harpsociety.org/Membership/>

### Equipment and lesson materials

Your harp should be tuned before each practice session. I recommend the Peterson iStrobosoft app. Harp strings should be replaced on your instrument as soon as they break. I recommend having a full set of the nylon and gut strings your harp takes on hand. For help replacing strings, try the videos on Lyon & Healy technician Steve Moss's website: <http://www.mossharpservice.com/videos.php>

I also expect you to have an adjustable-height bench, music stand, and metronome at home.

You will need need to bring a small notebook to weekly lessons. I use the notebook to record the weekly, semester, and annual practice and performance goals we set together, discussed below.

Harp method books and repertoire can be purchased at Lyon & Healy West or on Harp.com. If you prefer, however, I can purchase the music for you and add it to your lesson costs. When I inform you at a lesson of a new book or piece to purchase, I expect you to have the materials at your next lesson. I may also send parents text reminders about required materials and lesson times.

### Your lessons

I require at least 6 months of traditional piano lessons before students can begin on the harp, so students become acquainted with basic note-reading and music theory before incorporating harp technique. If you have not had piano lessons from another teacher, I also offer beginning piano lessons. Piano students

will work from the Faber Piano Adventures series, available at local music stores or online:

<https://pianoadventures.com>

Once students have a solid foundation in note-reading, we can move to the harp. I begin most students in Louise Pratt's method books, *From the Beginning Step by Step*. As the student progresses we will begin by adding études and short pieces, working together to choose repertoire suited to the student's style and goals.

You are expected to bring your music and your lesson notebook to every lesson. You should also cut your nails before each lesson and maintain short nails throughout the week, as this facilitates correct hand position and technique. Please come on time and wash your hands when you arrive. Cell phones should be on silent and put away for the duration of the lesson.

For beginning students, lessons last 30 minutes. Parents of children 9 and under are encouraged to attend lessons frequently and to sit with the child during the week's at-home practice sessions at least once a week. As students progress, we may decide together to extend lessons to 45 or 60 minutes.

At the beginning of each semester we will work together to choose a weekly lesson time. I expect you to maintain that lesson time for the duration of the semester. My cancellation policy is described below.

### Music theory and history

I believe a familiarity with the basics of music theory and history is essential to a student's musical development.

For beginning students, music theory mostly involves reading pitch and note value, which we will reinforce as they learn études and beginner pieces. As students progress we will add scales, triads and 7th chords, and lead-sheet improvisation. By the end of their third year on the harp, students will be able to improvise a simple chordal or arpeggiated accompaniment to a familiar melody. Further, as students learn individual pieces, they will also learn to identify the musical forms (binary, ternary, variation, etc.) and phrase structures (sentences, periods, etc.) that provide a foundation for musical expression.

As students advance and learn pieces from the classical canon, they will be required to do some outside research on composers and historical periods. I also strongly encourage students to attend classical music concerts whenever possible: exposure to the depth and breadth of art music expands students' ears

and the minds. Students are required to attend at least one classical concert (that they are *not* performing in) each semester. I may also make reading or listening assignments to help a student learn a specific piece.

### My method and technique

As with every instrument, there are many competing harp methods, including the French schools (from teachers like Henriette Renié and Marcel Grandjany), the Carlos Salzedo school, and the Russian and Austro-Hungarian schools. I have found that in general, most of these methods share a few basic techniques:

- High thumb
- Relaxed hands, fingers, and shoulders
- Fingers sloping toward the ground
- Elbows away from the instrument to create a rounded wrist
- Closing fingers all the way to the palm

While my first teacher taught a strict Salzedo technique, and my later teachers have taught more from the French school, I believe in working with individual students to find what works best for their own hands, arms, and shoulders. The basic techniques outlined above will guide our exploration of your unique physiology as you learn to play freely and safely.

### Warming up

For intermediate and advanced students, it is essential to warm up before you begin playing your repertoire either for me in lessons or during your practice sessions to loosen up and relax your fingers. I recommend Marcia Dickstein's *Harp Warm-Ups* for a complete series of scales and arpeggios and the directional placing series from the Renié method book. Another technique that I have found works well is to slow down a difficult passage from one of your repertoire pieces and practice it in the Renié directional placing series. This not only gets blood flowing to your fingers, but helps reinforce muscle memory in tricky spots from your repertoire.

### Practice expectations and weekly goals

I expect students to play the harp at least six days per week. Five of those days should be focused on your lesson material, including a full warm-up, études, and solo repertoire. I am less concerned that you

practice for a certain length of time than that you achieve measurable progress toward our weekly goals, which I will write in your lesson notebook. Your weekly goals might be:

- Play the right hand of a new piece without pauses at a slow tempo
- Play a piece you've worked on for several weeks at tempo
- Memorize the first two pages of a piece you've worked on for a month

As mentioned above, we will also set semester and annual goals, too. Semester goals will usually be oriented toward the spring, fall, or holiday recitals, and annual goals will usually be oriented toward festivals and competitions. I believe clearly articulating these practice and performance goals and regularly checking your progress will help you maintain motivation and gain confidence as you achieve them.

In addition to five solid practice sessions working toward your practice and performance goals, I want you to take one day each week at the harp to play whatever you feel! You might choose to use that "free" day to play an old favorite piece, learn some new pop or religious song, or just improvise.

Remember: your daily practice doesn't need to be done all in one session. Many harpists find it easiest to break practice down into a few smaller sessions. For example, you might want to practice for 15 minutes before school in the morning, 20 minutes when you get home, and 15 minutes after dinner.

I also encourage you to listen to recordings of the pieces you work on and encourage you to move and dance to the music! I find this helps students internalize phrasing, expression, and transitions more quickly, and also facilitates memorization.

At your lesson each week, you will report on your practice. Especially for young students, this may involve showing me a practice chart we create together. For students who struggle to come prepared to lessons, we may decide to work out a system of incentives.

### Performance opportunities and group lessons

Performing is essential to your progress. I hold studio solo recitals twice yearly, in the spring and in the fall. You must memorize your music for solo recitals. The spring solo recital is intended in part to prepare students for American Harp Society competitions, including the annual Utah harp festival and the biannual national competition. If you are interested, I will also work with you to find and prepare a gig binder for additional performance opportunities, including performances in weddings, retirement homes, churches, and hospitals.

Students are also strongly encouraged to participate in the holiday chamber concert, which gives you the opportunity to perform in a harp ensemble and with other wind and string instruments. Many students have siblings or friends who play a solo instrument, so choose to collaborate with them for chamber performances. I also encourage middle- and high-school students to participate in their school orchestra and, if needed, I can work with your orchestra director to find or arrange repertoire appropriate to your level.

To prepare you for these many performance opportunities, we will hold group lessons once a month during spring and fall semesters. At group lessons, you will perform for your peers and practice harp ensemble works.

### Payment and cancellation policy

My current rate for lessons is \$25 for a 30 minute lesson. I break the year into three semesters: fall (September-December), spring (January-April), and summer (May-August). During fall and spring semesters, payment in full for each month's lessons is due at your first lesson of the month. I create and share a Google spreadsheet with you to track payments. I accept checks, cash, and payments via Venmo and SquareCash.

If I know in advance I need to cancel a lesson, I will give you at least 1 week's notice and we will both make a good faith effort to reschedule the lesson. If I cancel any lesson that cannot be rescheduled, I will refund you the cost of that lesson.

If you need to cancel or reschedule a lesson, please contact me as soon as possible with alternate dates within that same week. Lessons cancelled with less than 48 hours notice will *not* be refunded, except in extenuating circumstances like illness and family emergencies.

During the summers, if you choose not to maintain a weekly lesson time, we can move to a pay-per-lesson model. I still expect 48 hours notice to cancel or reschedule. Please notify me of summer camps, family vacations, etc. as soon as possible so we can plan ahead.

### FAQs

*What kind of harp should I start with?*

I recommend students of all ages begin on a lever harp. Beginners who eventually wish to play the pedal harp should begin on a concert-tension lever instrument. All Lyon & Healy lever harps are concert-tension, and some other harp makers also build concert-tension lever harps, including Pratt

Harps and Salvi. Concert-tension strings prepare students hands for a pedal harp from the beginning.

Beginners, especially older beginners, who do not plan to move to a pedal harp and/or who may have joint trouble might wish to play on a folk-tension lever harp.

*What age should students begin harp lessons?*

I recommend students begin no younger than 8 after at least 6 months of piano lessons. Older beginners (16? 60? 96? Great!) are always welcome!

*How do I care for my harp?*

- Tune your harp before every practice session. Pedal harps should be tuned with all of the pedals in flat position. Lever harps should be tuned to B-flat or E-flat major.
- If you have young children in your home, you may wish to store your harp in a room with a door you can shut and even lock.
- Dust your harp with a microfiber cloth and new, clean makeup brush as needed. A tiny amount of water on a microfiber cloth may be required to remove spots. Lyon & Healy West also carries a harp polish to remove grease or dirt, but this should only be used infrequently (2-3 times per year).
- Pedal harps require regulation at least every 3 years, and if you play frequently, every year or two. During a regulation, the technician changes short-lived felts, adjust the discs for intonation, and can inspect slipping pedals, buzzes, and clicking. Regulation protects your investment - don't neglect it! Regulations in Utah are performed by Steve Moss, a certified Lyon & Healy technician, at Lyon & Healy West. To prepare for regulation, keep a log of any buzzes or slipping pedals. When diagnosing a buzz, check the buzz in all three pedal positions: flat, sharp, and natural. The technician can also replace the bass wires, which especially on a pedal harp should be changed every 3 years or so.