



How to Train Your Hands to Work Separately (together!)

One of the challenges that a beginning or returning piano student faces is developing **hand independence**.

Your hands are almost always doing different things when you are playing even the simplest songs. Even when you are just starting to learn to play, and you're just playing chords in the left hand and the melody in the right, already you are developing hand independence.

Fortunately, there are piano exercises you can employ to help develop this indispensable skill.

The most effective piano exercises for hand independence combine **different rhythms, articulations, dynamics, and motion patterns between the hands**.

Practicing them slowly and consistently (a few minutes every day) is more important than doing many different drills occasionally.

Core principles

- **Go very slowly** so the brain can build new coordination; mistakes at slow tempo mean the tempo is still too fast.
- Practice each hand alone first, then hands together in tiny chunks (one beat or one bar).
- Change only one parameter at a time (rhythm, dynamics, or articulation) when making an exercise harder.

VIDEO 1:

Exercise 1: Different dynamics on a simple scale

Use a C major scale hands together (or a 5-note C–G pattern if you are a beginner).

- Play both hands in the same rhythm and notes, but:
 - Right hand loud (forte), left hand soft (piano) for one ascent and descent.
 - Then switch: left loud, right soft.
- Stay on this until you can keep the soft hand truly **quiet** and the loud hand strong without them “bleeding” into each other.

Exercise 2: Legato vs staccato

Still on a simple scale or 5-finger pattern in each hand.

- Play both hands together in the same notes and rhythm.
- Make the right hand legato (connected) while the left hand plays short staccato, then reverse roles.
- Start at a very slow tempo and listen for absolutely even legato in one hand and clear, detached staccato in the other.

VIDEO 2:

Exercise 3: Different rhythms (quarter vs eighths / dotted patterns)

Use a 5-note C–G pattern to make this easier.

- Version A:
 - Left hand: steady quarter notes (C–D–E–F–G–F–E–D...).
 - Right hand: eighth notes on the same pattern (twice as fast).
- Version B (harder):
 - One hand plays even quarter notes, the other plays a pattern with dotted rhythms.
- Count aloud (“1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &”) and loop just one bar until it feels automatic.

Exercise 4: Contrary-motion scales

Contrary motion forces each hand to move in opposite directions while staying rhythmically aligned.

- Start with both thumbs on middle C.
- Right hand plays C–D–E–F–G upward while left plays C–B–A–G–F downward in the same rhythm, then reverse.

- Begin with a single octave and slow quarter notes, then extend to two octaves and faster note values as it stabilizes.

VIDEO 3:

Exercise 5: Harmonize Hannon

Harmonizing Hannon

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system is divided into two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The piece begins with a treble clef staff containing a continuous eighth-note melody. The bass clef staff provides harmonic support with chords and a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score is marked with measure numbers 4, 7, 11, 14, and 17. The final system concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 6: Away-from-piano tapping drills

Rhythm separation can be trained on a table or your legs.

- Tap a steady beat (quarters) with the left hand while the right taps double-time (eighths).
- Then try left hand in a “long-short-short” pattern while the right stays steady.
- Always start slowly, counting out loud, and increase speed only when you can talk and tap without thinking.

How to structure practice

- 15–20 minutes total:
 - 5 minutes: dynamics + articulation scales (Exercises 1–2).
 - 5–10 minutes: rhythm contrasts (Exercise 3 + tapping).
 - 5 minutes: contrary-motion or a real piece that uses simple left-hand chords and right-hand melody (Exercises 4–5).
- Stick with a small set of exercises for at least a couple of weeks so the coordination can “settle in” before rotating to new material.