

FINDING THE RIGHT FINGERING

Procedure for choosing fingering:

Hands separately, play one phrase, or a part of one phrase, very slowly. Using the printed finger numbers as guidelines, fill in the gaps with the implied fingering. Use your knowledge of scales and arpeggios to construct fingerings that connect all notes logically and fit the hand.

Try different combinations. When you feel you have the best one, play short sections at the projected final tempo (hands alone). If the fingering is still comfortable, return to a slow tempo and see if it fits with the other hand.

Add the notes directly before and after the part you've just fingered. Does your fingering fit with them? If not, make the necessary changes.

Write your fingering into the music. Write all numbers if the passage is complicated, for example in a piece by Bach. Otherwise, write in enough numbers to guide you.

In scale and arpeggio passages, what usually helps the most is to write in numbers for the third or fourth finger where it precedes or follows the thumb.

General Principles to Keep in Mind

- ❖ Establish a “permanent” fingering early on. Use it every time you play the passage and don't change it unless absolutely necessary.
- ❖ Keep things simple. If you can finger a pattern within the confines of your own hand—what I call a handful—all the better.
- ❖ If a passage is difficult to finger, search for the spot which can only be fingered one way, and work backward or forward from that spot.
- ❖ Avoid using weak combinations, like 4-5, at important points in passage-work.
- ❖ When fingering sequences, try using the same fingering for each pattern. If keyboard geography causes problems in certain patterns, change the fingering to fit, but don't be afraid to use finger one or five on black keys. They don't bite.
- ❖ Remember that a great fingering in one hand may feel awkward once you put hands together. So always test that out (as close as possible to tempo) before making your decision.
- ❖ If the printed fingering doesn't work it can be changed. Have a good reason for changing it, though, and be sure to write your fingering into the score.
- ❖ If you mis-finger something during practice, stop and write the fingering in the music immediately. If it's already written in, circle or highlight it and drill immediately.
- ❖ If mistakes keep occurring in a passage, search for a new “permanent” fingering.