

SARAH'S Studio



2025-26

Studio Handbook



Welcome to my Studio!

I'm so glad you'll be joining me in flute or piano lessons this year!

Each of my students is unique and precious to me, and I look forward to getting to know you and helping you achieve your musical goals.

Sarah Richards

This handbook is being provided to communicate essential details about our studio expectations, rules, and policies, and logistics. Parents *and* students should take a few moments to read its contents carefully and thoroughly.

Keep it handy and refer to it throughout the year.

Enforcement Date: August 15, 2025

Your continued enrollment past this date AND/OR submission of a School Year Sign Up response (Google form) in August 2025 indicates your full agreement until further notice or revision.

Getting Started

If you are brand-new to the studio, WELCOME!

I am truly overjoyed to get to know you and begin our musical journey together! We're going to have so much FUN :)

After our Interview/Trial Lesson, here are the steps you'll need to take to get all set up for lessons with me.

First Steps

☐ Fill out the [Registration Form](#)

- This form will ask you to add a payment method - you can use a credit card (2.9% processing fee) or ACH bank withdrawal (FREE payment processing).
- Your Parent Portal access e-mail will be sent at this time also. Log in, take a look around and change your password to something easy to remember. Save or bookmark the login page URL for future use: sarahsstudioidsm.com/portal-login. OR, simply click the "Portal Login" button at the top right of my website header.

☐ Read this Studio Handbook thoroughly and talk to me about any questions or concerns you may have.

☐ Sign and return the Lesson Enrollment Agreement (the last page of this Studio Handbook). A legible scan or photograph is acceptable; then give me the hard copy at your first lesson.

Once those three things are done, you're all set! I'll follow up to communicate your assigned lesson time and let you know any books or materials that need to be purchased prior to our first lesson.

Thank you for choosing Sarah's Studio!

Goals

As your teacher, I really hope to see you grow in these areas throughout our time together :

- **enjoy** our lessons and playing your instrument
- develop a deep **love** for music and **interest** in gaining musical knowledge
- play beautifully with **musicality, expression, rhythmic integrity** and **technical skill**
- demonstrate an understanding of **music theory, notation & history**
- make **steady progress**
- learn **HOW to practice** on your own/become your own teacher
- set musical **goals** and achieve them
- collaborate with **other musicians** (me, other students, friends, family...)
- minimize and manage performance-related anxiety
- become a **patron of the arts** in our community, attending performances and supporting local musicians
- **challenge yourself** beyond your natural limits
- **apply** skills learned in lessons to **other areas of life** (perseverance, discipline, tenacity, attention to detail, grace, goal-setting, kindness, inclusion, collaboration, curiosity, and many more!)
- **get to know other students** in our studio and build lasting relationships
- give of your time and talents to our **community**

Above all, it is my desire to see you succeed in your own goals this year.



Expectations

I do not require perfection of my students. Nor do I expect everyone to become virtuosos or professional musicians. Here are some things I do expect from all of my students and families, to give us the best possible outcome in lessons...

Students:

- Work hard and maintain a regular practice routine (at least 5 days/week)
- Arrive on time to lessons, with an open mind, positive attitude and teachable spirit
- Be responsible for your own lesson books and instrument - bring everything you need to your lesson (It's not your mom's fault if you forgot a book at home!)
- Complete lesson assignments and check off practice boxes
- Be open and honest with me about your desires, struggles, hang-ups, and inner thoughts regarding music, practicing, performing, etc.
- Engage with me in lessons: make eye contact, speak clearly, answer questions, take my comments to heart, and refrain from arguing. Know that I have your best interests in mind always.
- "Fake it 'til you make it" - Some days you just might not be "feelin' it" and you will be tempted to either skip practice or a lesson, or show up with a "blah" attitude. But the best thing to do in these situations is to *just do it anyway*; your feelings about the lesson or practice will likely do a 180 pretty quickly.
- Perform in our Spring Showcase Recital. (Christmas Musicales is optional but encouraged!)
- Be a reliable participant at group classes and ensemble rehearsals.

Parents:

- **Attend all lessons for the first three months.** After that, attend weekly with younger students or occasionally with older students.
- Encourage and affirm! Be your child's biggest fan/cheerleader. Praise their efforts! (refrain from negative talk or shaming - these tactics will only de-motivate)
- Facilitate a regular practice routine and enforce boundaries at home that promote musical learning and the achievement of goals.
- Be present and available while your child practices. The amount of involvement needed depends on the child's age, but even big kids need help sometimes.
- Gentle reminders are helpful - for practice, for packing up for a lesson, etc.
- Provide any technology needed for at-home practice - students will often be asked to play along with an app or recording on a portable device with speaker.
- Communicate with me! I want to hear about how things are going at home so I can either do a happy dance with you or give you some new ideas to help you out.
- Keep your child's instrument maintained and in good repair. Instruct all household members to treat instruments with respect and care.
- Coordinate transportation to studio events, arriving on time, and communicating via text and/or email when plans change or unforeseen circumstances get in the way.

Materials

Student musicians need reliable equipment and books! Here is what you'll need to be successful:

Piano Students:

- A full-size, 88-key piano with weighted keys (also called “graded hammer action”) in good working order. Digital and acoustic pianos are both acceptable. Non-weighted keyboards with fewer than 88 keys are not appropriate.
- Music books (as assigned by Ms. Sarah)
- A metronome or free metronome app/website (I recommend [Metronome Beats](#), but most free metronome apps are just fine.)
- A tote bag to carry music books to and from lessons

Flute Students:

- A flute in good working order + cleaning cloth & rod
- Spiral lesson notebook (given by Ms. Sarah)
- Music books (as assigned by Ms. Sarah)
- Music stand for at-home practice (folding stands will work, but I recommend a sturdier stand, such as the [Manhasset Model 48](#))
- Pneumo Pro Wind Director - purchase through me or at [Blockiflute.com](#)
- [Thumbport](#) (if I've recommended)
- Flute Flex Pro (if I've recommended; also available at [Blockiflute.com](#))
- A metronome or free metronome app/website (I recommend [Metronome Beats](#), but most free metronome apps are just fine)
- A digital tuner device, or free tuner app such as [Flute Tuner by LikeTones](#) ([Android](#)/[Apple](#)) or [Soundcorset](#) (All-in-One Tuner + Metronome)
- A tote bag or backpack to carry music books and flute

[Flute Guide](#)



Check out my instrument guides
for more info on:

What type of instrument to purchase
What features to get
Where to buy
When to upgrade
Repair & Maintenance

[Piano Guide](#)



Location & Logistics

- All Lessons and Group Classes will be held at my home, unless otherwise specified: **8029 Brookview Drive, Urbandale, IA 50322**
- Please let yourself in the front door **no more than 5 minutes** prior to your scheduled lesson time (if arriving earlier, please wait outside). There is no need to ring the doorbell or knock; it can be distracting for the student currently in a lesson. If I am with a student, please wait quietly in the foyer area (you may use this time to take off your coat and get your flute or materials out).
- Upon arrival, students should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer (provided).
- The bathroom located off the hallway/foyer may be used by students and their families or guests. **Please do not enter any other area of my home, and instruct children not to do so either.**
- You may park in the street (on our side of the street) or on the RIGHT side of our driveway (closest to our front door). Please keep the left side of driveway clear.
- I encourage you to **bring a water bottle** with you to your lesson if you like; please do not ask for a drink of water while at my home for a lesson.
- **No food or gum** is allowed in the studio. Students should consume any snacks before entering the studio. If a student happens to be chewing gum or eating food or candy, I will ask that they spit it into the trash can.
- **Shoes** may be left on or taken off at the door - I don't really care. (If you have foot odor, go ahead and leave 'em on for me, eh?)
- Young **siblings** are welcome in the studio but must not become a distraction. Parents, use your best judgment; either bring a quiet activity for them to do in the studio or plan to stay outside/in the car during the lesson. If available, they may use one of my studio iPads to play a preschool music game.



Practice

- **“Perfect practice makes perfect”**

- All students should try to practice at least **5 days/week**. Multiple shorter practice sessions are always better than one big “cram” session the day before a lesson.
- Practice boxes are drawn on all exercises/pages that are assigned, and the page is flagged. Play the piece/exercise **THREE** times, and check off **ONE** practice box per day (**each box = “I practiced this 3x today”**)
- Focus on goals, not time. 5 minutes spent perfecting a tricky spot is infinitely more effective than fumbling through the whole piece for 10 minutes *ignoring all the mistakes*.
- The following times can be used as *guidelines only*:

Age 5-6	Age 7-9	Age 10+
5-15 minutes daily	15-30 minutes daily	30-60 minutes daily

- Parents: I recommend setting an expectation that piano or flute practice **MUST** happen before screen time (or whatever that favorite activity is for your child). Discuss a consequence in advance of enforcing this rule, and then stick to it without exception. Consistency is key!
- I know there will be days and even weeks when it’s next to impossible (or impractical) to practice. We all need a break from time to time! But I want my students to not just “get by” in music lessons, but to **THRIVE**, and that won’t happen without intentional, daily practice at home as a general expectation.
- Let me know what successes/struggles you are experiencing so I can help!

Incentives

Polished Piece Chart

- This is probably my favorite incentive! We enjoy the friendly competition of seeing who has the most polished pieces by the end of the year!
 - Students can earn a sticker on our chart for each piece of music they polish.
 - Level 1+ piano students & intermediate+ flute students: 1 page = 1 polish sticker + \$20 music bucks
 - “Double-polish” a piece for ANOTHER sticker (at my discretion)

Music Bucks & Store

- Students can earn music bucks for the following:
 - Arriving on time and prepared (\$5)
 - Checking off practice boxes (\$1/box; double bucks when all 5 boxes are checked in a week)
 - Polishing a Piece (\$20)
 - Memorize a Polished Piece (\$40)
 - Sightread 1 solo book (approx. 10 pieces) (\$50)
 - Perform home recital for family/friends (play at least 3 Polished Pieces) (\$100)
 - Pass a Scale (5-note, 1-octave, or 2+ octaves); play from memory in 3 lessons. (\$30)
 - Attend a live classical, jazz, or folk performance (suggestions: the Des Moines Symphony, a Drake recital, Ms. Sarah’s Flute Choir performances, etc.) (\$100)
 - Complete a method book (\$100)
 - Do pages in your theory book (\$5/page)
 - Playing music games (\$ varies)
 - Ms. Sarah may “hand out” music bucks throughout a lesson for a variety of good behaviors or for demonstrating musical knowledge and skills and playing games!
 - Perform in a studio recital (\$100)
- I will add more ways to earn bucks regularly! Have a suggestion? Let me know!
- Music Bucks will be stored in each student’s music lab folder in the lab station (they should not be taken home).
- The music store will be open about once a month for shopping.
- Items in the treasure chests and on top of the music store cabinet can be purchased anytime.
- Shopping must be completed during your Music Lab time.
- Younger students may need a little help from a parent to count their music bucks and make their selections from the store.

Performances

Holiday Musicales (optional)

- A “musicale” is a recital given in a home or residence.
- We schedule two Holiday Musicales in December at local retirement facilities. It is a joy to share our music with the residents and bless them in this way! They *really* enjoy having us. It is a fantastic way to serve our community with our talents and skills, while practicing the art of performance.
- Two dates will be offered, and you can sign up for the date you prefer (each program will have a mix of flute and piano students)
- Flute players will perform along with accompaniment backing tracks, or play ensembles (duets, trios, etc.)

Spring Showcase Recital (expected)

- Always on a Sunday afternoon in April or May
- Two recitals: a Flute Recital and Piano Recital
- All students will prepare one to three pieces for this performance.
- Ensemble opportunities: flute ensembles, piano duets, sibling duets, etc.
- Family members are asked to plan to attend the recital in its entirety to support all of the performers and avoid distraction of audience members leaving early.



Lessons & Enrichments

Lesson Length

- Beginners: 30 or 45 minutes weekly
- Intermediate to Advanced: 45 or 60 minutes weekly

Music Lab

- Music Lab is an independent enrichment time for students to explore music theory, rhythm, ear training/listening, music appreciation, and composition/creativity skills using an iPad and digital piano.
- Music Lab Tasks will be provided for all ages and abilities, and will include topics relevant for both piano and flute students.
- 15 or 30 minutes weekly, scheduled adjacent to lesson.
- The Music Lab student must work independently and minimize interruption to the private lesson that is happening simultaneously. Young children may need a parent or older sibling's help to complete their Music Lab time.
- Music Lab is always optional; if you occasionally have a conflict with the lab time, it's no problem!
- Students must respect all studio property and use equipment carefully. Intentional abuse or misuse of Music Lab items may result in loss of this privilege and additional fees to cover the replace cost of damaged items.

Group Classes

- Group Classes will be scheduled monthly for a total of up to 6 classes each school year and 1 in the summer.
- Attendance is not required, but strongly encouraged.
- Will include peer performance, group instruction, ensemble playing, and game/activity time.

Calendar & Scheduling

School Year (Last week of August through May)

- A total of at least **31 Weekly Lessons guaranteed** and up to **6 Group Classes**.
- A Studio Calendar will be provided each semester.
- Planned No-Lesson Days:
 - Thanksgiving and Black Friday
 - Winter Break (usually 2 weeks)
 - Spring Break (third week of March)
 - Week of Memorial Day (some make-ups may occur)
 - One or two additional weeks per semester, at instructor's discretion
- Lesson time/day preferences will be gathered in the summer, and a lesson schedule will be announced by mid-August
- You may request the same lesson day/time each school year, but it is not guaranteed. I make every effort to give you a first or second choice day/time.
- Once you are assigned a lesson spot in August, it is yours through May. Please consider making a commitment to stay in lessons through May (including the Spring Recital), so you have a chance to experience all aspects of lessons.
- If a recurring conflict arises and you can no longer attend lessons at your regular time, let me know right away. I will attempt to switch you (permanently) with another student. There is no guarantee that someone will be able to switch with you, but we usually can figure something out.

Summer (June through Mid-August)

- Students will choose a Summer Lesson Package of 3 to 8 lessons to be held from June to mid-August, with a make-ups the third week of August.
- No refunds will be given for missed lessons in the summer. However, rescheduling or switching within my availability is fine when conflicts arise.
- One summer make-up is allowed, and must occur before school starts.
- Summer Enrollment **guarantees** Fall placement. Students wishing to step away for the summer will be considered "discontinued" and placement will be subject to availability in the Fall after openings are filled by new students.
- **New students** and **high school flute players** are strongly encouraged to enroll in the *maximum* number of summer lessons that your schedule allows. We will need regular interaction to get a solid start, or to prepare for Fall auditions.

Tuition & Fees

Annual Registration & Materials Fee

- Assessed in August to secure Fall enrollment (**\$50**).
- Covers a variety of studio costs, such as Music Lab, Music Store incentives, studio resources, recital costs, subscriptions (e.g., Piano Maestro app), and more.

School Year Monthly Tuition (Sept.-May)

30-minute lessons	45-minute lessons	60-minute lessons
\$116	\$174	\$232

- Billed monthly on the first, regardless of the number of lessons in the month.
- Pro-rated ONLY when a student begins/ends lessons in the middle of a month.
- Additional costs may occasionally be incurred for materials or other services, These amounts will be communicated via text or email prior to the invoice date.

Summer Tuition Packages (June - July)

	3 lessons	4 lessons	5 lessons	6 lessons	7 lessons	8 lessons
30 min.	\$91.50	\$122	\$152.50	\$183	\$213.50	244
45 min.	\$137.25	\$183	228.75	274.50	320.25	366
60 min.	\$183	244	305	\$366	\$427	\$488

- Package will be chosen in May and lessons placed on the schedule.
- Billed as lump sum on June 1 or two equal installments on June 1 & July 1

Late Fee

- Overdue balance reminders are emailed on the 5th of the month, and a late fee of **\$30** will be posted if the account remains delinquent on the 10th.
- Lessons will be paused immediately for any account that remains delinquent more than 30 days. Tuition is *not* waived for the next month unless 30 days notice has been given. Lessons will resume as usual upon payment in full.

Auto-Pay

- All tuition is collected automatically via Stripe on a monthly basis.
- Multiple months can be paid in advance if you wish. There is no discount for paying in advance.
- Auto-Pay Invoices will be e-mailed on the first day of the month, which will automatically initiate payment processing.
- Upon enrollment for lessons, families must ensure they have one of these payment methods on file within the Parent Portal:
 - Automatic credit/debit card (incurs a 2.9% convenience fee)
 - ACH withdrawals (i.e., electronic check) - FREE **recommended**Lessons cannot be scheduled until *after* a payment method has been verified.
- Within the Portal, navigate to the “Account & Invoices” tab and click on the “Manage Payment Methods” button to add or delete payment methods.
- In the event an automatic check/credit/debit transaction fails, you will receive an email notice of the failure either immediately or within 5 business days. You may need to update your payment details within your Parent Portal (such as expiration date) or call your credit card company/bank to find out why the transaction was declined, then manually initiate a new payment to avoid late fees from Sarah’s Studio.
- Cash or paper checks will not be accepted, except in special circumstances at the Instructor’s discretion.
- If you ever notice an error or have a question of any kind about an invoice, please reach out directly to me so I can look into it and fix any problems!



Online Portal

- Access the Parent Portal by clicking the button at the top right of the header at www.sarahsstudiosm.com. You may want to bookmark the website so it is easy to find for future use.
- Additional parents/grandparents can be added to the family account and given portal access. Just send me the name(s) and e-mail address(es) to add.
- Students may also request their own portal access if they have their own personal (non-school) e-mail account. I highly recommend you do this so students can use the calendar and other tools and features available inside the Portal (such as the Practice Log and Online Resources). Just send me the student's *non-school* email address and I'll set it up.
- A variety of useful information and tools is accessible any time in your Portal:
 - Calendar (sign up for studio events, view scheduled lessons and classes, notify me of an absence, etc.)
 - Studio News/Blog Posts
 - Manage Account, Invoices, and AutoPay (visible in Parent account only)
 - Attendance records
 - Online Resources (i.e., any audio or video files that I want to share with you)
 - Practice Log
- If you ever have trouble logging into your Portal, please let me know. I can re-send a login link (this resets your password) if you are unable to get in with the "forgot my password" feature.
- I encourage you to keep your login details handy and use the portal frequently!



Attendance

Absences

- Student absences for ANY reason are completely voluntary and will not affect monthly tuition.

Rescheduling/Switching/Make-Up Lessons

- **Please schedule lessons at a time that your student is consistently available.** Make an effort to attend your lesson each week.
- Habitual no-shows or excessive requests for rescheduling may constitute grounds for dismissal from the studio, per the Instructor's discretion.
- When a conflict does arise—such as a school band or choir concert, track meet, special event, going out of town, or falling ill, etc.—please notify me as soon as possible, and include full details of student's availability M-T-W-Th during the week of the conflict.
 - One of the following options will be offered:
 - Switch Lesson – Instructor will find another student who may switch lesson times with you for the week. Advance notice by Saturday before the week of the conflict is preferred.
 - Rescheduled Lesson – Per instructor's discretion, an alternative date and/or time may be offered during the week of the conflict or during a subsequent week. Advance notice by Saturday before the week of the conflict is preferred.
 - Virtual Lesson – When advance notice is not possible (i.e., within 48 hours of the lesson), an online lesson may be a good choice. Make sure you get in touch with me first; do not assume it will work unless you hear back from me. Some examples of appropriate situations for a virtual lesson would be:
 - student illness, but student feels well enough to hold the lesson
 - student is out of town but able to attend a lesson virtually.
 - student is unexpectedly stuck at home with no transportation
 - Make-Ups – One missed lesson may be made up per semester. Make-Up Lessons will often be scheduled during a designated “make-up week” at the end of each semester. Make-Ups will at any other time will be subject to my discretion and schedule.

Attendance (continued)

No Instrument or Materials?

- In the event you have accidentally left your music books or flute at home or school, or your instrument is being repaired and you have no replacement, **PLEASE COME TO YOUR LESSON ANYWAY!** I have a spare flute and lots of flute and piano music and resources, so we can still have a productive lesson. If you simply do not show up, the miss will be considered an absence.

Instructor Cancellation

- When the Instructor must cancel a lesson, a make-up lesson will be given OR a credit applied to the account.
- In case of **inclement weather**, the Instructor will base any decision to cancel or switch to virtual lessons on the decisions of local school districts, including Johnston, Urbandale, and Des Moines. I will communicate cancellations via text and e-mail. Any lessons canceled by the Instructor due to weather will be rescheduled. If the student chooses not to attend a lesson due to inclement weather when Instructor has not canceled, the miss will be considered an absence.

Reminders

- An automatic e-mail and/or text reminder will be sent 24 hours in advance of all lesson events.
- Be sure to provide at least one SMS-capable cell phone number so that you can receive text reminders and other communication.



Termination

Voluntary Discontinuation

- Advance notice of **one month (four weeks)** is required in the event the student wishes to discontinue lessons. The student is not obligated to attend further lessons after notice is given, but certainly welcome to.
- An **exit interview** must be held prior to the last lesson to gain feedback and ensure all necessary communication has occurred. The student and a parent/guardian should be present. An in-person meeting is preferred.
- Upon notice of discontinuing, the current month's tuition must be paid in full, and an additional fee will be pro-rated per lesson, for up to four lessons, based on the number of lessons remaining in the current month.

Dismissal

- Dismissal is considered a last resort only after sufficient communication with the family and significant attempt to resolve the behavior has been made.
- The following situations constitute grounds for immediate dismissal from the studio, subject to the Instructor's discretion:
 - Excessive or repeated late payments
 - Long-term failure to maintain practice standards
 - Persistent absences or tardiness
 - Failure to honor studio policies
 - Repeated neglect to bring materials or refusal to follow instruction
 - Inappropriate or disrespectful behavior, theft, and/or repeated misbehavior
 - Intentional damage to studio property or personal property of Instructor or other students
- At the time of dismissal, the current month's tuition must be paid in full, and an additional fee will be pro-rated per lesson, for up to four lessons, based on the number of lessons remaining in the current month.

Agreement & Releases

Revision and Agreement

- This handbook may be revised periodically to address the changing needs of the studio and its student enrollment. The instructor will provide at least two weeks' notice before any changes in Studio Policy take effect.
- The student's continuation of lessons beyond the enforcement date will be deemed affirmation of agreement with the handbook.

Liability Release/Hold Harmless

- If a dispute arises out of, or relates to, this handbook, the instructor, parent and/or student agree to try in good faith to settle the dispute by reasonable communication or, if necessary, non-binding third-party mediation. Legal action shall not be taken.
- Sarah's Studio and Sarah Richards shall be released and discharged from any liabilities, accidents or injuries, or damage to or loss of personal property that the enrolled student or their family members may incur due to participation in studio events.

Photo Release

- During studio events, instructor reserves the right to take photographs and video or audio recording of students for use in studio media. Photos/video taken by other individuals and provided to the instructor may also be used for studio purposes.
- First names may be used, but care will be taken to ensure safety and appropriateness of posts online.
- If you do not want your child's photos used in this manner, please provide a written request to Sarah Richards.