

Piano Evaluation Check List - For Upright Pianos

This list is not exhaustive and will not help you determine the actual value of a piano but it will help you determine if the piano has a minimum value and is not worthless.

This piano may be worth something if you can answer **NO** to all these questions:

Case/Cabinet

Yes No

- Is the cabinet ornate? (I should remove this question. Ornate pianos are attractive but their design is often inferior because they are so old.)
- Are there pieces of veneer missing?
- Are there cracks or wrinkles in the cabinet?
- Any loose or missing pieces?
- Any scratches or chips?
- Is it hard to roll the piano around?
- Do you hear crunching or squealing noises when you try to move it?

Keys

Yes No

- Are there any chips in the keys?
- Are any key tops missing?
- Can you move the keys side to side?
- Are they discoloured or yellow? (Select yes if they are white)
- Are they in one piece? (Again, confusing. Ivory has two pieces but is not always considered more valuable.)

Action (Insides, take top front panel off.)

Yes No

- Are there gaps of different sizes between the hammers? (Select no if the hammers are evenly spaced)
- Are there gaps of different sizes between other parts below hammers? (Select no if the other parts are evenly spaced.)
- Are there grooves in the fronts of the hammers where they strike the strings?

Bridle Straps

There are little tapes or straps glued to each hammer and hooked around a metal wire. Try gently to pull the end off where it hooks around the wire:

Yes No

- Does the end crumble?
- Are there any of these tapes missing or broken?

Strings/pinblock

Yes No

- Are any strings missing? (Look at each tuning pin, they should all have strings wound around them. Each hammer should have 3 strings except for the hammers to the left. There are 2 strings for the hammers just to the left and 1 string per hammer for the left most hammers.)
- Are any of the strings new looking and clean? (i.e. newer looking than the majority of the other strings, and randomly spaced.)
- Do any of the strings have knots in them as if they were tied? Look near the top.
- Are the tuning pins (the pins where the strings wind around) set into a block of wood? (Select No if they are set into a plate of metal.)

Capstans

Look at the very back of the keys, where something comes up and activates the hammer mechanism above the keys.

- Do you see a small block of wood on the key with two screws in it? (Select No if there is a dowel or wooden cylinder on a wire, or a thick screw-like object with a funny looking head.)

Sound

- Play some notes at the same time and let go. Can you still hear the notes ringing after you let go the keys?
- Play the notes in the bass (left). Do they sound muffled and last only a short time?
- Are there any notes that don't sound at all?
- Are there any notes that hit twice if you play softly?
- Try pushing some keys down slowly. Do you sometimes hear silence?
- Play all the notes slowly from top to bottom. Listen to the sound of each note. Do some sound horribly out of tune while others sound not too bad? (Especially in the treble. i.e. top or right end)

Remove bottom front panel. There may be a wooden or metal clip under the keybed in the middle. Press up on it to remove the bottom front panel.

- Look at the wooden panel at the back, behind the cast iron plate, often painted black or gold. Are there any cracks in it?
- Look at the block of wood at the lower right where the coiled strings sit. Look at the tiny copper pins where the strings are up against. (2 pins per string.) Can you see any cracks where these pins go into the block of wood?

If you answered no to all these questions, your piano may have some value. It is strongly suggested that you have a qualified technician look at it to confirm your inspection and to give you an evaluation of what it may be worth in your market.

Keep in mind that the used piano market is difficult to predict. In order for the seller to improve their chances of getting a fair price for their piano, they should be willing to wait up to six months to a year to find the right buyer.