



◆ MOORE PIANO SERVICES ◆

Greenwood, South Carolina · Certified Piano Technician

Piano Buyer's *Checklist*

What to inspect before you buy a used piano

A field-ready checklist from a Certified Piano Technician —
so you know what to look for, what to walk away from,
and what questions to ask before you commit.

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Before You Buy That Piano.

Used pianos range from hidden gems to expensive mistakes — and they often look identical on Marketplace. This checklist gives you the same framework a Certified Piano Technician uses in the field: what to inspect, what sounds wrong, and the one thing that means you should walk away regardless of price.

■ THE #1 WALK-AWAY: CRACKED SOUNDBOARD OR SEPARATED RIBS

The soundboard is the large wooden panel under the strings that amplifies the piano's sound. When it cracks significantly or separates from the internal ribs, the instrument loses resonance in ways that cannot be meaningfully repaired at reasonable cost. Press your hand flat on the soundboard and look for visible cracks, gaps, or areas where the board has buckled away from the ribs underneath. If you see this — regardless of how good the piano looks or how low the price — walk away.

I. The Soundboard & Structure

Start here. Structural problems are expensive or impossible to fix — everything else is negotiable.

✓ LOOK FOR

- Soundboard is solid with no visible cracks
- Ribs are flush against the underside of the board
- Cabinet is square, joints are tight
- Cast iron plate (harp) has no visible cracks
- Bridges are intact — no separating or cracking at string contact points

✗ WALK AWAY IF YOU SEE

- Cracked soundboard or ribs separated from board
- Cracked cast iron plate — irreparable
- Severe warping or twisting of the cabinet
- Bridge cracked through at string pins
- Evidence of past flooding or water damage inside

II. Tuning Pins & Strings

A piano that won't stay in tune after a proper service is a piano that needs an expensive pinblock replacement — or retirement.

✓ LOOK FOR

- Tuning pins feel tight when you wiggle them by hand
- Strings are consistent in color — no heavy rust patches
- No broken strings (count the notes that don't sound)
- Pins are upright and evenly spaced

✗ WALK AWAY IF YOU SEE

- Tuning pins that wobble or spin freely — stripped pinblock
- Heavy rust on strings (surface rust is cosmetic; deep pitting is not)
- Multiple broken strings — signals neglect or age
- Pins leaning at odd angles

III. Keys & Action

Action problems range from cheap fixes (a broken key) to significant jobs (full regulation or action rebuild). Note what you find.

✓ LOOK FOR ■ All 88 keys present and intact ■ Keys return to rest position after being pressed ■ Key surfaces are clean — ivory or plastic, not crumbling ■ Notes sound at both soft and loud velocities ■ Hammers hit strings and return cleanly	✗ WALK AWAY IF YOU SEE ■ Keys that stick down and don't return ■ Crumbling or missing key surfaces ■ Notes that don't speak at soft dynamics (regulation needed) ■ Hammers with deep grooves cut into the felt ■ More than 2–3 non-functioning notes
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IV. Pedals, Cabinet & Environment

✓ LOOK FOR ■ All pedals engage and return smoothly ■ Cabinet finish is intact — minor scratches are cosmetic only ■ Piano smells clean — no mustiness or mildew ■ Seller knows the instrument's history and last tuning date ■ Serial number is visible (helps date the instrument)	✗ WALK AWAY IF YOU SEE ■ Pedals that don't engage or are seized ■ Musty or moldy smell — signals interior moisture damage ■ Signs of pest damage: rodent nesting material, droppings ■ Seller can't say when it was last tuned or serviced ■ Missing serial number plate
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V. Questions to Ask the Seller

“How long have you owned it, and do you know its history?”

Pianos that moved through multiple homes are harder to assess. Original-owner pianos are often better cared for.

“When was it last tuned, and by whom?”

A tuning within the last 1–2 years by a named technician is a good sign. "Years ago" or "I don't know" means budget for a pitch raise plus tuning — add \$325 to your cost estimate.

“Has it ever been moved, flooded, or sat in storage?”

Storage in a garage, barn, or unheated space is one of the most damaging things that can happen to a piano.

“Why are you selling it?”

"Upgrading" or "downsizing" are good answers. Vague answers about "not having room" for a piano they clearly could fit deserve follow-up.

VI. Realistic Cost to Budget Beyond the Purchase Price

SERVICE	TYPICAL COST	WHEN YOU'LL NEED IT
Tuning (first visit)	From \$200	Always — every used piano needs it
Pitch Raise	\$125	If it's significantly flat or sharp
Regulation	From \$900	If touch feels uneven or notes don't speak softly
Dampp-Chaser Install	\$700–\$1,500	Strongly recommended for SC climate
Deep Cleaning	\$125	If it's been sitting or shows dust/debris
Piano Appraisal	\$125	Before you commit — includes a written condition report

◆ NEXT STEPS WITH MOORE PIANO SERVICES

- Piano appraisals — \$125, includes a written condition report
- New Owner's Package (\$1,000) — pitch raise & fine tuning bundled
- Dampp-Chaser installation — the best first investment for any SC piano
- Questions before you buy? Call or text (864) 340-5916

Schedule an appraisal at moorepianoservices.com/contact

◆ FOUND A PIANO? LET'S LOOK AT IT TOGETHER. ◆

Appraisals — honest advice — written report.

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