

Developmental and Remedial Tips and Techniques for String Instructors
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Importance of Establishing a Healthy Foundation

These warm-ups and exercises, which have been adapted from the work of **Mimi Zweig** (www.stringpedagogy.com), **Dr. Brenda Brenner**, **Paul Rolland**, **Shinichi Suzuki**, **Rebecca Henry** (www.violinpractice.com), and others, are intended to develop flexibility, comfort with the instrument, and eventual artistic freedom.

These warm-ups could be incorporated into a public school string curriculum with the intention of reinforcing the motions through many repetitions throughout the early years of study in order for the physical motions to be internalized.

While the exercises and terminology are intended for elementary school age students, they can be used with students at any age or level of proficiency. They can also be transferred to any string instrument!

They are presented in a vaguely sequential order, though the appropriateness of any assignment is always at the teacher's discretion and is dependant upon the students' needs.

All teachers are encouraged to expand on this list- be creative! Be sensitive to the musical and technical requirements of your students.

Warm-ups in *italics* are more suited for students at the end of Suzuki Book 1.

STRETCHES (Brian Lewis)

- Brian Lewis says that “musicians are athletes!” It is essential for our students to stretch before they play

VIOLIN ONLY – REST POSITION

- **Slide on Magic X** -- for violin and viola students only; cello/bass maintain C shape with fingertip/thumb contact only; Placed at the base joint of the left index finger; pre-shifting exercise
- **Tap Over High Dot** – Reference point at octave harmonic; Promotes relaxed fingers and proper left hand shape; pre-vibrato exercise; rhythmic reinforcement; repeat these two exercises many, many times
- **Statue of Liberty** – for violin and viola students only; start in rest position with left hand over high dot; lift left arm to “Statue of Liberty” position; counting games to develop strength; turn instrument toward body and ensure that the end button is against the

student's neck on collarbone; head stays stable – like a statue! No space between the neck and the instrument

- **Check Violin/Viola Instrument Stability** – wave; scratch back; swing arms
- **Cello positioning** – endpin set so peg box is at ear level; knee position just below C bout – balancing, not squeezing; Roller Coaster exercise
- **Bass Positioning** – check feet and body balance; angle instrument towards the centre of body; left leg touches back of bass; “Look! No Hands!” exercise

VIOLIN ONLY – PLAYING POSITION

- **Flap Your Wings**
- **Tap Over High Dot**
- **“I Like Ice Cream”** (Tap rhythm over high dot, then in 1st position. Repeat)
- **Pinky Plucks** – Pre-shifting exercise (1st position; high dot; next high dot; back)
- **Ant Song** – Violin/bass together; left hand pinky plucks (3x each string) over high dot:

Each, Each, Each, Each and every
Ant, Ant, Ant, Digging in the
Dirt, Dirt, Dirt, Underneath the
Ground, Ground, Ground

Viola/Cello together as above:

Ants, Ant, Ants, Digging in the
Dirt, Dirt, Dirt, Underneath the
Ground, Ground, Ground, All the way to
China, China, China

For all instruments, look for relaxed left hand fingers, vibrant ringing sound; reinforces string names

- **GDG** – continues to reinforce the names of the strings and proper shaping of the left hand; over the high dot; pinky finger all together:

G D G rest
G D G rest
G G D D
G D G rest

During the rests, either tap the right hand on the right thigh, stomp foot, or tap toe

Variations:

D A D (all)
A E A, G E G (violin and bass)
C G C, C A C (viola and cello)

LEFT HAND FINGERS

- **Tapes for specific fingers**
- **Thumb Taps**
- **Placing 1 2 3:** Starting over high dot, slide hand back, place 1, 2, 3, (4), tap thumb. Repeat 3-5x
- **Finger Taps** (Do the 4th finger taps even if the student isn't playing with 4 yet)
 1. Finger Taps: Tap up and down (These can also be done with independent fingers once the hand shape looks unified)
 - i. In first position hop 1 up and down
 - ii. With 1 down, hop 2
 - iii. With 2 down, hop 3
 - iv. With 3 down, hop 4
 2. Finger Hops: Hop side to side (Maintain shape and angle of hand and fingers)
 - i. First finger, hop from A to E, repeat (keep hand shape)
 - ii. Second finger, same
 - iii. Third finger, same
 - iv. Fourth finger, same
 3. *Finger Slides: Slide back and forth with a light finger, like a harmonic*
 - i. With 1 down, slide 2 up and back (C to C#)
 - ii. With 1 down and high 2 down, slide 3 up and back (D to D#)
 - iii. With 1, 2, 3 down, slide 4 back and up (E-Eb)
 - iv. With 2, 3, 4 down, slide 1 back and up (Bb-B)
- **Levels**
 1. Left Arm Strum
 2. Flap Your Wings
 3. Tapping Levels – all four fingers together on E, A, D, G, D, A, E; swing arm for levels
 4. *Slurring Levels:* 01 01 01 01 10 10 10 10 Slur 2; swing arm/elbow during open strings.
G D A E E A D G
- **Pre-Shifting**
 1. Pinky Plucks
 2. Tap 'n Slide – any string; slide up the string and back while tapping all four fingers together. They can fall on any of the strings.
 3. Tap 'n Slide – one string; slide up the string and back while tapping all four fingers together on one string. Do on all 4 strings. Swing arm for levels and as the hand slides up to the high positions.

- **Preparing the 4th Finger**
 1. The Broken Record – doubles, detache; 012343434343210
 2. Exercises in Suzuki Book 1
 3. Matching 0-4-0-4 (E, A)

- **Preparing Low 2**
 1. Finger Slides (see above)
 2. Doubles, detache, on A, E: 0 1 low2 high2 low2 high2 low2 high2 3 high2 low2 high2 low2 high2 low2 1 0
 3. Pattern Work (in doubles, detache) – any Book 1 bowings
 - i. Major: 0 1 23 4 32 1 0
 - ii. Minor: 0 12 3 4 3 21 0
 4. Main Rule: Use ONLY 3 before a low 2
 - i. On A String: Play B D C B. Leave 1 down. Use 3 without 2.
 - ii. G Major Scale in 2 octaves: Descending, use ONLY 3 before low 2.

- **Pattern Work: Hot Cross Buns (1st position)**
 1. 210
 2. 103
 3. #321
 4. 432

- **Facility and Release of Tension**
 1. Thumb Taps: Tap thumb during open strings on any scale or song.
 2. Fuzzy Fingers: harmonic fingers on any scale or piece.
 3. *Trill Exercises*: 010, 020, 030, 040, 030, 020, 010 (release during open strings)

- **Pre-Vibrato**
 1. Shadow Vibrato: (no instrument or bow); In playing position, move bow arm slowly and left arm as if sliding on the magic X.
 - i. Opposite motion
 - ii. Parallel motion
 2. Slide on magic X while playing open A with slow bows.
 3. Slide on magic X during all open strings of the Twinkle Theme.
 4. Pretend Vibrato
 5. Peg Knockers
 6. String Scrubbers
 7. Teacher Wiggles Fingers

- **Contact Point**
 1. Bridge Pulls (Whole bow, gently pull bow from sul tasto to the bridge and then over the bridge! Squeaky sound)

- **Pre-Spiccato**
 1. Let Go Bow – drop bow at bouncing point; “let go” of thumb and bow hold; watch the bow bounce; hit the string and pull bow towards the tip – let it keep bouncing
- **Scale Keys**
 1. Early Book 1: A, D
 2. Late Book 1: add G (2 octaves), E
- **Scale Bowings**
 1. Twinkle Rhythms
 2. Upper Half 2x martelé
 3. Lower Half 2x martelé (wobble at every frog- pinky pushups)
 4. Whole Bow Legato
 5. Whole Bow Half Half martelé and legato
 6. Hook 2 marteles
 7. Slur 2
 8. Hook dotted quarter and eighth note (3/4 bow, 1/4 bow)

BOW ONLY

- **Mark the middle of the bow with tape (and tip if the bows are long)**
- **Pinky Houses for violin/viola**
- **Start with a pencil – taps; flexible thumb; look upside down**
- **Bow Games**
 1. Windshield Wipers
 2. Salt and Pepper Shaker
 3. Pinocchio
 4. Unicorn
 5. Stir the Soup
 6. Rocket Ship
 7. Baseball Bat (put bow on top of head with a baseball bat hold; transform into a beautiful bow hold; bring down and see if the thumb and pinky are curved)
 8. *Pinky Push-Ups*
- **Bow on Shoulder** – Paper towel tubes for correct motion without sound; hold with left hand in playing position; use upper half of the bow for violin/viola; lower half of the bow for cello/bass; say and play rhythms; open and close the gate; Karate chop!!

VIOLIN AND BOW TOGETHER – don’t rush this step! Previous skills must be set to ensure success!

Continually review all previous steps for reinforcement

- **Right finger taps** with bow at middle on A string; tap 1, 2 and 3 together, pinky, thumb

- **Silent String Crossings**
- **Open and Close the Gate** on Open E and A (UH martelé)
- **Tiri Tiri Ti Ti** on Open A and E (Clear detaché and martelé strokes) – E String Concerto!
- **“Boinga Boinga”** – bounce both arms to find the balance and the feeling of hanging
- **Surf the Bow** (instructor holds bow, resting at tip; student travels along the stick with bow hold, tip to frog)
- **Silent Bow Placements** – middle, trip, frog. TOAD AND FROG STORY; note the square and triangle shapes
- **POOFS** – ½ bow martelé, middle-tip-middle-frog (wobble to check balance) – middle
- **Bow Wanderings** – baby steps (detaché) from tip to middle to frog to middle to tip.
- **Bow Circles in Fruit Sizes** (watermelon, orange, grape, etc.); down bow and up bow
- **D A D with the Bow** – upper half of the bow for violin/viola; middle for cello/bass; prepare silent string crossings between G and D, and D and A; martelé bow stroke; combine entire sequence: Pizz – C G C, G D G, D A D, A E A; Bow – D A D
- **See Saw** – introduces 1st finger; legato bowing in triple meter; violin/viola in upper half; cello/bass in lower half; A - - D - - A - - D - - E E E E E D - - D - - repeat
- **D Major Scale** – twinkle rhythms; bow division; block fingers (plop)

REMEDIAL WORK

Through a qualitative research study, I interviewed 10 postsecondary instructors from across North America. They all agreed that body awareness and bow technique are the most pressing deficiencies with their first-year students.

For us instructors, this highlights the importance of establishing a healthy foundation from the outset of instruction

In the early stages of learning, it is essential that students understand the importance of their feet and posture – how they stand and use their bodies. If this is established in the early years of study, it increases their potential to develop an awareness of how they stand.

A hands-on approach of modeling and imitation in the early stages helps students to kinesthetically transfer the motions into their physiology and eventually internalize the skills.

- **Set-up Song**
- **First Drill Exercise** – cellists
- **Hitchhiking Duck Clock** – toes touching; face wall and place arms against wall with thumbs pointing up; move arms up like a clock

- **IU** – Lengthening; find relationship between the head, neck, and back; create a space between the vertebrae; feel shoulder blades supported by the big muscles in the back; crawl up the wall; blades fall down into back
- **Centering** – slouch; one finger on navel; one finger on sternum notch; lengthen- feel the head lift and push back
- **Air violin** – put hands out in front (like genie); open up to violin position; put violin on collar bone; hand over high dot; bow in middle on string

When students sit while playing violin, try to accomplish the following:

- Students sit tall in their chair with weight onto their feet
- Weight is equally distributed between the two feet
- Weight is equally distributed between both hips
- Make sure that shoulders are down
- Eliminate unnecessary rotation through legs, hips, shoulders, torso, or neck/head
- Watch that they avoid reaching for the instrument – move body closer to the instrument

Strategies to eliminate posture deficiencies:

- Respectfully give verbal cues
- Provide gentle physical cues to enforce the new postural suggestions
- Find places in the music for students to self-assess – reset posture, breathe (e.g., when there are rests in the music; when the teacher is working with another section/student)

Bow Position

- Relaxed bow position – thumb loose (no gripping)
- Place hand over high dot
- Bow in the middle on the A string
- 1st finger is relaxed; tap; tap 2 middle fingers; tap pinky finger; tap thumb
- Flip bow over – thumb on side of frog to help push and pull of the string
- Silently place the bow at the tip – back of the hand is loose and more elongated; balance on 1st finger
- Middle of the bow – hand is balanced
- Frog of the bow – balance on the little finger

TRAIN STORY

- Bow at the tip; the hand is the engine; the forearm represents the cars; the caboose is the tip of the elbow
- Up bow – use the engine to pull the cars as far as they can go; when the engine cannot pull any more, the caboose pushes the bow the rest of the way
- Down bow – turn the stick away from you by balancing the bow between the middle finger and the thumb

Martelé

- Practice 4, 2, 1 martelé per bow – feel the weight of the string; push and pull the string back and forth; listen to the beginning of the note and the ring; “hammer” stroke; when at the frog, tap all fingers and balance the hand