

How to Effectively Teach Bow Technique in String Instruction
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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.

PRE-BOW EXERCISES

- **“Flying pizzicato” movements** – develops freedom of movement, body coordination, long bow strokes; practiced by plucking string with right hand with big circular motion
- **Start with a pencil** – taps; flexible thumb; look upside down

BOW ONLY (BEGINNER LEVEL)

- **Mark the middle of the bow with tape (and tip if the bows are long)**
- **Pinky Houses for violin/viola**
- **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 – for advanced students
- **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 with tube held in front of them; say and play rhythms; open and close the gate; Karate chop!!

1. Pepperoni Pizza (4 sixteenth notes and 2 eighth notes)
2. Strawberry Strawberry (1 eighth note and 2 sixteenth notes)
3. Pepperoni Pepperoni or Do You Want a Motorcycle (8 sixteenth notes)

VIOLIN/VIOLA 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** – bow at middle on an open string; tap 1, 2 and 3 together, pinky, thumb
- **Silent String Crossings** – to keep the arm and shoulder flexible
- **Waves** – practice hooking the tip onto left little finger; wave wrist up and down to feel the flexibility
- **Bouncing a Ball** – practice the waving motion with the bow just hovering over the string; then bouncing it vertically onto the string (without making a sound)
- **“Poofs”** – on open strings (UH martelé)
- **Twinkle Rhythms** – on open strings (clear detaché and martelé strokes)
- **“Boinga Boinga”** – bounce both arms to find the balance and the feeling of hanging

- **D-A-D (all instruments)** – upper half of the bow for violin/viola; middle for cello/bass; martelé bow stroke; combine entire sequence: Pizz – C G C, G D G, D A D, A E A; Bow – D A D

D-A-D rest (stomp)

D-A-D rest (stomp)

D-D-A-A

D-A-D rest (stomp)

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

- **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

- **See a Little Monkey** – Pepperoni Pizza rhythm; reinforces finger pattern

See a little monkey (D)
 Climbing up a ladder (E)
 Climbing up so high to (F#)
 Pick a pink banana (G)
 See a little monkey (G)
 Climbing down a ladder (F#)
 Climbing down so low to (E)
 Eat a pink banana (D)

- **Scale Bowings (D major, A major, C major) – upper half only**

1. Twinkle Rhythms

EXTENDING THE BOW TO THE LOWER HALF (Violin/Viola)

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
- **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
- **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
- **Big Grasshoppers** – using the whole bow (WB Half Half)
- **Scale Bowings (D major, A major, C major) – expanding to the lower half**
 1. Upper Half 2x martelé
 2. Lower Half 2x legato (wobble at every frog- pinky pushups)
 3. Whole Bow Legato
 4. Whole Bow Half Half (martelé and legato)

- **Scale Bowings (2 Octave G major)**

5. Hooked Bows (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 15 notes per bow)
6. Slurs (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 15 notes per bow)
7. Hook dotted quarter and eighth note (3/4 bow, 1/4 bow)

- **Slur Preparation (to be practiced on all consecutive strings)**

D-A (down bow slurred quarter notes) A (up bow half note) A-D (down bow slurred quarter notes) D (up bow half note)

D-A (down bow slurred quarter notes) A A (separate quarter notes) A-D (up bow slurred quarter notes) D D (separate quarter notes)

D-A (down bow slurred quarter notes) A-D (up bow slurred quarter notes) D-A (down bow slurred quarter notes) A-D (up bow slurred quarter notes)

BOW ONLY (INTERMEDIATE LEVEL)

- **Caterpillar Crawling** – hold the bow vertically (tip pointing towards the ceiling); student travels up and down the bow with only the fingers! You can vary the angle of the bow to increase difficulty
- **Bow Lifts** – reverse the bow hold so that the tip is now the frog; lift and lower the bow ten times; repeat at least 3x; * ensure that the little finger remains curved! *
- **Jelly Fish** – hold the tip of the bow with the left hand and mimic the movement of a jelly fish with the right hand while maintaining the bow position
- **Collé in the Air** – hold the bow vertically (tip pointing towards the ceiling); hold onto the right wrist with the left hand to isolate the fingers; elongate the fingers and then bring them back to a square position; * ensure that only the fingers move! *
- **Circles** – hold the bow vertically (tip pointing towards the ceiling); hold onto the right wrist with the left hand to isolate the fingers; pretend that the screw at the frog is the tip of a lead pencil and draw circles with only the fingers

ADVANCED BOW STROKES

Tone: Three-Dimensional String (to develop maturity in tone)

- **Bow Waves** – practice pulling the string from the left side and pushing the string from the right side; 2 “waves” on the down bow and 2 “waves” on the up bow (feel the bow

stick sink closer to the bow hair with the pulsing motion of the index finger on each “wave”); 3 per bow, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, etc.

Viotti Stroke

- Variety of hooked and separate bowings that incorporate two notes in a rhythmic ratio of 3:1 or 2:1
- Catch and a release – “work” on the “little note” to yield a released tone on the long note
- Begin by practicing with the whole bow on all open strings; then at the tip beginning up bow; and at the frog beginning down bow

Ricochet Stroke

- Let the bow bounce on the open string as many times as possible in one bow
- Let the bow bounce 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 times per note on each down bow and up bow
- Add the ricochet stroke to a two octave scale
- Ensure that the bow hair is flat, the fingers are loose with a forearm motion, and that minimal bow is used
- Then try ricochet with a down up up pattern; down down up pattern

Spiccato Stroke

- **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
- **String Bounces** – begin by silently bouncing the bow vertically on the open strings – 4 bounces on each string and back (use the whole arm to bounce the bow); think of the violin as a percussion instrument – do not control the bow! Then move on to 3 bounces, 2 bounces, and 1 bounce per string – move the elbow to the appropriate string level
- **Forearm** – then add horizontal motion in the lower half and repeat the 4, 3, 2, and 1 (beginning up bow and down bow) bounces per note
- **Detaché to Spiccato** – practice 4 detaché and 4 spiccato; repeat
- Remember that the first spiccato note in a passage always STARTS FROM THE STRING; upper arm stays completely relaxed and keep the stick of the bow tilted over towards the fingerboard

Sautillé Stroke

- Directly from detaché bow stroke – except sautillé is vertical; bow hair does not come off the string (think of the stick bouncing only)
- Need to feel leverage – like a teeter-totter in the elbow; flat bow hair; loose arm and elbow!

- Feel like the arm is going to play a fast string crossing back and forth between two strings (but stay on only one string)

Up and Down Bow Staccato

- Legato strokes that are stopped at the end of each note (not released as a martelé)
- The “stop” becomes the beginning of the new note
- Play down and up bow (2 notes per bow) with the bow moving as a constant legato tone; then add 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12 notes per down and up bow
- Bow must be “sticky” in the string – horizontal motion!
- Flying Staccato – practicing starting at the tip of the bow with a tremolo (crunchy sound) and then stay totally relaxed while you move the bow horizontally; release the arm with a sort of “rocking” motion in the hand (like turning a doorknob) – experiment lots! This is a very personal bow stroke that will be executed successfully by every student in a different way

Collé Stroke

- **Spider on a Mirror** – practice this to increase flexibility in the fingers
- Collé increases flexibility of the hand and benefits all bow strokes – initially practiced at the frog using only the fingers
- Fingers begin in a square position; fingers move horizontally to the right to an elongated position; fingers return to a square position
- The beginning of the note is articulated and the fingers release – always check to make sure that the thumb is loose!
- Practice the motion in the air with the tip of the bow pointing vertically to the ceiling
- Practice at the frog of the bow on the open strings (lift bow off; then keep on) – start with the fingers elongated at the frog and “pinch” the string with a release in the air
- Play collé up bow at the frog and down bow at the tip
- Play collé down bow at the frog and up bow at the tip