

Fourth Finger First: Why the Order of Finger Introduction *Matters*

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The Context

- Heterogeneous string orchestra instruction
- Approaches to initial set-up of the left hand/arm position
- Issues:
 - Left Hand/Arm Position for violinists and violists
 - Voluntary Use of Fourth Finger by violinists and violists

The Comparison: Private Instruction Methods

- Geminiani, F. *The Art of Playing on the Violin 1751 Facsimile Edition*
- Mozart, L. *A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*
- Auer, L. *Violin Playing as I Teach It*
- Applebaum, S. *The Art and Science of String Performance*
- Galamian, I. *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*

The Comparison: Group Instruction Methods

- Müller, J. & Rusch, H. *Müller Rusch String Method for Class or Individual Instruction*
- Dillon, J., Kjelland, J., & O'Reilly, J. *Strictly Strings: A Comprehensive String Method*
- Frost, R. S., & Anderson, G. E. *All For Strings Comprehensive String Method*
- Allen, M., Gillespie, R., & Hayes, P. T. *Essential Elements 2000 for Strings*

The Experiment

- Control group time series design
- Duration: 27 weeks
- Participants: 6th grade orchestra students in a suburban public school in Atlanta, GA
- Pretest to create equal control and experimental groups followed by instruction
- Four prepared performance tasks and a sight-reading task

The Implementation in the Classroom

- Starting all instruments with all four fingers down
- Using your current method book



Fourth Finger First Procedure

- Preliminary exercises and stretching
- Touch all four fingering dots lightly on the D string in the order of 4,3,2,1 (Fingering dots were placed on the instrument prior to instruction) and lightly “tap, tap, tap” the left thumb across from the first dot without squeezing to prevent tension.
- Practice touching all fingering dots without squeezing and then practice pushing each string down lightly with all fingers.
- Pizzicato the note out loud over and over while singing its pitch name “A” and then play an exercise students previously learned using open A, now with 4th finger while singing the pitch. Cellos and Basses provide a pitch anchor by still playing open A.
- Play G using 3 fingers down on the D string. Start by echoing rhythms from the teacher and being careful to always touch all four fingering dots to position the hand before releasing the fourth finger to play G. Cellos are now introduced to G with 4 fingers down and basses provide a pitch anchor with open G.
- Play F# using 2 fingers down on the D string. Start by echoing rhythms from the teacher and being careful to always touch all four fingering dots to position the hand before releasing the fourth and third fingers to play F#. Cellos release one finger to play F# with 3 fingers down and Basses are introduced to F# with 4 fingers down.
- Play E using 1 finger down on the D string. Start by echoing rhythms from the teacher and being careful to always touch all four fingering dots to position the hand before releasing the other fingers to play E (all instruments).

The Benefits

- Improved positioning of the left hand, wrist and arm
- Voluntary use of fourth finger
- Better conceptual understanding
- Better intonation
- Pitch stability within lessons while introducing fingering
- All instruments are able to start with all four fingers down