

Setting up your string students for for success!

Diagnose and correct common technical problems to allow your students play their very best.

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D'Addario Orchestral Strings

Eastman Stringed Instruments



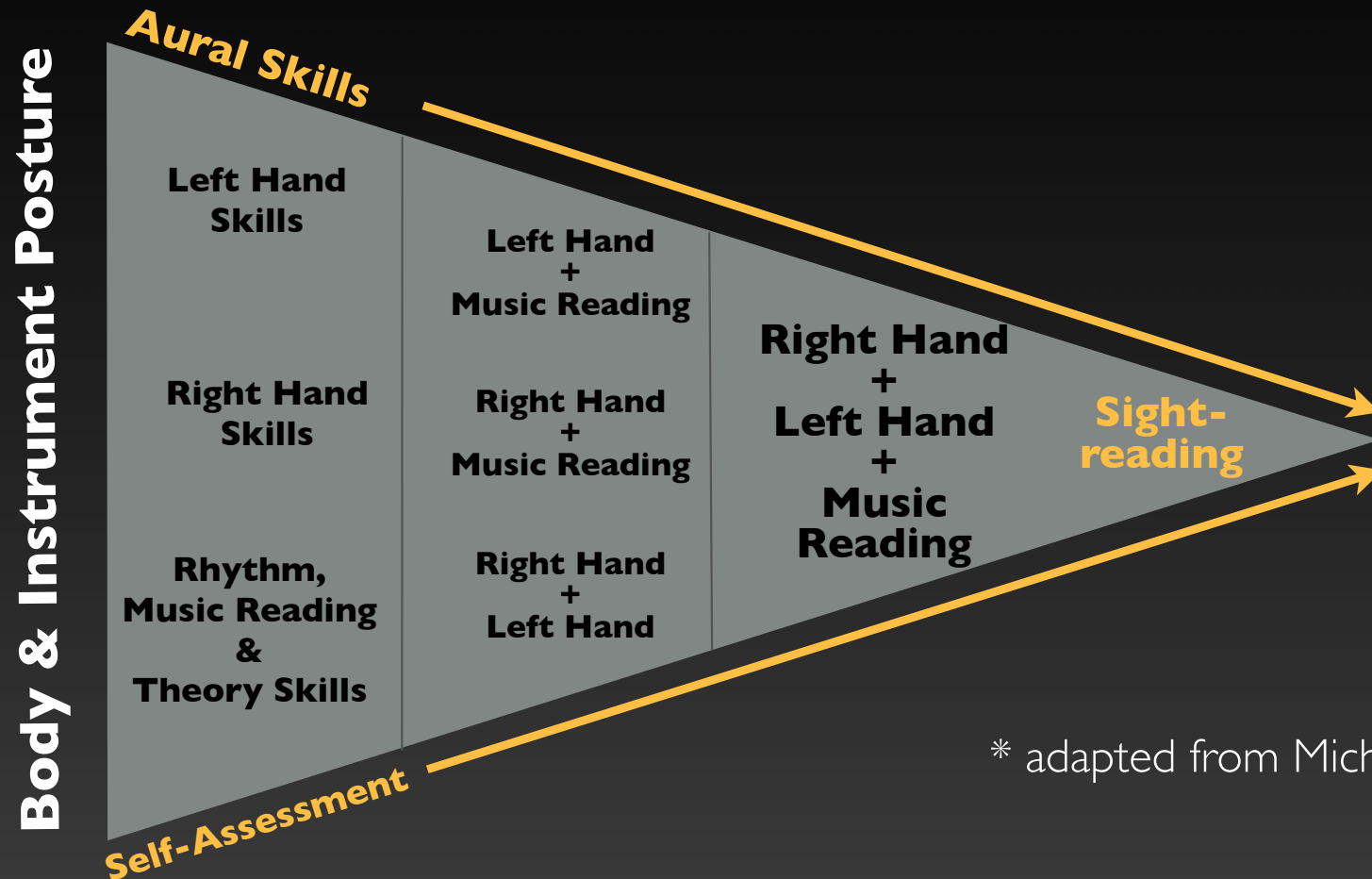
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Where I'm coming from...

- Middle School Orchestra (*Nevada*)
- Community College Applied Lessons (*Nevada*)
- High School Orchestra (*Florida, Ohio, Georgia*)
- University String Techniques (*Ohio State, Kennesaw State*)
- Elementary Strings (Itinerant) (*Ohio*)
- Youth Orchestra (*Georgia*)

String Pedagogy Sequence



* adapted from Michael Allen

Laux's "Priority" List

1. Set-Up (Essential Technique)
2. Tone Production
3. Intonation
4. Rhythm & Ensemble
5. Music Literacy
6. Musicianship Skills
7. Musical Understanding

Diagnose Common Problems

- Body
- Instrument Position / Set-Up
- Left Hand
- Right Hand
- Combination of two or more of the above



Set-Up is Key!

- Good set up is a prerequisite to be able to play accurately and without pain
 - Body Posture
 - Left Hand Position and Shape
 - Right Hand Shape

Body Posture

- Goal/Purpose: Comfort, Injury prevention, Allows for proper LH technique
- If at all possible, stand! (violin and viola)
- Key Principles
 - Lengthened and relaxed
 - Tall spine, head slightly forward
 - Players should always listen to their body! If something is uncomfortable or painful something needs to be adjusted.

Problem: Feet NOT flat on floor

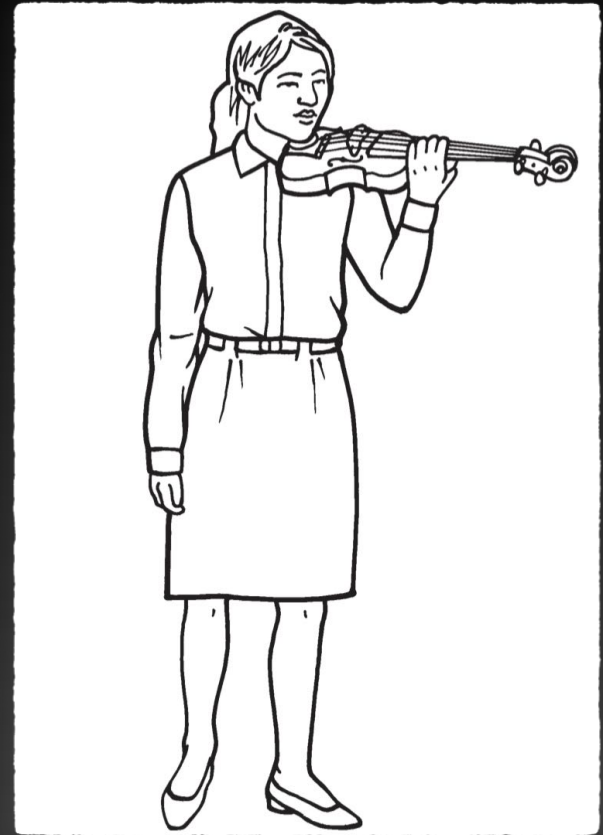


Body Posture Strategies (Sitting)

- Gillespie - "Grow an Inch"
- Shoulder Shrug
- Stand Up, Sit Down without moving your feet
- Foot Shuffle
- "Sumo Stomp" - cello

Setting Up Instrument Position (Violin/Viola)

- Instrument is parallel to the ground
- Instrument/Shoulder rest fully covers shoulder
- Instrument is positioned at 10 o'clock



From *Essential Elements for Strings, Book 1*

Guideline for use of a Shoulder Rest

*“If you have
a NECK, you
must use a
shoulder
rest”*



Double Bass Sitting Position

- Rule #1: Every bass player has their own philosophy
- I prefer to have basses sit in stools
- Stools should be adjustable and fit to each student
- Name the stools or assign numbers based on height
- Right foot flat on the floor, left foot on stool's step ring

Problem: Chair too low & sitting back



Strategies: Chair too low & sitting back

- If possible find appropriate height chair
- Have students sit on stools
- Put something uncomfortable on the back of the chair
- Remove instrument and revisit body posture strategies

Problem: Instrument Not Parallel to Floor



Strategies: Instrument Not Parallel to Floor

- “Scrolls up!” Or find other key words that work for you
- Have students balance something on instrument so it doesn’t fall off
- Raise music stands
- Have students stand during rehearsal
- Peer evaluation
- Self evaluation with video

Problem: Instrument not under jaw bone



Strategies: Instrument not under jaw bone

- Have student put fingers on end button and move instrument toward their neck
- Explain that the instrument should be an extension of the body
- "Lock it in"
- Try a cloth or pad on chinrest (may be a comfort issue)

Problem: Instrument not on shoulder



Strategies: Instrument not on shoulder

- Have students lift instruments in the air with two hands and down into the correct position
- Physically move the instrument to the right position
- "No violin beards"
- "10 O'clock sharp"
- Cause may be the student trying to face the music stand. Remind them to reposition their body/chair!

Set-up assessments

- “Selfie” Self-Assessment
 - Have students take photos of each other, then complete a self-assessment rubric
- “Beauty pageant”

Left Hand Set-Up

- Goals/Purpose:
 - Intonation, Facility when changing notes, Rhythmic accuracy, Shifting, Injury Prevention
- Wrist should be straight, as to avoid injury and allow fingers to move freely
- Demonstrate crooked wrist and finger action vs. straight wrist

Left Hand Set-Up Checkpoints

- First finger square (“Don’t spill the spaghetti”)
- All fingers are curved
- Fingertips hover over strings and fingernails align with fingerboard
- Palm faces shoulder, not the face
- Wrist straight and relaxed
- Elbow moves to change strings

Long Fingernails! Eww!

- Long fingernails do not allow finger tip to touch string
- Besides a “community nail clipper” (**GROSS!**), what are some of your solutions?
- Compare to athletics



Problem: Pancake hand



Strategies: Pancake hand

- Students use right hand to check left wrist
- Hold a straight object up to the students wrist
- Keywords “Oven”, etc.
- Pedagogical aids on instrument

Problem: Hand grips the neck



Strategy: Hand grips the neck

- Have students tap thumb. (Students can't squeeze while tapping thumb). Ask students to do this often!
- Check thumb height. Only the top of the thumb should touch.
- Check opening below thumb
- Double check that instrument is correctly on shoulder and weight of instrument is not in the left hand

Problem: Fingers not aligned with fingerboard



Strategy: Fingers not aligned with fingerboard

- Goal: Fingernails must hover over the strings!
- Without instrument, pretend to screw in a lightbulb into the ceiling
- Be sure that the palm faces the student's shoulder and not the head/face

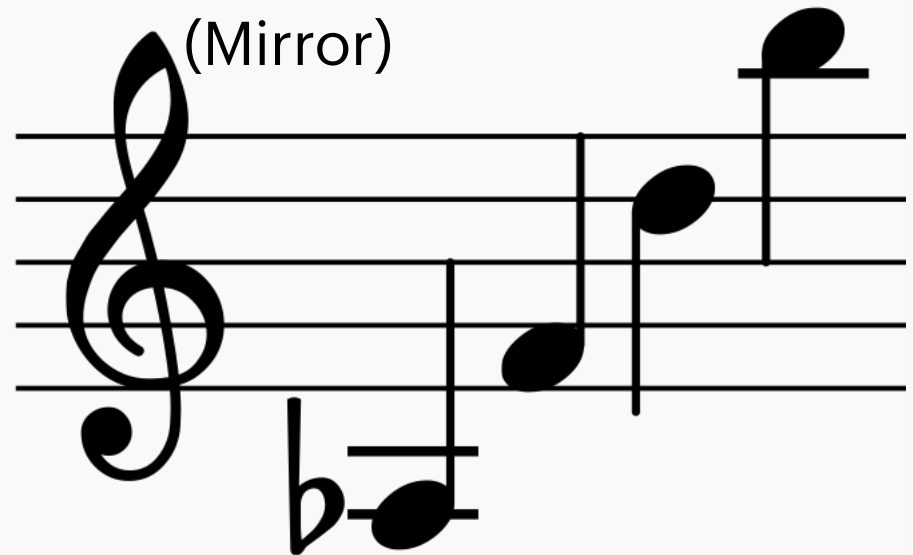
Problem: Left elbow does not move when crossing strings

- Practice swinging elbow to change strings
- Pretend there is a person sitting on the elbow and swing them back and forth.
- “Elbow toward your tummy”
- Be sure wrist does not flex or twist

Violin/Viola Left Hand Set-Up Strategy

- No instrument
- LH up as if you are playing
- Thumb out
- Make 1st finger square
- Twist wrist, align fingernails

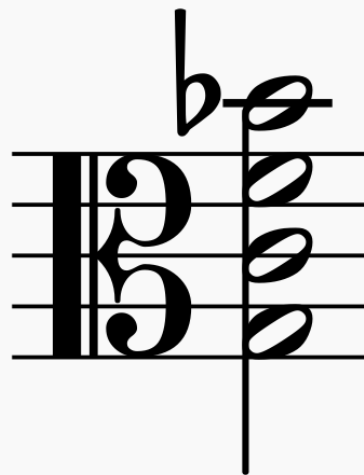
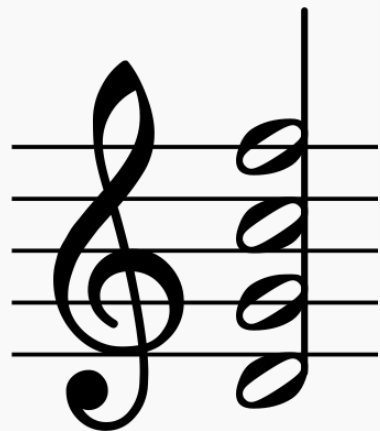
Setting Up the Geminani Chord (Violin)



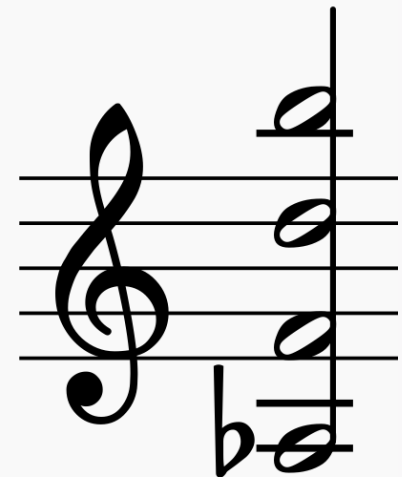
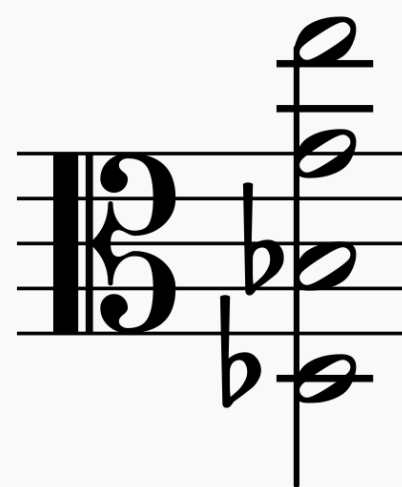
Setting Up the Geminani Chord (Viola)



The Geminani Chord



(Mirror)



Strategy: Cello Left Hand Position

- Students move to 4th position, interlace RH fingers into left hand, then slide back.
- Reach out for a giant drink

Problem: Cello/bass elbow too low

- Knuckle Knocks
- Bridge Taps
- Phyllis Young Exercises
 - Tap Head, then bring to instrument
 - Ski Slopes

Strengthening the left hand

- Left hand pizzicato
 - Pulse, Rhythms, etc.
- Finger independence exercises (helps both hands)

Setting up your students' **EARS**

- Aural skill training is just as important and physical set up
- Aural training from the very first day
- Listening, pitch matching, singing should be a part of your routine

Echoes

- Start each day with melodic and/or rhythmic echoes
 - Be sequential. We want students to feel successful!
- Have students sing, then pluck, or play
- Can be as simple as D, D, D, D (echo) A, A, A, A (echo)

Interval Ear Training

- Start with half and whole steps
- Focus on a few intervals per week
- Use lots of echos and find tunes/songs/riffs that match the intervals
- When you come across different intervals in literature, be sure to point them out and have students identify

Right Hand Skills

- Bow arm, elbow, wrist, fingers
- Goals/Purpose: Tone Production, Rhythm, RH/LH coordination

Items often overlooked...

- Bow hair tension
- Bow hair condition
- Bow hair quantity
- Appropriate amount of rosin

The “bow hold”

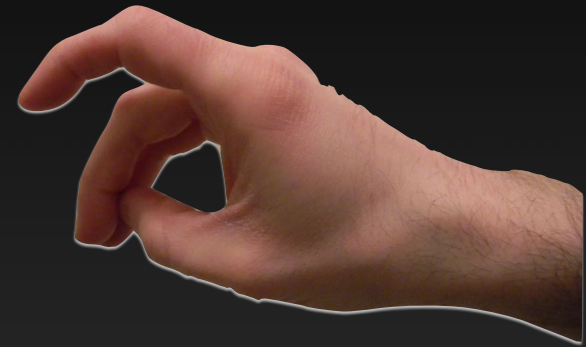
- Not a “grip”
- “Bow Balance” rather than bow “hold” or “grip” (Butz, 2015)
- Never fixed or rigid!
- The bow hold is under continuous change as it is moved from frog to tip and back.

Two bow holds??

- The “frog bow hold”
- The “tip bow hold”

Bow Hand shape strategies

- The flop hand
- The bunny
- The llama
- The “Chop & Flop”
- The snake
- “Baby’s hand”
- “Each finger goes here...”



- What are your favorites??

Pre-Bow Hold

- Hand shapers (from large to small)
 - 1/2 inch PVC tube
 - Shapes fingers by exaggerating the curve
 - Pencil
 - convenient, closer to bow size
 - Drinking straw (cheap, thin ones!)
 - helps prevent squeezing
- Mini Bows (don't ever throw away a broken bow!)

Have students memorize the checkpoints

- All fingers are curved and naturally spaced
- All fingers are relaxed
- The thumb is bumpy
- The pinky is on top (violin/viola)
- The ring finger covers the eye

From Essential Elements for Strings, Book 1

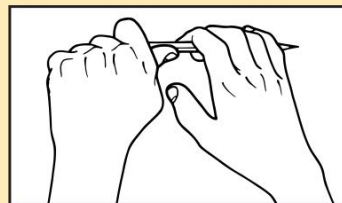
SHAPING THE RIGHT HAND

BOW BUILDER ONE

Pencil Hold

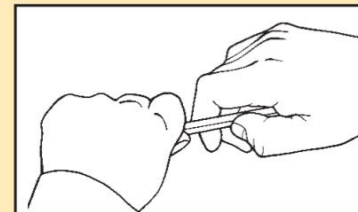
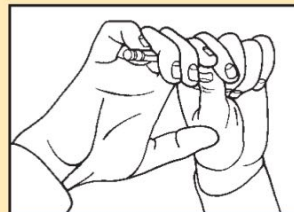
Step 1 Hold a pencil in your left hand at eye level.

Step 2 Hang your right fingers over the top of the pencil, as shown.

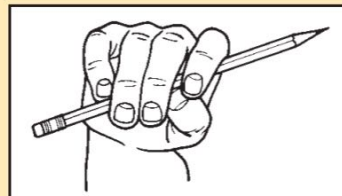


Step 3 Place your right 4th finger on top of the pencil.

Step 4 Touch the tip of your right thumb to the pencil just opposite your 2nd finger. The curve of your thumb will form an oval with the finger.



Step 5 Lean your right hand so the first finger rests on top of the pencil between the 1st and 2nd joints. Keep your fingers relaxed. Remove your left hand from the pencil. Practice shaping your hand on the pencil until it feels natural to you.



Practice BOW BUILDER ONE daily.

A Note about Pronation

- **Pronation** is the slant of the fingers on the bow
- Prominent in violin/viola bow hold
- When setting up the violin/viola bow, always angle the tool/bow at a 45 degree angle to automatically build in the pronation.
- Traditional methods of setting up bow hold only reinforce supination (the wrong kind of slant)

#BowHoldThumbProblems

- If the thumb is not bent, the rest of the fingers will usually not bend!
- Bumpy thumbs
- “A-shape” thumb
- Texting thumbs

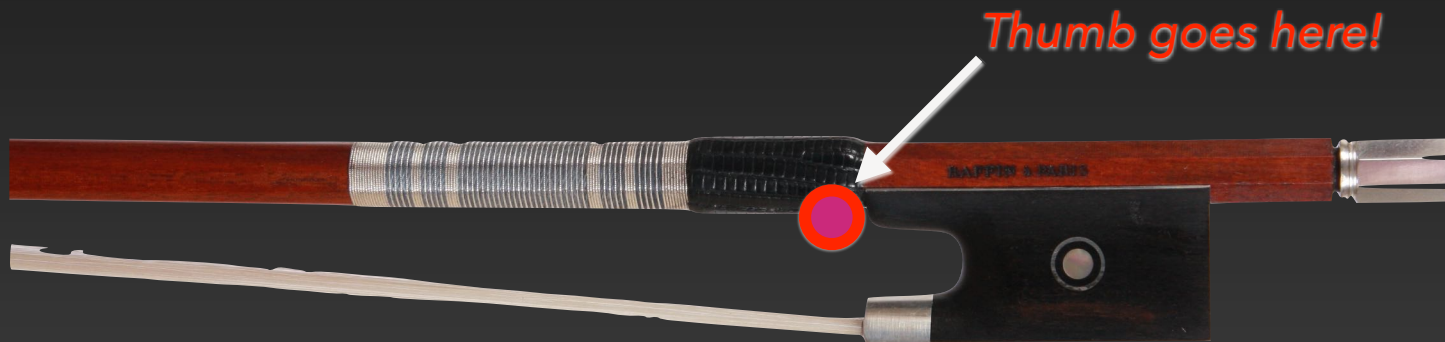


** “No Banana Thumbs”*

** “No Hitchhiker thumbs - illegal in every state!”*

Where does the thumb belong?

- Important that you continuously remind students
- NOT in the frog's mouth!!
- The tip of the thumb belongs on the stick **just in front** of the frog's "mouth"



Bow Hold Exercises/Warm-Ups

Search "The Orchestra Teacher" on YouTube



In closing..

- A string player's set-up impacts tone production, intonation, expression, and the ability to play without pain.
- It is essential that we address this, not only at the beginning stages, but all through a student's education.

"The Orchestra Teacher" Podcast



Special Thanks...



Contact me!



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Slides and more available at:

www.OrchestraTeacher.net