

Sequential Vibrato Instruction in the String Classroom

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I. Vibrato Readiness in the String Classroom

- A. Students must have proper set up
 - 1. Instrument, including hardware
 - 2. posture and relaxed left hand
- B. Solid intonation should be achieved
- C. Students should be comfortable and accurate with shifting to allow for fluid motions

II. Types of Vibrato

- A. Wrist and Arm
 - 1. When to teach each style
 - 2. How to teach each style
- B. Importance of thumb placement
 - 1. Violin and Viola strategies
 - 2. Cello and Bass strategies

III. Use and Movement of Left Hand Fingers and Arm

- A. How fingers feel on the string
 - 1. Playing on the pad of the finger
 - 2. “Sticky” fingers
- B. The all-important partnership between forearm and elbow

IV. Sequential Vibrato Exercises for Heterogeneous Daily Classroom Use

5 Minute Daily Vibrato Sequences

Week 1 [No Bow]

Focus is on learning proper arm & wrist movement for vibrato.

Violins/Violas: Start in playing position, then remove the arm/hand from instrument neck and support the instrument only with the shoulder and jaw. This will make sure there is no left hand tension. The vibrato movements for wrist vibrato will be against upper bough and arm vibrato will slide wrist against neck of the instrument. For arm vibrato this gets arm moving at the elbow.

2 – Woolstenhulme/Vibrato

Cellos/Basses: Fold left arm at elbow and touch the collar bone with fingers. Arm rocks back and forth to get the entire arm moving rather than creating just an elbow twist.

Set metronome at quarter = 66. For rhythmic movement, try eighths, triplets & sixteenth notes.

Great stage for shakers!

Week 2 [No Bow]

Focus is to remove possible tension or squeezing of the instrument with the left hand by using fixed thumb movements on the neck.

Violins/Violas will keep thumb stationary to neck unlocking the finger joint from opposite side.

Cellos/Basses will fix thumb to back of neck and rock arm.

Set metronome at quarter = 66. For rhythmic movement, try eighths, triplets & sixteenth notes.

Week 3 [No Bow]

Focus is to get finger rocking on instrument top through proper arm or wrist movements.

For all string students, place the 2nd finger on upper bough of the instrument around the black stripes of the purfling. Students move the finger on the wooden top of the instrument to the metronome click. Try using fingers 1, 3, & 4 as well.

Set metronome at quarter = 66. For rhythmic movement, try eighths, triplets & sixteenth notes.

Week 4 [No Bow]

Focus is to set fingers on string with proper arm or wrist movement.

The following is a finger polishing exercise.

Violins/Violas: place hand in 3rd position.

Cellos/Basses place hand in 1st position

3 – Woolstenhulme/Vibrato

Lightly place 2nd finger on string and make small “polish” motions. Towards end of week start adding arm weight to finger so that finger “sticks” with the polish motions. Try using fingers 1, 3, & 4 as well.

Set metronome at quarter = 66. For rhythmic movement, try eighths, triplets & sixteenth notes.

Week 5 [No Bow]

Focus is keeping the finger planted in same location on the string.

Place 2nd finger on string with eighth note movements. The violin and violas are rocking from nail to pad of finger. Try keeping violins/violas in 3rd position and cellos/basses in 1st position. Don't rush into triplets or sixteenths until they are ready to move forward.

Weeks 6 & 7

Focus is adding the bow to learned vibrato sequences.

Repeat weeks 1-5 adding **whole note bow strokes** to the string. Watch for tightness and tension and make necessary adjustments.

Week 8

Focus is vibrato with whole notes in one octave scales.

Day 1: Alternate notes so that the first note of the scale has no vibrato, then the second note has a slow and wide vibrato. Continue with that pattern.

Day 2: Every note has slow wide vibrato.

Day 3: First note has slow wide vibrato, 2nd note has faster vibrato.

Day 4: Every scale note has fast vibrato.

Day 5: Review days 3 and 4.

Set metronome at quarter = 60.

Week 9

Focus is to activate fast vibrato from the start of the note.

Day 1: F, rest, F, rest, F, rest, F, rest.

The idea is to activate fast vibrato on the start of quarter notes. Invite student solos alternating with whole class participation.

Day 2: E, rest, E, rest, E, rest E, rest.

Day 3: Using the same pattern as shown on Days 1 and 2, try F#, G with rests

Day 4: Twice as fast using eighth notes and rests to get the vibrato activated. Try using the A string: B, C, C# and D.

Day 5: Constant vibrato using quarter note patterns.

(E, F#, G, A) (B, C, D, E) etc,

Encourage and remind students to vibrate the notes. They need reminders to make it into a habit.

Set the metronome no faster than quarter = 60

V. Ideal Music Exercises and Literature for Incorporating Vibrato

- A. Slow (whole note) scales and “Week 9” sequences as warm ups
- B. Melodic materials that are slow and/or contain long valued notes
- C. Faster moving notes in technical exercises or performance-based music (as players progress with their use of vibrato)

VI. Defining Vibrato Speed for Each Instrument

- A. Basing vibrato on string instrument size and sound
- B. Width and speed of osculation based on style of music and parts played within the literature

VII. Troubleshooting for Excessive Tension and Tightness

- A. Changes in basic instrument position and posture to accommodate vibrato
- B. Violin/Viola: Locked thumbs
- C. Cello/Bass: Using wrist in vibrato
- D. Watching for shoulder to arm tightness
- E. Watching for hand to wrist to finger tightness