

From Poof to Portato: A Sequence of Bow Strokes for the Heterogeneous Class
Dr. Brenda Brenner, Associate Professor of Music Education (Strings)
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music

Bowing technique is a crucial foundational skill in string playing that creates good tone quality and forms the basis for musical style. In this session, methods of teaching fundamental bow strokes and bow choreography in group settings from beginning through intermediate levels will be explored. Literature utilizing the various strokes will be broken down and demonstrated by a string quartet from the Indiana University String Academy.

Bow hold

Preparations before holding the bow

Swing and flop – hold left arm in air in front, swing right

Circle with right hand thumb and middle finger

Pencil practice – set shapes and tap

Tapes on bow

Pinky house

Directions: using plastic, colored tape, cut a 4” segment and a 2” segment.

The 2” segment is cut in half the long way.

On the 4” segment, fold 1/3 of the tape so that it sticks to itself but leaves 1/3 remaining sticky. Wrap it around your pinky with the sticky side out. Remove it from your pinky and fold the sticky into the center, like the end of a present. Place it on the bow near the end of the frog.

Using the 2” segments, attach the pinky house to the frog, wrapping the segments around the frog and reinforcing the inside of the house.

Three tapes – at the $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ points of the wood

Holding the bow

Start with bow only – work with the instrument separately until comfortable with the bow.

Hold bow with left hand in the middle while shaping right hand.

Younger students (upper strings) can start with thumb on metal (switch to regular position when expanding to use lower half)

Thumbs are round and flexible

Taps – bow tip in air, using words set to Twinkle rhythms

Bow games – unicorn, Pinocchio, rocket, windshield wipers, stir the soup

Preliminary motions

Shoulder bowing – toilet paper or pvc tubing held with the left hand on the left shoulder

Upper strings start in the upper half only (tape 2 to the tip)

Lower strings start in middle (tape 1-3)

Begin with short motions using the forearm – Twinkle rhythms (tiri tiri ti ti, grasshopper, Mississippi is a River)

Basic principles of teaching bow strokes and rhythms

Say rhythm first, if possible with catchy words (younger students) or direction (say up or down, for older students)

Air bow – tip in the air, saying or singing rhythm or direction

Play bowing on open string

Pay close attention to choreography – where in the bow, and how much bow

Play bowing on a related scale pattern

Play bowing within the context of a piece

Sequence of bow strokes

Martelé (Poof)

Best beginning stroke – allows for quick motion, good beginning and ending to note, and time for finger placement (FBB – finger before bow)

Upper strings in upper half (tape 2-tip)

Lower strings from tape 1-3

Demo: DM one octave scale

Detaché

Short legato strokes

Upper strings in upper half (tape 2-tip)

Lower strings from tape 1-3

Demo: Tiri-tiri Twinkle in DM, Simple Square Dance by Dorothy Straub

Expanding the bow

Bow Expansion Exercises

Silent bow placements

Whole Bow circles

Bow wanderings

Division of halves – UH, LH, WB, WHH

Demo: Loch Lomond by Noah Klauss

Bow Circles

Listening to the ending of the note, and soft landings

Demo: March of the Metro Gnome by Fred Hubbell, Apollo Suite (Scherzo) by Merle J. Isaac, Little Symphony by Carol Nunez

Preparation for slurs

Stop bows – 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 15

Open strings, change note at tip and frog, change note after every stop

S/S/S (separate/stops/slurs)

Demo: Dorchester Street Songs by Gregg Porter, Cripple Creek by Edmund Siennicki, Apollo Suite (Waltz) by Merle J. Isaac

Slurred String Crossings

S/S/S, watching elbow levels

Demo: Country Fiddler by Stanley Fletcher

Hooked Bowings

Division of bow – counting

Preparation for Viotti Stroke – work on the short note, get the long one for “free”

Demo: Kingsbridge March by William Dyson

Spiccato

Best learned over a long period of time

4, 3, 2, 1 time per note

Constantly checking for a loose bow hand

Always start from the string – comes from detache

Jumping analogy

Learn left hand notes on the string, then add bowing

Demo: Can Can by Offenbach/Meyer

Collé

Lifted staccato near the frog – pizzicato with the bow

Demo: The Old Clock by Stanley Fletcher

Ricochet

From the air – middle of bow, lift bow in anticipation

Demo: Tiddly Pom Tune by Stanley Fletcher

Portato

Smoothly separated strokes

Demo: Spanish Traveler's Tale by Stanley Fletcher

Indiana University String Academy Quartet

Brian Allen, Amy Lidell – violins

Gregorio Lopes – viola

Paul Moskalew - cello