

# TEEN STRINGS

TIP SHEET No 9

IDEAS, NEWS & FUN FOR STUDENTS OF VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO, BASS & FIDDLE

## 5 Ways to Improve the Results of Your Practice Sessions

### 1 IDENTIFY THE PROBLEMS

Students often tell me they sound "bad." This is so unhelpful! Of course, every string player wants to improve. Identifying the problem, or problems, is the first and most difficult step.

### 2 BREAK IT DOWN

Many string players don't know the difference between playing and practicing. Playing is what you should do to diagnose a problem. It's most useful in the first and final stages of the learning process. Initially, it can be useful to play through bits, even if you're faking parts of it. After you've taken the piece apart and worked out the kinks, play through the piece again to see what stuck. But the vast majority of practice time should not be spent playing through a piece. Rather, it should be spent breaking down the component parts.

### 3 SET CLEAR GOALS

Why spend an hour learning something you can do in 15 minutes? By setting

clear, reasonable goals, you're able to track your progress, identify problems more quickly, and feel a sense of true accomplishment. How do you do this? Divide practice time into specific goals, and spend just five to 30 minutes on any one goal, depending on your tolerance, time, and experience. A typical practice session might include focus on intonation, dexterity, string crossings, and maintaining a single contact point. Ten minutes spent on each goal equals a 40-minute practice session—hopefully not enough to become truly fed up with any one aspect.

### 4 BE READY TO SWITCH GEARS

Still, frustration can set in quickly. If it does, remember that practicing has diminishing returns.

The master cellist and teacher Heidi Litschauer once told me to give something three tries: if, on the third try, I didn't see a noticeable improvement, I was to change something in my technique or approach—change the bowing, try one hand alone, alter the fingering, experiment with the rhythm . . . something!



### 5 KEEP YOUR FOCUS

Most problems fit into one of three categories: rhythm, intonation, or sound. Different practice techniques work well for each of these categories. Working on one at a time is helpful. For instance, if rhythm is an issue, only work on rhythm—nothing else, and so on.

—Robert Howard

## THE GIFT OF MUSIC



like to remind the next generation that talent is only the beginning. It takes hard work to realize your potential. The process takes time and is rarely easy. We all face obstacles, and none of us achieves his or her dreams without the generosity and support of others. As musicians, we are each blessed with a voice that can touch and transform. It is our responsibility to use it to make the world a better place for those around us."

—Rachel Barton Pine



## CROSS YOUR FINGERS—AND YOUR STRINGS!

**S**harpen your awareness of bowing-arm dynamics. When you want to move to different strings and power your longer strokes, the shoulder is the area of the arm that does the job. Watch a good baseball pitcher and you'll see what full, fluid bow strokes need as well: power, efficiency, coordination, and follow-through. First, the muscles of the shoulder (not to mention the rest of the body) are used to “wind up” the energy needed for the pitch. In a split second, you'll see the upper arm move. The rest of the motion, though equally important, is the follow-through. Begin by isolating the motion required to change strings.

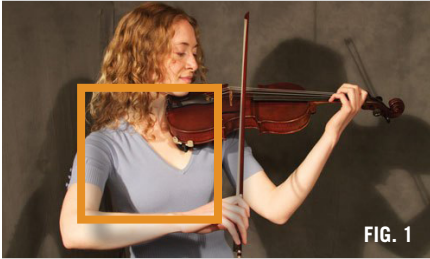


FIG. 1

**FIG. 1:** Your elbow should be at a right angle, forming a square when you include the bow and an imaginary line traced from the shoulder joint to the point where the bow hair contacts the string. Stand in front of a mirror and tuck your violin or viola comfortably under your chin. Place the middle of your bow parallel to the bridge on the A string.

Your elbow should be at a right angle, forming a square when you include the bow and an imaginary line traced from the shoulder joint to the point where the bow hair contacts the string.



FIG. 2A



FIG. 2B

**FIG. 2A:** Rock the bow to each string. Keep the arm and bow in the same plane and find the feeling of natural arm weight at each string level.

**FIG. 2B:** Note how the upper arm is moving vertically. This is the active upper-arm motion that allows a player to change strings.

Now, rock the bow to each string. Keep the arm and bow in the same plane and find the feeling of natural arm weight at each string level. Note how the upper arm is moving vertically (Fig. 2, a and b).

This is the active upper-arm motion that allows you to change strings. The arm should feel relaxed, yet buoyant. With your arm and bow in the same plane, rock the bow on each string and practice long bow strokes.

With this configuration, your string crossings will be nimble and your long bow strokes will be powerful.

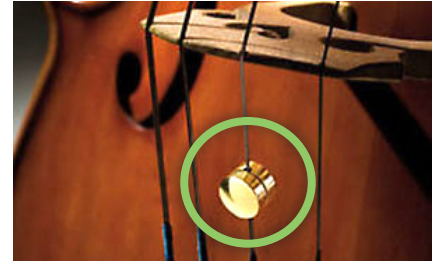
—Laurel Thomsen

## Did You Know?

The iconic “Wedding March” played at many Western weddings, while the bride walks down the aisle, was originally composed by Felix Mendelssohn as a suite of incidental music in 1842 for a production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.



## How to Fix, or at Least Control, a Wolf Tone



### RESONATOR

One is a nifty little resonator. You'll have to go to your violin maker to get one because they require professional installation—they're glued to the inside of the top. Your violin maker will select the one that corresponds with the pitch of your wolf (they come in three different ranges) and then, using beeswax to stick it to the top by the lower end of the bass sound hole, he or she will move it slightly while you saw away on the wolf until the spot is found that most mitigates it.

### BRASS SLUG

David Bice, at New Harmony Music, has come up with a much more effective version of the old familiar brass tube that you used to see screwed onto the G string between the bridge and tailpiece. His is a simple brass slug with a curved slot that allows you to clip it on the string. He makes them in a variety of weights, from 3 to 13 grams; you want to use the lightest one that works. Try it on the C string first, and then the G—by moving it ever so slightly, eventually you'll find a weight and place that works best. Unlike the resonator, which dampens the wolf, these slugs seem to work by moving the wolf to a note you don't play. So I would try this first—once the resonator is glued in, it's the devil to get it out.

### WEIGHT

A recent innovation called the Rezx is a weight that's held onto the top by a magnet on the inside. Like the resonator, you move it around until you find the most effective spot for damping the wolf. Made of bright stainless steel, it adds a raffish, downtown touch to your instrument's look—a nose ring for your cello. But be very careful installing it—if you slip with the magnet, it will clip onto the endpin, if it's steel.

—James N. McKean