

II. Left Hand Shape

Violin/Viola:

- A. Prerequisite: acceptable body and instrument position
 - B. Forearm and hand in straight line from radius of elbow to base hand
knuckle of little finger
 - C. Finger knuckles curved
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- A. Hand balances on middle fingers
 - B. Index finger forms a square with the fingerboard and lightly brushes or touches
the side of the neck
 - C. Thumb touches the neck across from the first finger around the thumb knuckle
 - D. Tips of fingers contact the string

Cello/Bass:

- A. Shoulders are naturally aligned and moveable, not hunched. Do not allow the
right shoulder to twist or sag.
- B. The left arm is suspended and moveable, not collapsed or artificially elevated.
- C. The forearm and hand form a line without an extreme bend at the wrist.
- D. The hand is balanced, not overly pronated or supinated -- just poised comfortably.
- E. The fingers are dropped onto the string and remain flexible on the string.
- F. The thumb lightly touches the back of the neck generally behind the second finger
and is relaxed and flexible.

III. Finger Placement

Violin/Viola:

- A. Prerequisite is well-shaped left hand

- B. Fingers on tips
- C. Block finger frame initially with major tetrachord finger spacing
- D. Flexible finger joints and relaxed thumb webbing
- E. Only as much weight on fingers as necessary for string to sound
- F. Close 2-3 initial finger pattern

Cello:

- A. Fingers are equidistant
- B. Fingers are curved and flexible at all joints -- they remain naturally curved and stay on or near the string when not being used
- C. Fingers contact the string slightly on the pads for more coverage
- D. The thumb touches the back of the neck behind the second finger
- E. When changing fingers, the weight of the arm is simply transferred to the new finger. The result is a subtle change in the balance of the hand.

Bass:

- A. The first and second fingers are spread, the second and third fingers are close, and the third and fourth fingers are slightly separated.
- B. The first finger is relatively straight.
- C. The ball of the first finger rests on the string.
- D. The elbow should be slightly below the level of the hand.
- E. The second, third, and fourth fingers are more perpendicular to the string than the first.
- F. The third finger does not normally finger individual pitches until the thumb position.
- G. The thumb stays behind the second finger until the pivot is introduced.

Left Hand Shape and Finger Placement Strategies

- A. **Left Hand Shape - Violin/Viola**
Hold hand up with palm facing you and notice the space between the thumb and the hand. Bring hand to the neck of the instrument and place the base knuckle joint of the index finger right in front of the nut. Let the side of the thumb rest opposite the fingers without squeezing or clenching.

- B. Left Hand Shape – Cello**
Shape the hand as if holding a glass or milk or can of pop. Notice the position of the thumb opposite the fingers. Bring hand to instrument neck with the fingers on the strings and the thumb at the back of the neck in exactly the same shape. Sometimes referred to as the “c-shaped hand”
- C. Left Hand Shape – Bass**
Shape the hand the same as the cellos, then extend the index finger slightly away from the other fingers. Notice the thumb’s position opposite the fingers. Place the tall, ring, and pinky fingers perpendicular to the strings with the thumb in the back, and stretch the index finger back to form the “K-shaped hand”
- D. Playing Pantomime**
(All instruments)
Assume correct playing positions and pantomime playing the instruments with correct form
- E. Square First Finger**
(violin and viola)
The first finger comes in contact with the string on its tip, the bend of the finger forms a square shape with the fingerboard.
- F. “Opening for a Bee”**
The web of skin between the thumb and finger does not contact the neck of the violin or viola. There is a space between the neck and that part of the hand “for a bee to fly through”
- G. Finger Tips**
Violin fingers contact the string on their tips. Make fingers stand up so the student can see the fingernails. Stickers on the nails often appeal to younger players so they can look and see if their stickers are visible. The same is true to a certain extent for violas
- H. Wrist**
The upper strings hold their wrists straight so there is a straight line from the elbow to the base hand knuckle. No “beggar’s hand” or “pancake hand”
- I. “Block Fingering for Beginners”**
To begin, players will place all fingers up to the sounding finger on the string. This adds stability to the sounding finger and helps shape the hand.
- J. Random Thumb Taps**
Whenever the teacher calls out “thumb taps” the students will tap their left thumbs to prevent them from squeezing
- K. Finger Taps**

At a given signal, students will tap different fingers to maintain curved shape, and keep from choking up on the strings

L. Finger Placement & Sequence – Violin/Viola

With all fingers down up to the sounding finger, place all fingers on the string. Lift the fingers one by one to form different pitches. When the heterogeneous class plays together, violins and violas will play 3, 2, 1, and then open.

M. Bridge and Nut Tap

(cellos)

Tap alternately on the bridge and the nut of the cello with left hand to establish proper left arm position and elbow height
Bass can do a modification of this by tapping at the nut and the end of the fingerboard

N. “Rubber Fingerboard”

Players imagine a yielding, soft surface for the fingerboard and “feel” their fingers sinking in to it. Gives the idea of the weight of the arm helping the fingers to stop the strings rather than squeezing from the thumb

O. "Ski Slopes"

Cellos and basses place all four fingers on the strings and slide down the fingerboard, jumping into the air when they reach the end of the fingerboard. Helps the hand shape and keeps the arm from getting trapped behind the instrument

P. "Fling Pizzicato"

Like the Ski Slope exercise, but ending in a pizzicato from the left hand fingers and they leave the string at the bottom, followed by a circular motion to replace the hand at the nut again

Q. Knuckle Knocks

Begin with hand at the first position point and knock softly on the strings with left hand knuckles to keep wrist loose

R. Finger Placement & Sequence - Cello

Holding hand in a rounded shape imagine holding a large orange in the hand), place fingers on the string from pinky to index finger with fingers equidistant and thumb in the back behind the second finger (tall finger)

S. Finger Placement & Sequence - Bass

Holding hand roughly the same as for the cello (imagine holding a grapefruit) place the pinky, ring and tall fingers perpendicular to the string with the thumb in back opposite the second (tall) finger. Stretch index finger back and place on the string at a distance from the other three.

T. Rowell “Add a note” Scale

D major:

D C# D, D C# B C# D, D C# B A B C# D, D C# B A G A B C# D, etc. until whole scale is played down, then up.

A. Checkpoints

Violin and Viola:

Straight arm, wrist and hand

Curved fingers, fingers contacting string on their tips

Thumb opposite first finger, contacting neck on the side, relaxed and not clenching

Space between neck of instrument and web of skin between thumb and hand

Palm turned slightly in to face neck of instrument

Fingers spaced so second and third are touching, the rest have a finger’s width space between

Cello and Bass:

Hands curved with fingers in front and thumb in back

Thumb relaxed and perpendicular to neck, not clenching or pointing up

Arm and elbow just slightly lower than hand, forming a straight line – no bend at the wrist

Fingers contact string slightly on pads

Cello fingers equidistant, bass fingers with index finger extended back and slightly straightened, a large space between it and the others