

Basic Bowing Guidelines

These are the basic guidelines that we use for writing bowings – often there will be criteria for both down and up-bows at the same time. Therefore, one must decide which of the criteria are more important and then back-track from there to make it work out.

Bowings: Where to start?

- Consider Historical Practices
- Tempo and Style
- Meter and Rhythms
- Bowing ideas from YouTube videos of professional orchestras
- Does the ensemble have the skills needed to perform the bowings put in the part?
- Move on to the rest of these “Bowing Basics”

Down-Bows

- Down-beats
- Accents
- Sforzandi
- Phrase beginnings (if on the beat)
- Decrescendi
- On-beats in 16th note groupings and 8th note groupings
- First notes of loud dynamics
- Rolled chords

Up-bows

- Pickups
- Weaker beats
- Crescendi
- Certain types of string crossings (opposite for violins/violas than cellos/basses)
- Staccato slurs (hooked ups)
- Classical figuration
- Big upward shifts or ascending scales
- Waltz/Minuets
- Preparing for a quick transition into pizz.
- Evening out syncopation bowings

Bowing challenges

- String Crossings
- Triple meters
- Triplets
- Uneven Rhythms (dotted quarter + 8th, dotted 8th + 16th, etc.)
- Hooked bows
- Bounced bowings (speed vs. what section of the bow)
- Transition to and from pizzicato
- Sudden dynamic changes
- Syncopation
- Off-set bowings (when the bow change is not on the beat)
- Mixed articulation (slurs combined with separate bows)

Matching Sections

- Same rhythmic ideas should be bowed the same way
- If you make them differ, there should be a musical reason as to why.
- Generally, 1st violin determines other section's bowings but other parts will occasionally take priority – use the score to make that determination.

Great Things Happen When Parts are Bowed

- Bowing the score helps you see the whole picture, and check that players are using the bowings.
- When bowings are included in their parts, players learn bowings from the start, as they learning notes and rhythms.
- Good bowings help rhythms to be accurate.
- Students learn how bowing decisions are made when bowings are in the part from the beginning.

- Advanced players in the orchestra may have good bowing ideas. Let them make their case to you.

Bowing Help: *Orchestral Bowing - Style and Function* by James Kjelland

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