

# SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS IN THE STRING CLASSROOM

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Some of the most important factors that determine success in playing a stringed instrument involve the beginning “set up” stage, which includes establishing a proper playing position and developing free and open muscular motions. Teachers can ensure success for their students by establishing a series of procedures that break down the set up tasks to a sequence of exercises that allow their students to look and sound great!

## **Proper Instrument Sizing**

Always err on the side of too small rather than too large

Violin/Viola – hand around scroll with no hyperextension of the elbow, straight bow at the tip with no straining

Cello – endpin adjusted so scroll is at nose level when standing/ m3 in 1<sup>st</sup> position

Bass – endpin adjusted so nut is adjacent to top of forehead when standing/ M2 in 1<sup>st</sup> position

## **Playable Instrument Condition**

Good quality strings with tuners on the tailpiece

Pegs adjustable

Violins and Violas - comfortable chin rests/ sponge & rubber band shoulder rests Cellists and bassists - suitable rock stop

Bows - good quality hair / properly adjustable.

## **Chairs**

Correct size and angle

## **Fingernails**

## **Body Positioning**

Stand with feet together

Make a V

Take a step (shoulder width)

Rock back and forth like a “tree in the wind”

Sit on the ends of the chairs

Feet flat on floor

Backs straight

“fire drill” exercise

Chair circles

## **Rest Position**

### **High Dot**

- Reference point at octave harmonic
- Taps over high dot with relaxed fingers
  - Promotes relaxed fingers and proper left hand shape
  - Pre-vibrato exercise
  - Rhythmic reinforcement

### **Magic X**

- Violin/Viola students only
  - Cello/Bass maintains C shape with fingertip/thumb contact only
- Placed at the base joint of the index finger of the left hand
- Reference point for proper left hand placement
- Start in rest position with left hand over high dot
  - Slide back over the Magic X to first position
  - Pre-shifting exercise

### **Statue of Liberty**

- For violin/viola only
- Start in rest position with left hand over high dot
- Lift left hand to “Statue of Liberty” position
  - Counting games to develop strength
- Turn instrument toward body and float onto collarbone
  - Head stays stable – no “turtle neck”
  - No space between neck and instrument

### **Check violin/viola instrument stability**

- Wave
- Scratch back
- Swing arms

### **Cello Positioning**

- Endpin set so peg box is at ear level
- Knee position just below C bout – balancing, not squeezing
- Roller Coaster exercise

### **Bass Positioning**

- Check feet and body balance
- Angle instrument toward center of body – left leg touches back of bass
- Look, No Hands Exercise

### **Ant's Song**

Violin/Bass together, left hand pinky plucks (3X per string) over high dot  
Each, Each, Each, Each and every  
Ant, Ant, Ant, Digging in the  
Dirt, Dirt, Dirt, Underneath the  
Ground, Ground, Ground

Viola/Cello together as above  
Ants, Ants, Ants, digging in the  
Dirt, Dirt, Dirt, underneath the  
Ground, Ground, Ground, all the way to  
China, China, China

For all instruments, look for relaxed left hand fingers, vibrant and ringing sound  
Reinforces names of strings

### **GDG**

Continues to reinforce the names of the strings/proper shaping of the left hand  
Over the high dot, with the pinky finger, all students pluck:

G D G rest  
G D G rest  
G G D D  
G D G rest

In rests, either tap right hand on thigh, or tap toe/foot

Variations:

DAD (all)  
AEA, GEG (violin and bass)  
CGC, CAC (viola and cello)

### **Bow Set Up**

Mark middles with tape  
Pinky Houses for violin/viola  
Start with pencil  
Taps/Flexible Thumbs  
Look upside-down

### **Bow Games**

Spatial Games:  
Rocket Ship, Pinocchio, Unicorn, Stir the Soup, Windshield Wipers

### **Shoulder Bowing**

Toilet Paper Tubes  
For correct motion without sound  
Hold with left hands in correct position for playing  
Use UH of bow for violin/viola, LH for cello/bass  
Say and play rhythms  
Partner playing

## **Instrument and Bow Together**

Don't rush this step – previous skills must be set to ensure success  
Continually review all previous set up steps for reinforcement

## **DAD with the bow**

Bow division – violin/viola in UH, cello/bass from tape 1 to tape 3 (middle)  
Prepare silent string crossings between G and D, as well as D and A  
    Different parts of the bow  
    Smooth, open motions  
Play with half-bow martele strokes  
    Impulsive motions  
Add left hand pizzicato version to bowed version to create first complete piece  
    Pizz: CGC, GDG, DAD, AEA Bow: DAD

## **Shaping the Left Hand**

Tapes for specific fingers  
Slide back over Magic X  
Fingerboard slides and taps  
Penny Game  
Finger faces  
Thumb taps

## **See Saw**

Introduces 1<sup>st</sup> finger  
Legato  
In triple meter  
Bow division – violin/viola UH, cello/bass LH  
    A—D—A—D—  
    E E E E E  
    D—D--

## **D Major Scale**

Tetrachords on D and A  
Twinkle rhythms  
Bow Division  
Block fingering – plops

**For further information:** [StringPedagogy.com](http://StringPedagogy.com); [Circlingaround.com](http://Circlingaround.com);  
[www.music.indiana.edu/special\\_programs/sa/](http://www.music.indiana.edu/special_programs/sa/)