

FLEXERCISES

Right Hand / Arm

1. Fishing Pole / Lines on Ceiling

description: Hold the bow vertically (pointing toward the ceiling) and "cast" the tip of the bow forward and back as if drawing imaginary lines on the ceiling. The movement is entirely from the fingers, not the wrist or arm.

purpose: This develops the finger flexibility to keep a straight bow without excess flexing in the wrist joint. The forward position simulates the hand position at the frog, and vice versa.

2. Windshield Wiper

description: Holding the bow vertically (pointing toward the ceiling), rotate the forearm so the tip points to the right, and then to the left as in a windshield wiper. Make sure you have room on each side so you don't poke your stand partner. The range of motion can be a full 180° or any smaller portion.

purpose: This loosens up the rotator muscles of the forearm and relates to lifting the bow off the string in the upper half. It also relates to the sensation of the full bow stroke in the hand--i.e., when the bow points to the player's left, it approximates the feeling of playing at the frog, and vice versa.

3. Circles on the ceiling

description: From the starting position of #1 & 2 above, draw imaginary circles on the ceiling. The motion is from the finger joints and not the wrist.

purpose: This is also a good finger flexing exercise to help keep a straight bow and relaxed hand throughout the course of a whole bow stroke.

4. Witches' Cauldron

description: Start with the bow pointed to the ceiling (as in #1-3 above). Keeping the bow vertical at all times, make a stirring motion with the whole arm as if making circles on the floor with the frog.

purpose: This is good for arm flexibility especially the shoulder and elbow joints.

5. Rocket Ship / Elevator

description: With the bow in the vertical position, as above, raise the bow straight up and down

as if a rocket ship taking off from the pad. Make sure the bow stays vertical at all times.

purpose: This also relates to flexible joints and the simulation of the whole bow stroke. Every joint must flex in order to keep the bow exactly straight. The position at the highest point relates to playing at the frog, and vice versa.

6. Rock 'n Roll

description: With the instrument in position, place the bow on one string at the mid point. Silently roll the bow across all four strings making sure there is no sound, and a fluid arm motion. Make sure the whole arm moves with the bow from one string level to the next.

purpose: This relates to string crossing of two to four strings.

7. Tubing

description: Take a cardboard tube (from toilet tissue or paper towel roll) and draw the bow through the tube making sure the bow hair drags across the bottom of the tube creating a sound of friction between the hair and the tube.

purpose: This is excellent for training the feeling of a straight bow on the instrument as long as the bow is kept straight and the hair stays on the bottom of the tube. Position the tube as closely as possible to the angle of real playing. Cellists can actually hold the tube over the strings so the bowing motion is exactly at the right angle.

8. Finger Taps

description: With the bow resting on the strings, lift each individual finger and tap it up and down without moving the other fingers.

✓ purpose: This helps maintain a relaxed hand and develops a sense of finger independence and the role of each in the control of the bow.

10. Thumb Glides

description: With the bow resting on the strings and a correct hand position is maintained, glide the thumb horizontally along the bow stick.

✓ purpose: This flexercise reduces excess tension in the bow hold and assures the thumb is not pressing.

11. Touch Bows

description: With the best bow hold, silently touch the strings with the bow and quietly lift it off. Touch all point along the length of the bow and emphasize relaxation of the bow hand.

purpose: This relates to placing and lifting the bow in various points to begin and end playing in the upper half, tip, frog, etc.

12. Side-Winder

description: Rest the bow on a string near the mid point. While maintaining that point on the string, move the frog forward and back (down and up).

✓ purpose: This motion relates to changing bow angle while drawing the bow to straighten it, or change bow placement (distance from the bridge).

13. Sleeping Bow-hand

description: While resting the bow on the string just below the balance point, let the bow hand slowly relax (fall asleep) in place. When the hand is completely relaxed, draw the it across the string to produce a soft but good tone.

✓ purpose: This shows the student what little effort is actually required in holding (not gripping) the bow in order to produce a sound.

14. Bow Dribble

description: Rest the bow on a string at the mid point. Then lift it several inches above the string and let it drop on the string and rebound several times. Gradually control the number of bounces to four, then three, then two, then one. There is no back and forth draw of the bow at this point, only vertical bouncing. Once this bouncing motion is under control rhythmically, add a very slight up and down motion to create a short articulated tone.

purpose: This relates to the sensation of playing spiccato at the middle of the bow (bounce spiccato) and encourages a relaxed hold of the bow in order to let the bow bounce freely of its own accord.

15. Make an "L" / Stickem Up

description: While holding the bow normally with it pointed toward the ceiling, extent the index finger and thumb. Then place the thumb along the side of the fingerboard and pluck the strings with the index finger.

purpose: This flexercise teaches the hand position for playing pizzicato while holding the bow. (German bass bow points toward the floor.)

Left Hand / Arm

1. Hot Strings

description: With the instrument in correct position, frame the left hand in correct position with all four fingers down. Then lift individual fingers quickly in the air as if the string had become suddenly too hot to the touch. Keep the other fingers down on place. Do this with individual and groups of fingers. The emphasis is on quickness in lifting the fingers.

purpose: This is an excellent exercise to develop quickness in the fingers for velocity of faster passages.

2. Waving Goodbye (violin/viola)

description: With the left arm in playing position, wave goodbye to yourself, i.e., move the hand vigorously forward and back from the wrist.

purpose: This is the foundation of "wrist vibrato" on violin & viola

3. Swinging Gate

description: When in playing position with the violin/viola, swing the elbow underneath the instrument and back. On cello/bass, swing the elbow forward and back.

purpose: This motion relates to positioning the arm for each individual string and promotes relaxation and flexibility in the shoulder area.

4. Flying Fingers

description: With the left hand in playing position, wiggle the fingers vigorously up and down on the strings for several seconds at a time. Move only the fingers from the base joints as the hand and arm stay stable.

purpose: This develops quickness and strength in the individual fingers in preparation for high velocity technique.

5. Butterflies

description: While doing the Flying Fingers exercise (#4 above), move slowly up and down the fingerboard.

purpose: This adds elbow flexibility and hand relaxation to the benefits of flying fingers.

6. Whistles

description: Touch any string lightly with the 2nd or 3rd finger. Glide slowly up and down the string while maintaining proper hand shape and arm posture. When this is smooth and continuous, add the bow to produce a whistling sound. Easiest motion is up bow and up slide, and vice versa—i.e., hands moving together and apart. Then try down bow and up slide, etc.

Sirens

description: Play a note in approximately 1st position on any string. Slowly slide up and down the string while holding it to the fingerboard. Avoid excess pressure from the thumb and finger. When this motion is smooth, add the bow, to produce a siren-like sound. If this is uncomfortable on the fingertip, place a small piece of paper between the string and finger.

purpose: Both flexercises are the foundation for shifting and arm vibrato on all instruments.

7. Ski Jumps

description: With the left hand in approximately 1st position, slide the finger the entire length of the fingerboard in a smooth fluid motion "flying" off the string at the end of the fingerboard simulating a ski jump. Without interrupting the motion, come back to first position in a large circular motion to repeat the movement.

purpose: This is for strength and flexibility in the shoulder and elbow as well as preparing for large shifting motions.

8. Polish the String

description: Lightly touch a finger on the D or A string in approximately 4th position. On violin/viola, the motion can be from the wrist or elbow, cello/bass motion is from the elbow primarily. Simulate polishing the string with a short rapid motion back and forth about 1-2 inches without pressing down the string (harmonic touch). When this is steady and rhythmic, add the bow to produce a whisling sound. Try to do about 8-10 back-and-forth slides in each bow direction.

purpose: This is the fundamental coordination for vibrato. From this point the player can add weight to the fingertip until the string is touching the fingerboard. The motion will narrow to the point where the finger stops but the polishing motion continues. while narrowing the motion,