

Practice Strategies: String Edition

General Ideas:

- CHUNK IT - work on only a small chunk at a time.
- ADD A NOTE - start with just a few notes, then add one at a time
- ADD A MEASURE - work measure by measure, grouping measures together as they are learned
- PENNY GAME - try to get your spot right 3 to 5 times in a row. If you get it right slide a penny from the left side of your stand to the right. If you get it right again slide another. Anytime you mess up all the pennies go back to the left and you have to start over.
- REVERSE - start at the last measure of your section, then move back 1 measure, then 2, etc.
- SLOW - play slowly with a metronome and gradually increase speed
- RECORD - and then listen for errors / successes
- FRIEND - practice with a friend (can be through Skype or FaceTime!)
- FAMILY - perform for a family member

Fingerings:

- Figure out a fingering for a tricky spot and write it in as a reminder
- Check if tunneling would be helpful
- Check if using 4th finger would be helpful/best (violins/violas)
 - Rule: If you are moving from a lower string back to the lower string use 4th finger.
- For tricky shifts isolate the shift – practicing going forward and backward
- Look for alternate fingering possibilities. Would shifting help?
- Double it: play each note more than once before moving to the next note
- Use Mixed Rhythms to isolate tricky fingering passage, Short (S), Long (L)
 - Examples: SL, LS, LLSS, SLL, LSSS

Rhythm:

- Write the counting in your part
- SUBDIVIDE (count/think in small units - 1&2&3&4& or 1e&a2e&a...)
- Count the rhythm aloud
- Count the beat (1,2,3,4) while clapping the rhythm
- Pluck or Bow the part (on an open string or with the notes) while counting aloud

Tempo:

- Practice counting with a metronome.
 - Practice playing with a metronome.
 - SUBDIVIDE
- Free metronome:
www.metronomeonline.com
or download a free APP

Intonation:

- Listen for ½ steps and whole steps
- Practice the scale of the key you are in
- Practice finger patterns for that key
- Practice with double stops (play notes on one string while droning the open string below)
- Sing your part, Sing and play your part
- Play with a tuner - Tuner Lite (Free) or Tonal Energy (\$\$) are good apps to check out
- Practice intervals, or identify intervals in your music to listen for:
 - Half step - “Jaws”; Whole step – Do-Re; Major 3rd – “Doe, a Deer” (“deer” is the third); Perfect 4th – “Here comes the bride”; Perfect 5th – “Twinkle Twinkle” or “Star Wars”; Major 6 – “NBC” or “My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean”, etc..

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Articulation:

- Isolate the articulation by playing it on open strings rather than with the fingerings
- Listen to music in the same style or from the same time period to get a sense of what the articulation is supposed to sound like
- Identify what part of the bow you need to be in.
- Experiment with bow tilt, and LAWS (see below)

Tone:

- Basics: Is your bow tight? Are you holding the bow correctly? Are you sure?
- Is your bow at the sound point? (contact point between the bridge and the fingerboard)
- Are you drawing your bow straight?
 - If not – make sure you are utilizing your shoulder, elbow AND wrist joints.
- Are you playing smoothly or are you pushing too hard?
- Are your bow hairs tilted towards the bridge?
- Are you using enough weight at the start to grab the string & then releasing to let it ring?
- Are you keeping your bow moving at a consistent speed?
- Are you placing your left hand fingers down evenly with weight on the string?
- Are your left hand fingers curved?
- Check your posture

Bowings:

- Shadow Bow
- Think about where you should be in the bow – frog, balance point, middle, tip?
 - Try a section at different points to determine what is easiest and most useful.
- If something like a slur or string crossing is giving you trouble isolate it and try to figure out what will make it easier – how much bow are you using, where in the bow, where on the string, etc...

Phrasing:

- Sing your music!
- Think of a phrase as a musical sentence. In speech there are natural pauses for periods and commas. Figure out where the natural pauses might be in the music. Then apply different bow techniques to create that space.
- Identify places that might benefit from addition dynamics and mark them in.
- MOVE! & BREATHE! This should be natural and a part of every musical experience.

Dynamics:

- Identify the dynamics, Circle things that you have trouble remembering
- Ask yourself the following question: WHAT IS MY BOW DOING?
- Apply the “LAWS of Dynamics”
 - L**ocation - where the bow is on the string:
 - Sound Point (middle) – strong sound, clear tone
 - Ponticello (near the bridge) – strong sound, often crunchy tone
 - Sul Tasto (by the fingerboard) – soft sound, often weak tone
 - A**mount – more bow = more sound
 - W**eight – more weight = more sound.
 - S**peed – varies the dynamics depending on location, amount and weight
- Experiment with flat hair vs a tilted bow stick.