

Preparing for the Bow

Flexibility

We need lots of **flexibility** in our right hand when playing with the bow.



Before we pick up the bow for the first time, we need to make sure that our hand is **flexible, relaxed**, and in the right **shape**.

The rest of the bow arm - including the wrist - needs to be flexible too. The wrist should never lock in one position.

Here are some activities for you to practise *without* the bow. They will help you to find good **hand** and **arm shapes**, so that when you begin to play *with* the bow, you will already be really flexible and relaxed.

Activities

1) **Shoulder Shrugs**

Centre your body, and make sure your posture is balanced. **Breathe** in deeply, and **raise** your shoulders to your ears. Hold them there for a couple of seconds, then breathe out fast (make a big sighing noise!) as you **drop** your shoulders.

2) **Air Violin**

Keep your shoulders relaxed, and raise your arms up to playing position (where the violin would be). Pretend to play with the bow - first, move from the elbow, without raising your shoulders. Keep the wrist free too!

3) **Find the Rabbit Shape**

Make a rabbit shape with your right hand: curve your thumb, then drop the second and third fingers over the thumb to make the rabbit's teeth! Wiggle your 1st finger and little finger to make the ears of the rabbit!

4) **Bounce the Invisible Ball**

Bounce an imaginary ball down to the ground and back, whilst keeping your hand in the 'bow hold' (rabbit) shape. Keep the wrist relaxed and free as you bounce, but don't wiggle it too much!

How to Hold the Bow

Balance

The **bow weight balance** changes from one part of the bow to another. The **bow hold** needs to stay flexible as we play, to avoid screechy noises!

These exercises will help you position the fingers correctly every time, and keep them relaxed as you play.



Try all these exercises with a pencil first!

Activities

1) Place the Fingers

Balance the bow (or pencil!) on your right thumb pad, flop the fingers over the top, then place the tip of the little finger on the top of the stick.

Make sure the little finger is curved, and the thumb is not locked.

2) Drop the Pencil

Place the fingers onto a pencil again, in a 'bow hold' shape. Rotate your forearm to the right, until the pencil is vertical.

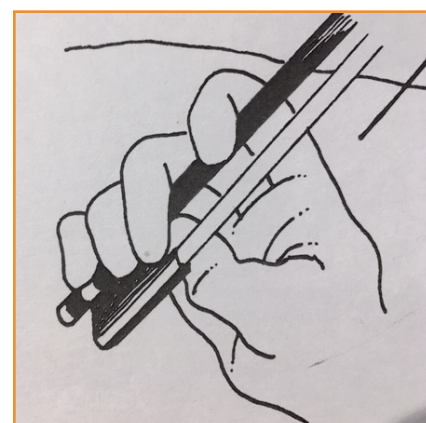
Then, gently release the fingers until the pencil starts to fall. **This is how relaxed your bow hold needs to be when playing!**

3) Windscreen Wipers (for little finger strength)

Hold your bow in playing position, then push down with your little finger, lifting the bow into the air and back again, like a windscreen wiper on a car!

4) Tapping Exercise

Hold the bow and rotate your forearm until it is vertical. Tap the metal screw of the bow on different surfaces, but **keep your hand in shape!**



Bowing Arm/Hand Checklist

- Shoulder:** relaxed, never lifted
- Upper Arm / Elbow:** level with the bow; not too high or too low
- Wrist:** flexible, never locked
- Hand:** parallel to ground, relaxed, never gripping
- Thumb:** supports the bow in the air, never locked
- 1st, 2nd, 3rd Finger:** flopping over (not on) the bow
- Little Finger:** sitting on the top of the bow

The Down-Bow and the Up-Bow

Bow Direction

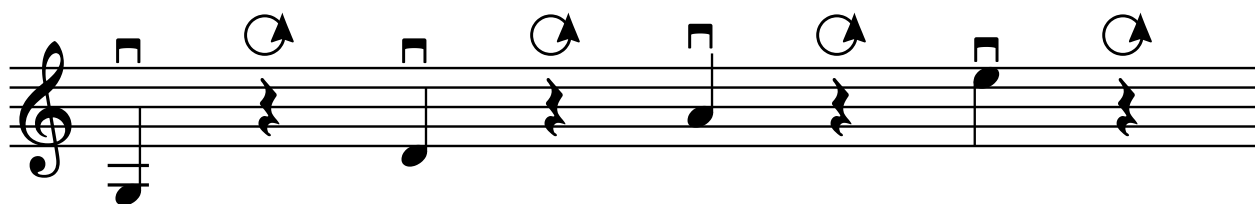
We describe the bow direction as being either '**down**' or '**up**'.

A **down-bow** is a stroke that is pulled from a **lower** part of the bow towards a **higher** part of the bow.

Here is the symbol for the **down-bow**:



For this activity, start each open string near the **heel** (bottom) of the bow. During the rest, make a full circle (anticlockwise) in the air.



Full Circle

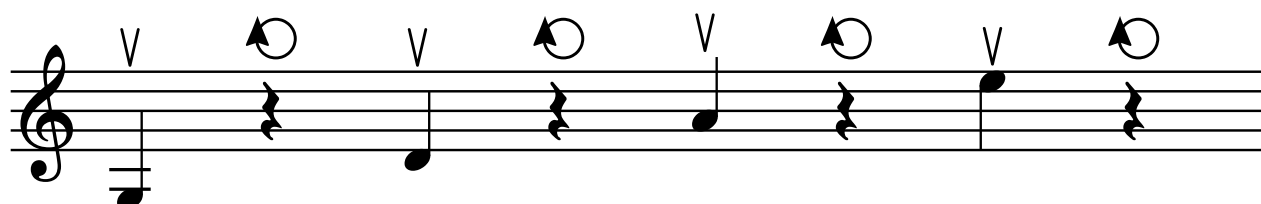
When you see this symbol, circle your bow **anticlockwise** in the air

An **up-bow** is a stroke that is pushed from a **higher** part of the bow towards a **lower** part of the bow.

Here is the symbol for the **up-bow**:



For this activity, start each open string near the **tip** (top end) of the bow. During the rest, make a full circle (clockwise) in the air.



Full Circle

When you see this symbol, circle your bow **clockwise** in the air

Playing With the Bow

Making a Beautiful Sound



www.ViolinSchool.com

Now we're going to learn how to make a beautiful sound on the violin, when using the bow.

First of all, stand ready to play ... bring your violin into position, then check your bow hold before you start.



We will begin by resting the hairs of the bow **very gently** on the D string. Make sure your elbow is not too low, and your shoulders are relaxed. Then, move your lower arm out (pull) and in (push) very very smoothly.

Play these notes. **Say** the bow direction as you play. Then **say** the words.

down up down up down up down up down up down up
Pull and push and keep me straight. Up down up down lick the plate.

Balance a piece of dried fruit (e.g. a raisin) on the back of your hand. At the end of the up-bow, when the raisin comes near to your mouth, eat it! But remember to keep the 'plate' (the back of your hand) straight, otherwise the raisin will fall to the ground!

Activities

1) Big Circles

Bring your violin into position, check your bow hold, and take a deep breath as you make a big circle into the air with the bow. Then exhale (breathe out), and land your bow gently on the D string. Play a down-bow all the way to the end of the bow. Repeat several times, on all of the strings.

2) Circle Down, Push Up

Repeat the activity above, but when you get to the end of the down-bow, push the bow back in the other direction (up-bow).

3) Long Bows (down-bow and up-bow)

Count 4 steady beats (1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ...). Play a down-bow for 4 beats, then an up-bow for 4 beats. Try this on every string!

4) Follow the Leader

Repeat the activity above, but one person plays the role of the leader, and shows everyone when to play a down-bow and when to play an up-bow. If the leader speeds up or slows down, everyone else has to follow!