

## Beginner Violin 'Outfits' (Starter Kits)

One of the best options for starting on the violin is a 'starter kit' that contains a violin, a bow, a case, and - usually - a rosin (see below).

These starter kits are usually known as 'beginner outfits', and a wide variety of brands and options is available. **At this level, price generally reflects quality.**



Try to avoid starter kits that are under €100 / £100 in price, unless you have had a chance to test everything and are completely sure that you are making a good choice. If you can, €200-€250 is a sensible 'all-in' budget (to include all accessories and a shoulder rest, as well as the Beginner Outfit itself).

For complete confidence when choosing a starter kit, especially if you are buying a non-mainstream brand or making a decision without the help of an expert, use this checklist to check the quality of the instrument before you buy:

### What to look for in a Beginner Outfit:

- Violin is easy to play
- Sounds pleasant under the ear
- Tone is even from one string to another
- Pegs are fitted correctly
- Pegs and fine tuners turn smoothly
- Strings should not be too high or low from the fingerboard
- You can move the bow easily from one string to another without hitting the edges of the instrument
- The feet of the bridge fit well, and the bridge is securely fitted
- The wooden fingerboard is smooth
- The nut (horizontal wooden bar between fingerboard and peg box) is well crafted
- Good quality strings are fitted
- Violin looks nice!
- Case is waterproof and offers adequate protection
- The bow is straight - the stick should not warp or twist when the bow is tightened
- The bow hair is new, clean and well-fitted
- The bow screw turns easily to increase and decrease the tension of the bow hair



As your child grows, you may wish to upgrade their instrument. As you move to higher price ranges, various aspects of the violin outfit will become more sophisticated.

Mid range products will come with a higher quality bridge and tailpiece, and there will be more attention to detail in the set-up of the instrument.

If you're making a significant investment (i.e. several hundred €/£) in a quality mid-range violin, then range, be careful to select an instrument that offers better sound and playability, an even tone and good projection, not just refinement in looks.

### **Don't forget the shoulder rest!**

The one thing that's **not** usually included in a Beginner Outfit is a **shoulder rest**. See the advice section below about how to choose the right shoulder support for your child.

### **Is the bow good enough?**

Occasionally, cheaper Beginner Outfits include a bow that's not as good as the violin. Sometimes, cheap bows don't have high quality hair, but a cost of a 'rehair' would be more than the price of replacing the bow.

In this instance, it's worth spending a little bit extra on a better bow, and keeping the other one as a spare. If your bow feels hard to control, ask your teacher for advice... the quality of the bow can make a BIG difference, and a poorly made bow can easily demotivate a beginner learner, so make sure that your bow is in good condition!

### **Are the strings good enough?**

Leading brands will usually include decent strings with their Beginner Outfits, but cheaper models are sometimes strung with low-cost steel core strings. These have a metallic, thin sound. They're harder to play on, and don't make a very good sound, even in the hands of an experienced violinist.

If your child's violin is supplied with cheap wire strings, then consider upgrading to a set of aluminium-wound strings with a nylon core. These will make a big difference to the sound.

### **If you can't get to a violin shop...**

If time and location prevent you and your child from visiting a violin shop and testing out different violin options, then **stick with a well known brand** if you are buying online, and be sure to read plenty of product reviews before making a purchase. If you can, avoid low cost models (Windsor, Gear4Music own brand, etc.) which are invariably poor!

Be aware that even well known brands (such as Stentor) can sound poor if badly set up. If you can get to a violin shop, it's definitely worth it!