

Vibrato exercises for violin and viola:

1st step: Learning to let go at the base of the index finger

Students tend to do one of two things – not let go and their hand is stuck or let go too much and do vibrato w/circles. Also, they tend to go too fast and the exercises below help slow down their vibrato and get it more even and wider.

Cradle exercise:

- 1) Cradle
- 2) Finger lightly
- 3) Let go (just enough for “daylight” to come through)
- 4) Hang (like Mary Poppins’ umbrella, hanging from a table)

Polishing – use tissue – do the cradle exercise, but only steps 1 – 3. Then polish back and forth, lightly. All string instruments can do this exercise.

Violins & Violas: Start on D string – set up 3 on D doing the “cradle exercise”. A metronome is on 120. Starting in the “up” (forward) position, rock back and forth, with the metronome. If you have a mirror, when you’re forward, you are “uncovering” the part of the fingerboard that is between the first finger and the nut – back is “covering” that section. It’s really important to be moving with the whole arm and covering and uncovering, which means the base of the index finger is traveling back and forth. If a student is going in circles, then they won’t travel as much back and forth (incorrect). Or if they tend to move their hand up and down (incorrect), they won’t cover and uncover. If they don’t “let go” at the base of their index finger, friction and tension will work against them.

Try the above with 2nd finger and 1st finger on D string and G string.

Ask them this question: “Let’s say you find that 3 is your best finger, 2 is second best and 1 is the worse. Which finger should you practice on the most?”

They’ll usually answer with, “First finger.” Then you say, “No – because 3 is your best finger, you want to practice that finger more – all fingers require the same arm motion – as you practice 3 more, you’ll get looser and better at that finger. Then that same movement will spill into the other 2 fingers. If you would keep practicing on your worse finger, you could continue to do vibrato incorrectly – maybe too tight, or up and down, or in circles.”

Encourage students to find which finger and on which string is their best finger.

Once they are doing the above correctly, the next step is to try to do individual fingers on the bottom 3 strings – When the cellos and violas are playing on their C string, violinists and bass players can play their A string. Start doing 8 clicks at 120 – start in the “forward” position and the 8th click would be back.

Teach the A scale to violins, starting on the G string – only one octave – 8 clicks on each (120). Have them use 4th finger, keeping 3rd down w/it as a support. Only go up the scale.

Violas and cellos can do the above (separate) on the D scale starting first finger on the C string.

You can combine all three instruments and they’ll be playing in perfect 4^{ths}.

Then do the same thing, adding the 2nd octave. Then practice it w/the metronome clicking 4 clicks at 60.

Continue on with the metronome clicking at 60, but with triplet (3’s) on each click. Add 4’s.

With 6’s, go back to the metronome clicking eighths, but slower than 120 (104 – 112). Gradually work up to 120.