

DEVELOPING VIBRATO FROM THE BEGINNING

1. Pre-Vibrato and Exercises without specific pitches

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Arranged loosely by difficulty in each section. Introduce at the following levels, and review throughout the development.

A – Beginning – Suzuki Bk. 1, Violin Practice Method Level A

B – Suzuki Bk. 2/3, Violin Practice Method Level B

C – Suzuki Bks. 4-6, Intermediate Levels

D – Advance levels

VIBRATO PREPARATIONS (Level A/B)

1. Tapping

- a. Mark a “high dot” with a sticker on the fingerboard under the octave harmonic
- b. Tap the left fingers together as a unit over the high dot. Tap rhythms and/or non-metered impulses.
 - i. Tap while in rest position
 - ii. Tap while in playing position

2. Sliding on the “Magic X”

- a. Draw a Magic X at the first crease of the left index finger. With the violin in rest position (like a guitar), slide gently up and down the neck, with the arm, hand and thumb moving together as a unit. Be sure all joints are loose.

3. Tic-Tac Shake

- a. With the left arm in play position, lightly hold a partially full Tic-Tac box in the left hand; shake back and forth (wrist motion) in a slow, even tempo that gradually increases. Feel the weight of the knuckles drop back and return to a “straight” arm.

4. “I Like Ice Cream”

- a. In playing position, tap “I Like Ice Cream” (or any other phrase) over the high dot. Then slide the arm/hand back to first position. Tap “I Like Ice Cream” over the strings in first position. Repeat.

5. Knuckle Calisthenics (without the violin)

- a. With the left index finger touching the left thumb (“o.k.” sign), gently allow the first knuckle to collapse. Repeat five times on each finger to develop flexibility in the knuckles.

6. Go To Sleep, Wake Up

- a. With the hand over the octave harmonic or on the bout, and fingers rounded:
 - i. Go to sleep: let wrist fall back and the fingers flatten (as the back side of a wrist vibrato)
 - ii. Wake up: Return to the original position.

7. Press & Release

- a. To sensitize the finger/thumb relationship, press a finger on the fingerboard harder than one should, then release, relaxing the thumb and lifting the finger to a harmonic feeling, just barely touching the string. Do repetitions on each finger.

8. Jelly Knuckles

- a. Pull your left index finger back and bend at the 2nd knuckle. Flick the tip of the finger with your right index finger and the 1st knuckle (closest to tip) should feel like jelly, with that tip section of the finger flopping up and down. Repeat on all fingers. This develops flexibility in the first knuckle.

9. Shadow Vibrato

- a. Without the violin or bow, relax the arms into playing position.
- b. Beginning with the bow hand “at the frog” and the left hand “over the high dot”, open and close the arms in contrary motion (while the bow travels down bow, the left hand slides back to first position. While the bow travels up bow, the left hand slides up over the high dot.)
- c. Then, begin “at the frog” with the left hand in first position, and have the arms travel in parallel motion.
- d. Then, do a slow bow with a faster left hand (this prepares for arm vibrato)
- e. Also try a slow left hand with a fast bow (tremolo at the tip)

10. Open String Slides

- a. Play slow half notes on an open string (hand over the octave harmonic), then add sliding on the magic X.
- b. Play Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star (the theme)
 - i. During all open strings, slide on your magic X.
 - ii. Later, try with other slow songs or pieces.

11. Rest Position Slides (Levels B-D)

- a. ARM: With the violin in rest position, slide on the “Magic X”; Lightly touch the A string with the 3rd finger while sliding up and down the string with an arm motion. Gradually decrease the amplitude of the slide until the fingertip is in one place (on one note) and the arm/hand/X is still sliding. This is an arm vibrato.
 - i. Do this allowing the thumb to travel with the arm
 - ii. Later, try it while keeping the pad of the thumb touching the neck, but still allowing the arm and Magic X to slide.

1. Additionally, practice sliding on the Magic X with a stationary thumb and without a finger down to be sure the thumb joint is loose.
- iii. Start with the 3rd finger, then all other fingers.

- b. WRIST: With the violin in rest position, place the hand over the “high dot (octave harmonic) and rest the heel of the hand lightly on the bout of the violin. Lightly touch the A string with the 3rd finger while sliding back and forth with an arm motion. Gradually decrease the amplitude of the slide until the fingertip is in one place (on one note) and the wrist is still sliding. This will look like a wrist vibrato.

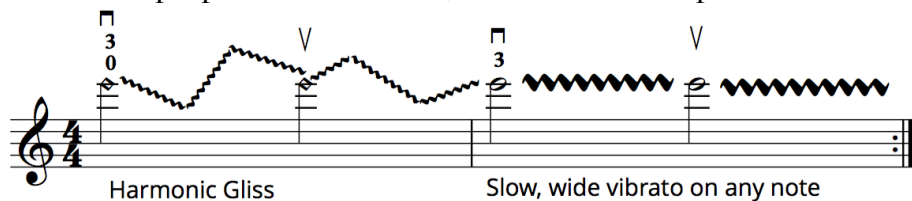
NOTE: If the student does not respond to either of these, skip at and try later.

12. **Teacher Wiggles the student’s fingers.** (Levels A-D)

- a. By wiggling the student’s fingers, the teacher can feel for the looseness in the student’s arm, wrist and knuckles, and can control the speed, width and sound of the vibrato. The student is able to relax and allow these motions and sounds to come in without “trying” to vibrate, thus allowing his or her hand to experience the vibrato motion and his or her ear to hear the sound of a beautiful vibrato.
 - i. Teacher and student face each other
 - ii. Student puts violin on the shoulder and leans the scroll against the teacher (hip/shoulder depending on height)
 - iii. Student plays a finger on the A string in first position (I usually do this order: 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4)
- b. Slower Wiggle: As demonstrated, for beginners and when trying to loosen a tight vibrato.
 - i. Teacher’s right hand:
 1. pinky under the scroll for balance
 2. ring finger touching the tip of the student’s playing finger to adjust intonation and to keep it from slipping
 3. middle finger gently on top of the student’s first knuckle
 - ii. Teacher’s Left Hand:
 1. Gently holding the center of the student’s hand with the thumb and middle fingers, sensing the balance of the center of the hand.
 2. Check the student’s left arm level for balance and relaxation.
- c. Faster Wiggle (Levels C/D): Don’t try this until the above exercise can be done with the student’s hand being relaxed, or with a more advanced student who is already vibrating.
 - i. Teacher’s Right Hand:
 1. Thumb and middle finger gently “grab” student’s first knuckle from above.
 2. Teacher’s Left Hand: May support the violin, wrist, or arm.

13. Harmonic Slides (Levels C-D)

- a. ARM: In playing position, slide on the “magic X” with the 3rd finger lightly touching the “A” String. Play long, legato bows as the arm/finger slide.
- Earlier: Just do this and keep the finger like a harmonic.
 - Later: Start with a harmonic slide, then gradually let the finger drop to play on any one note. Don’t press the finger down all the way to the fingerboard. Keep the arm sliding as before without any suddenly different motion when the finger stays in one place. Vibrate that note for a short time; returning to sliding; land on a different note; repeat with all fingers.
- b. WRIST: In playing position, with the hand in 4th position and the heel of the hand lightly touching the ribs of the violin:
- Earlier: Wave the hand back and forth, letting the 2nd finger lightly graze the strings as a harmonic. Repeat with all fingers
 - Later: as above, with the wrist motion.
- iii. NOTE: Keep a pulse with the bow, and an even bow speed.



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2. Measured Oscillation Exercises (Level C/D)

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The following exercises can be done with either arm motion or wrist motion. Start with one until a vibrato is stabilized. Eventually a violinist or violist should be able to do both. I generally use the following sequence for students who have not yet done this type of exercise because working with the gross motor motions first seems to help insure that the wrist and hand move together, then when we practice the wrist exercises the angle flows more naturally (no twisting, etc.) and the motions are integrated. That said, if a violinist already has a wrist vibrato and that is easier, I would start there. The choice on where to start depends a lot on what seems most natural for the student. At the upper intermediate and advanced levels adding the arm exercises to a wrist vibrato or adding the wrist exercises to an arm vibrato may not be intended to change the vibrato to the other but can help add variety and possibilities as various combinations can be used for musical goals.


1. Arm motion, with thumb traveling WITH the arm/hand
2. Arm motion, with thumb remaining in one spot
3. Wrist motion


Basic principles:

1. The vibrato starts with an in-tune pitch and goes 1/4-1/2 lower in these exercises.
Do not play above the pitch.
2. Practice these exercises first in 4th position on the “A” string (E, F#, G, A), then add the other strings.

3. In tune pitch:  1/4-1/2 step below the pitch: 

4. The arm/hand/wrist will initiate the motions. The finger should feel soft and passive, falling back not out of an active motion but because it is being moved by the arm/hand/wrist
5. The first knuckle of the finger must be soft.




a.  = the knuckle can look like a “square”, with the finger on the fingertip. (I often start this exercise with the fingers taller than they really will be when one vibrates in a piece in effort to make the largest amplitude in the exercises)

b.  = the finger should fall back until the first knuckle is nearly flat and the finger is playing on its “pad”.

6. Left arm level: Be sure that the left arm level is correct and balanced under the hand.

ARM MOTION




1. As a first measured oscillation exercise
2. If the upper arm is tight (this helps relax it)
3. If the student, upon trying the wrist exercise, reacts with conflicting impulses in the hand (i.e. Sideways motion, the wrist moves the knuckles don't, etc.) The arm motion is more basic (everything moves together) and I often use it first when making corrections or trying to change a vibrato as a way to get all the motions working well, even if the student might end up with a wrist vibrato.
4. When the student already has a nice wrist vibrato and wants to expand the possibilities.

- a.  = heel of hand lightly against the violin in 4th position
- b.  = arm/hand/thumb pull back away from the violin as a unit.
- c. Open the forearm from the elbow joint.
- d. Keep the wrist/arm straight and loose (do not hyperextend the wrist)
- e. Feel the work initiate from the arm and keep the fingers soft and passive.
- f. Let the arm slide back until the first knuckle of the finger is nearly flat.
- g.  = return arm to original position.


Later: When this is successful, repeat the exercise while leaving the thumb in one spot (about across from the 2nd finger). Be sure that, when opening the arm back, the base knuckle slides gently along the neck of the violin.

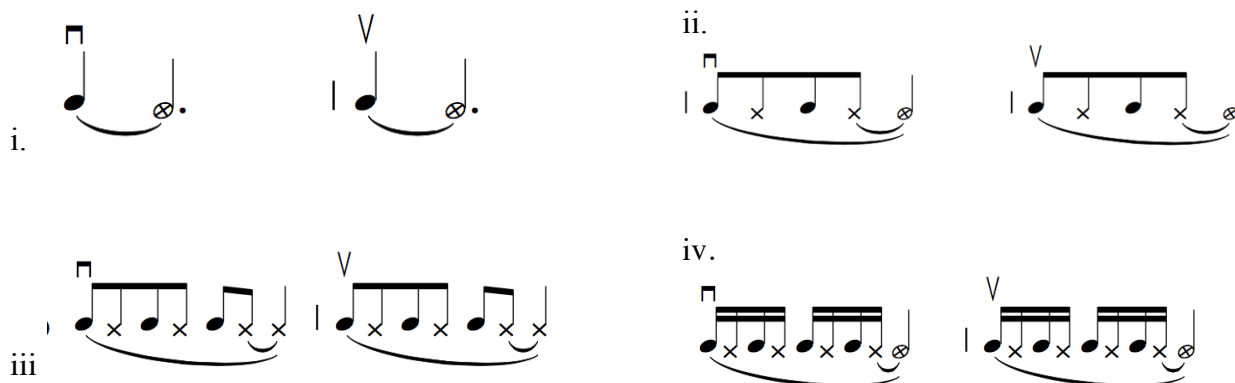
WRIST MOTION

1. If the student can do the arm oscillations
2. When the upper arm is loose and flexible
3. If the student hyper-extends his or her wrist (this exercise helps to relax the wrist, which should be slightly “in”).
4. If the student has a nice arm vibrato and wants to explore more possibilities, especially in the finger falling back on the pad of the hand for warmth in the tone.

- a.  = heel of hand lightly against the ribs in 4th position
- b.  = heel of hand remains against the violin; drop hand back from the wrist. Feel the heaviness in the knuckles as they fall back, and feel the center of balance in the center of the hand fall back
- c. Keep the fingers soft and “passive”.
- d. Let the wrist fall back until the first knuckle of the finger is nearly flat.
- e.  = return hand to original position.


1. ISOLATED OSCILLATIONS (arm and wrist) - with a built-in relaxation period.

a. On the back side () be sure all muscles in the finger, hand, and upper arm are relaxed before returning to the original position.



2. IMPULSE WIGGLES (arm and wrist) – with a built-in relaxation period.

Same number of notes as the Isolated Wiggles, but play the 8th and 16th notes as quick

grace notes with an impulse on the back side () be sure all muscles in the finger, hand, and upper arm are relaxed before returning to the original position. This is especially helpful with advanced players wanting to speed up the vibrato.

NOTE: Can also be practiced in the opposite direction (start on the low pitch and move quickly to the in-tune pitch)

3. MEASURED WIGGLES (arm and wrist)

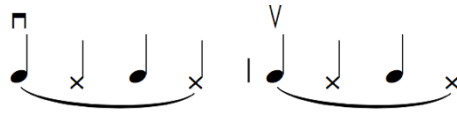
1. Play between quarter = 50=72
2. 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12 per bow, then just vibrate on the half notes.

i. During the half notes, let go of the hand/arm and vibrate without thinking about any initiation points. Just relax, let it swing, and listen for a beautiful sound. Like a trill practice, once reaching fast, measured notes one has to jump to an impulse trill.



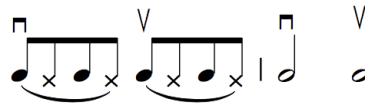
4. MEASURED VIBRATO EXERCISES WITH SCALES in 4th Position

1. **ARM:** Play a 2 octave D Major scale in 4th position with the heel of the hand lightly against the instrument. Open at the elbow and swing the arm back and forth rhythmically for two bars,



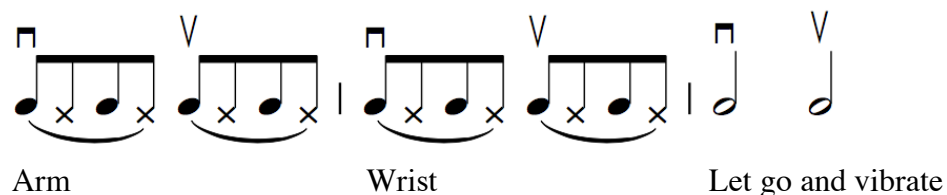
2. **WRIST:** Same, using the wrist vibrato motion, keeping the heel of the hand lightly against the violin.

3. **ARM Plus Release to half notes:** Play a 2 octave D Major scale in 4th position with the heel of the hand lightly against the instrument. Open at the elbow and swing the arm back and forth rhythmically for two bars, then let go and vibrate without thinking about how it is being executed. Do the following pattern on each note.



4. **WRIST Plus Release to half notes:** Same, using the wrist vibrato motion, keeping the heel of the hand lightly against the violin.

5. **ALTERNATING ARM and WRIST:** Use the ARM motion for two bars, then the WRIST motion for two bars, then let go (do not hold the wrist against the instrument) and vibrate. Let the arm and hand swing. The hand may settle with arm, wrist or a combination vibrato. Just listen and don't think too much about the execution.



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3. Extended Vibrato Exercises for those who are vibrating (Levels C/D)

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Once the basic vibrato motion is natural, balanced, even and beautiful at one speed, it is time to expand the vibrato in many ways in order to support the artistry of the music. Here are some of my favorites.

I. RANGE EXPLORATION (*Levels B-D*)

Experiment with these exaggerations first silently with the finger on the string (where possible) to feel the physical parameters, then while playing long tones, scales, etudes or excerpts from a piece to hear how the sound changes with these manipulations. Make up your own as well.

❖ **BASE KNUCKLE HEIGHT**

- Too high – fingers extra tall
- Too low – fingers very flat
- Just Right! (where the vibrato swings freely)

❖ **WRIST ANGLE**

- Too far out (hyperextended)
- Too far in (nearly touching the neck)
- Just Right! (in line with the arm, but flexible)

❖ **FINGER PADS**

- Too high (on the tip-toes – nearly at the nail)
- Too low (hanging for a flat finger)
- Just right! (The best choice depends on what you are listening for, and eventually what type of music you are playing)

❖ **WRIST HEIGHT**

- Wrist is too high
- Wrist is too low (below the stick)
- Just Right! (wrist is slightly higher than the stick)

❖ **LEFT ARM LEVEL**

- Too far out (swing to the left of the violin)
- Too far in (swing arm under your violin)
- Just Right! (the elbow is balanced under the finger and string)

❖ **FINGER WEIGHT**

- Press too hard (tightens the vibrato)
- Touch light as a harmonic (sounds fuzzy)
- Just Right! (add just enough weight for a clear sound)

II. RELAXING THE VIBRATO

1. ELEVATOR FINGERS (relaxes the vibrato)

1. **GOING UP** – Play a scale in whole bows, slowly. Drop a finger firmly and vibrate on one note. Gradually release the pressure in the finger until it is almost a harmonic. The vibrato should loosen up, and this sensitizes the finger to a lighter touch.
2. **GOING DOWN**– The opposite. On each note start by vibrating on a very light finger (harmonic) that will sound fuzzy. Gradually add pressure JUST until you hear a real tone. Stop pressing and enjoy a looser vibrato.

2. KNUCKLE COLLAPSE

1. Gently collapse the first (smallest) knuckle of the left finger while the finger is lightly down in 3rd or 4th position. Collapse and lift rhythmically (2 times down bow, 2 times up bow), then play half notes and just let the vibrato swing beautifully. Do not press. Repeat with each finger. This loosens that knuckle and warms up the sound, regardless of what type of vibrato is being played.



III. FINGERS AS HAMMERS: IMPULSE AND RELEASE

(relaxes the vibrato, encourages vibrato to start right away on each note)

1. **BOUNCE FINGERS** – Without the bow, drop a finger onto the fingerboard, then immediately release it to a harmonic feel. (Do not lift it into the air). Note that the thumb will have a little counterpressure when the finger drops, but that it should also release when the finger releases. Practice this without the bow. Then practice the following routine with no vibrato, and then with vibrato.

2. **BOUNCE FINGERS MARTELÉ** - Play a scale martelé, 2 per bow, hitting the finger with the start of the stroke, then immediately releasing the left finger to a harmonic. When the bow stops at the end of the stroke, the finger/hand/arm/neck should be loose, and the finger will be sitting lightly on top of the string. Can be done 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12 per bow.

3. **BOUNCE FINGERS FUZZ** - Play a scale legato, slurring 2, using bounce fingers, so that after the initial impulse of the left hand you will hear a harmonic/fuzz sound. This develops the ability to relax the left finger while maintaining bow speed and weight. At first, the bow arm will likely mirror the left hand with a portato. Later, try and keep the bow speed even. (Great exercise to eliminate unwanted portato)

4. **BOUNCE FINGERS LEGATO** – Same as above but bounce the finger to lighten it but still hear a “real” tone and let the vibrato swing. This trains the finger to release tension after the initial impulse.

5. IMPULSE TO OPEN STRINGS - Begin the vibrato at the instant the finger hits the string (sizzle), with an accent feel in both hands to help the impulse get started. Relax the hand/arm during the open string. Slowly, then faster.



IV. SMALLER, FASTER, NARROWER VIBRATO

1. **HARMONICS:** Practice slowly and measured, then non-measured and faster): Begin slowly and evenly, lifting the finger straight up. Gradually speed up until the open “A” doesn’t speak any more, then vibrate that note. This adds a bit of vertical motion and puts focus on the small muscles. Practice on all fingers and on other strings and harmonics. Repeat on each finger. Works best in 3rd or 4th position to start.



5. **SNEAKING IN:** Play any note softly with no vibrato. Be sure the entire hand/finger/arm is relaxed. Start softly at the tip on any note/finger. Very gradually sneak in a tiny amount of vibrato. Keep the amplitude narrow and don’t suddenly use a lot of arm or wrist.
 1. **Sneaking Away:** Start with a big, wide vibrato, and diminuendo to no vibrato

V. CONTINUOUS VIBRATO

1. Scales in overlap bowings

- a. Keep vibrato going during bow changes on repeated notes.
- b. Keep the last finger down while adding the next finger (keep the 2 down when you slur the first C to the D). Don’t disturb the oscillation of the hand/arm when you add the D. Release the 2 when you change bow and repeat the concept.
- c. Keep arm/wrist motion going as the finger drops, ensuring that the finger drop is independent of the arm/hand oscillation.



2. **Finger Drops on adjacent strings** - Using slow bows, vibrate one finger on one string, and drop and lift another finger on another string. Keep the vibrato constant while dropping/lifting. Start with 3rd position.
 - a. For example, play 2 on A and lift and drop 1, then 3, then 4 on D.
 - b. Try all combinations of fingers and strings.

3. **Vibrating on adjacent strings** - Vibrate on 1st finger on the “A” string, then add 2, 3, 4, 3, 2 on the E or D string, playing double stops and keeping the arm/hand vibrato motion going.

a. Start with 3rd position. Slur 2, 4

4. Scales with continuous vibrato

- a. Left hand only (no bow) – play slowly, then faster, focusing on keeping the vibrato coming from the arm/wrist and not generated by the finger.
- b. Fuzz-Tone scales with any slurs, or an acceleration pattern. Harmonic fingers – don’t press.
- c. Slur in groupings, where the 1st note is real, and the next notes are Fuzz-Tone. Then link the groups with no bow change.



d. Acceleration pattern with easy, continuous vibrato

5. **Broken thirds in overlap bowing** - Feel the balance change from finger to finger. Slowly, slur 2.

6. **Hanging Vibrato** – Swing the left arm back to 1st position during each open string, then feel the weight of the whole arm drop into the note in 3rd position. Do not hold up the violin and squeeze the thumb and finger together. Rather, use your head weight to support the violin, and the arm into the instrument, and feel the integration between the arm weight and the vibrato. Relax the neck and head during the open strings. This also helps with feeling the balance change from finger to finger.

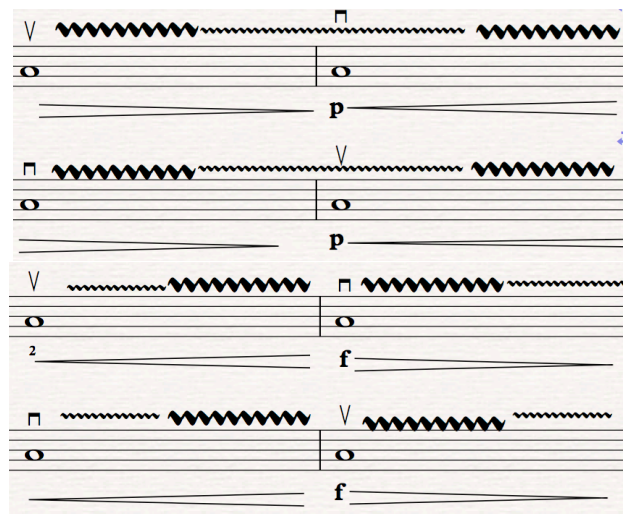


7. **“Walking Fingers” exercise by R. Henry** - I use this exercise for various reasons at different times for each student (patterns, intonation, shifting). For vibrato focus:
- i. Play in 1st-7th pos. and back (or 1st-5th) to solidify intonation, shifting and patterns
 - ii. Vibrate the half notes – swing arm under a bit to support the 4th finger.
 1. Focus on a loose vibrato
 - iii. Feel balance change from finger to finger, supported by a slight swing in the arm.
 1. First, focus on vibrating just the half notes
 2. Then, try and keep the vibrato continuous through all notes. Keep the vibrato motion going in the hand/arm while transferring the weight from finger to finger.



VI. VARYING VIBRATO SPEED AND WIDTH

1. Play whole notes, manipulate the vibrato gradually as the dynamics change, listening to the connection between the ring of the tone and the nature of the vibrato. Let the tone come to life and ring purely.
2. Scale in 4th position, 3 times, once each with a narrow, medium and wide vibrato
3. Scale in 4th position, adjust vibrato width to the width of the string
4. Play scales, adding dynamics and a vibrato that matches.
5. Find a tone – pick any note, string, finger, dynamic and intensity and play whole bows with no vibrato until the tone is clear. Then add a vibrato that brings that tone alive.
6. Do the following and make up other permutations and patterns on notes, scales, arpeggios and in the repertoire. (gradually change the vibrato to match the quality of tone and the dynamic).



VI. MATCHING THE VIBRATO TO THE TONE and THE MUSIC (Levels C/D)

1. Matching the vibrato to the thickness of the strings

- a. Play this (or a similar) pattern legato with whole bows (open string, then 3rd finger):
EE33 -AA33 -DD33 -GG33 -GG33 -DD33 -AA33 -EE33
 - i. Vibrate all with a narrow, fast vibrato
 - ii. Vibrate all with a wide, slow vibrato
 - iii. Match the vibrato speed and width to the thickness of the string.
 - iv. Repeat, varying the place on the string, the finger, the dynamic, the color
 - v. Play an excerpt of a lyrical piece all three ways.
- b. Play two octave scales in each position (1st through 7th)
 - i. Listen for how the vibrato needs to change from string to string.

2. Pick a Tone – Find the Vibrato

- a. Pick a note, pick a quality of sound (any dynamic or intensity)
 - i. Play many whole bows to find the natural sounding point and the tone rings clearly
 - ii. Add a vibrato to match. The vibrato should not change the pitch or the quality of sound but should resonate and bring the tone to life.
 - iii. Repeat with many variables.
- b. Find long notes in the repertoire and repeat the above exercise.
 - i. Then play those notes in the context of the whole phrase and listen for that same resonance.
 - ii. Repeat on your favorite notes of any piece, and gradually always.

3. The 4th finger – In effort to find a beautiful sound on all fingers, don't avoid the 4th finger routinely. Do all the exercises also with the 4th finger, and don't despair.

Some favorites:

- a. Close your eyes and go for the sound you want – no matter how you have to change the hand, or how the finger looks (curved, flat, double jointed)
- b. Finger Replacement Exercise: Vibrate and try and get the same sound with each finger.



- c. Review Walking Fingers, bringing the center of the palm closer to the 4th finger to provide balance and/or leaving the 3rd finger down while vibrating the 4th.

4. Repertoire – For each phrase, identify how the left hand is supporting the music.

- a. Play the phrase without the bow, using the vibrato to drive the dynamics and shaping. Add the bow and make adjustments.