

So You Want To Play In Tune?

Presenter

**Monte Belknap, Associate Professor of Violin
Brigham Young University—School of Music
Provo, Utah**

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Are you creating it?

Beginner Level

Are you happy with it?

Don't care, indifferent

Are you developing it?

True Amateur

Are you repairing it?

Fixing Bad Habits

Are you refining it?

Truly Striving for Perfection

“Why I Won’t Practice Slowly.”

1. “It’s boring!”
2. “That doesn’t help.”
3. “I don’t like it.”
4. “I did it once and it didn’t help me at all.”
5. “I don’t have enough time to do that.”
6. “I don’t have enough patience to practice slowly, I get frustrated and then I just go faster and faster.”
7. “It takes too much time and I need all the time I have left to get the piece fast enough.”
8. “It sounds bad when I go slowly.”
9. “I feel better about my practice time when I practice and really get into it like a performance.”
10. “Isn’t it a different technique to practice slowly then practicing fast? The way I put fingers down is different and the bow strokes are entirely different”
11. “It doesn’t make me feel good about my practice time.”

What does it take to play in tune?

Interviews with several professionals

1. Assume every note you play is out of tune.
2. You have to want to play in tune enough to do anything to accomplish it.
3. You have to pay attention and always be aware of where the pitch is.
4. You have to put in the time to be able to hear and recognize when you are in tune.
5. You have to not fall into the trap, as do many musicians, of not paying attention or caring anymore...willing to sit down in an orchestra and not care if you play in tune like you are in a factory.
6. You have to be willing to make adjustments on any note to match those around you or just to get it in tune.
7. You have to try and resonate with your instrument and feel it in your body and your hands.
8. You need to know the grid of your fingerboard.
9. Raise your standard every day, week, month, or year.
10. Practice your technique by memory as soon as possible (Flesch, Galamian, or whatever).
Eliminating your most dominant sense (sight) so that your hearing and feeling senses are augmented.
11. Choose reliable fingerings unless you are willing to do the thousands of repetitions necessary to hit the risky ones.
12. Learn how to breathe correctly so you can control the adrenal gland and play in tune under pressure.
13. Perform once a week.

EAR TRAINING

1. Start with something simple



do re mi fa sol la ti do ti la so fa mi re do

2. Add Hand motions--see the website:

<http://www.music.vt.edu/musicdictionary/appendix/scales/solmization/syllables.html>

3. Do triads and interval training



do mi sol mi do re fa la fa re mi sol ti sol mi fa la do la fa



so ti re ti so la do mi do la ti re fa re ti do mi sol mi do

4. Harmony studies
5. Melodic and Harmonic dictation
6. Composition
7. Be able to do all of the above at fast tempos

Other Notes:

- Have fun.
- Use the drone with everything at all levels.
- Teaches tonality in any key.
- It works! It helps those who are tone deaf and those who have perfect pitch.
- I didn't like solfeg until I started teaching theory.
- Teaches what I call melodic and harmonic memory.
- Relates to memory tools:
 - *Shadow Practicing*[®], *Sing a Phrase*, *Write a Phrase*[®], and *Write a Phrase Play a Phrase*[®].

Lifting and Tapping

Hand Frame

Formation

The hand should be balanced with the thumb forward (not high) and with the ability to reach a half step back with index finger and a whole step forward with pinky.

This will establish where the finger touches the string. With older students who need hand frame work this will take a while because the student will try and adjust the frame/formation to match where they are used to putting fingers down. (*Repairing It*)

Finger Patterns

Memorize finger patterns. Here are the ones I use:

Pattern #1	1 23 4
Pattern #2	12 3 4
Pattern #3	1 2 34
Pattern #4	123 4
Pattern #5	1 234
Pattern #6	12 34
Pattern #7	1234
Pattern #8	1 2 3 4

Color code scales, double stops, and pieces.

Guide Fingers

There should always (with few exceptions) be a finger down before putting another finger down.

Know what the intervals are between your fingers on the same string and on different strings.

Fingerboard Grid

Draw up or purchase fingerboard grids.

Know what the intervals are between your fingers on the same string and on intervals between strings like sixths or fourths. Another example would be sixths and tenths.

Study Double Stops From the Beginning

Here is a list of double-stop books from easy to hard:

Melodious Double Stops by Josephine Trott

Double Stop Studies, Op. 96 by Hoffman

Studi A Doppio Corde Progressivi by Polo

Out of print books by Gaylord Yost or

Contemporary Violin Technique by Galamian

Scale System by Carl Flesch

The 24 Caprices by Paganini

Other books on intonation:

A Violinist's Guide for Exquisite Intonation by Barry Ross

Google *Books on Violin Intonation* and there are other lists

What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body by Barbara Conable

Hold and Drill

Hold 60 seconds, Tap 60 times, and then trust and throw.

Pressure Coordination Training

Different pressure percentages for left hand pressure

As hard as possible, used only in condition training and when you're really mad.

As soft as possible, used for harmonics and the ideal way to press.

Just enough to produce a pitch, used for everything

Just a little more, used during vibrato

In general—press as little as possible

Should be able to play with light left hand and heavy right hand

Ballerina/Balleroni versus the Elephant

Reliable Note Grabbing Training

Hold sixty seconds and tap sixty times.

Relaxed

Eliminate all squeezing in the front, back, or side of the hand. (See *pressure coordination training above*)

Others

Use a drone with everything.

Pre-Warm Ups.

Pizzicato to see if you are in tune without subconsciously changing it.

The Three Octave Exam

Practicing with different bow strokes like spiccato with thirds in Paganini Caprice No. 1

Don't forget Perlman's article in the *Strings* magazine

"Don't spend 20 minutes training left hand and have your right hand be totally undisciplined and have to drill right hand 20 minutes to retrain it what to do."

Make it MJ friendly

Trust and Throw

Carl Flesch

Beginner #'s 1-4

Intermediate #'s most of 5, 6 and 7

Advanced, all numbers

Artist, entire key in tune

Use Drones

Use Midi

Shifting

Where is your left hand now and where is it going?

Know your positions!

This seems to be a very old forgotten technique that has fallen away in modern day teaching. Go through your piece and mark all the positions. There are only 14 positions and 30 notes on each string of the violin or viola (that's 120 half steps on the entire violin). Your left hand will be much more accurate if it knows where you are sending it.

Know what kind of shifts you are using and mark your music clearly.

There are three kinds of shifts, an arm, wrist, or thumb pivot shift. Within these different kinds of shifts there are different types of shifts. Mark which type of shift you are using in your part.

Three Kinds of Shifts

*Arm
Wrist
Thumb*

Six different ways to use them

*Old finger
New finger
Same finger
Reach up
Reach back
Jump and grab*

Use the wrist or thumb as often as possible from as low as you can reach (about third position) to as high as you can reach (about ninth position). It makes for a very fast and accurate shift.

Know what position you are in at all times and mark them in your part.

How to tell what position you are in:

- 1. Find a note up high and note what finger you are using.*
- 2. Figure out what note that same finger plays in first position.*
- 3. The interval between those two notes is the position you are in.*

Others

Use a drone with everything.

Speed of the shift—fast, slow, put finger down.

Steal time from the note before the shift and shift as early as possible when practicing.

Pre-Warm Ups.

Technology

Demo

Programs used: itunes, Amadeus (or Audacity), The Intonation CD (theviolinsite.com), Garage Band (Macintosh midi player), Van Basco (PC midi player).

Drones and Midi Files Demo

Get a good clear sounding violin that has natural resonance.

Make sure the violin is in tune straight across the strings.

Try and use the same type of strings on the bottom three, nylon, metal, gut, etc.

If you are going to work extra hard on intonation make sure the instrument is in tune or you will be training your left hand to play out of tune and defeat the purpose of tuning.

Sounding point affects intonation.

Specific Technique Rules

Thirds—keep first and third fingers down all the time, especially going up the scale and keep the fingers on left hand light. Press as lightly as possible. Listen to the bottom note.

Fingered Octaves—exactly the same as thirds and make sure your thumb is forward and you are reaching back with your index finger. Some violinists will have to come away from the violin

at the neck. With the right hand, get the bow next to the bridge and press on the lower string more than the upper string. Press as light as possible. Listen to the bottom note.

Octaves—make sure your thumb is forward, move from the elbow joint and forget the left hand fingers. Press as lightly as possible.

Tenths—keep the thumb right at the crook of the neck. Make sure your thumb is forward and you are reaching back with your index finger. Some violinists will have to come away from the violin at the neck. With the right hand, get the bow next to the bridge and press on the lower string more than the upper string. Press as light as possible. Listen to the bottom note.

Harmonics—lift and tap with L. H. With right hand get the bow next to the bridge, press, and use a lot of bow.

Sixths—mark the half steps. Listen to the top note.

Left hand pizzicato—press as hard as you can then a little harder, try and break the string while ripping the string downward. Do not try and get under the string and pluck upwards. Don't worry about hitting the other strings.

Intonation Choices

Pythagorean (Melodic)

Just (Just)

See the website:

<http://www.wonderhowto.com/how-to/video/how-to-play-in-pythagorean-intonation-on-violin-6215/>

From the Violin Journal

BUILDING RELIABLE INTONATION

Play By Feel Rather Than By Ear (eventually)

Spend most of your practice time every day training the left hand to play by feel and not by ear.

Never search for a note with the left hand as you are starting or running your piece. Train it to find the notes before the right hand has to play.

Spend your time training the hand/fingers/arm to remember where it is being placed, thrown or dropped.

Relaxing is the Key

I have learned over the years of practicing and teaching that when a violinist learns how to truly relax he/she can play with more ease and with better intonation. I have also seen more improvement in intonation in a five-minute session working with the following ideas than years of careful practice. Here are a few ideas:

1. Keep the shoulders down!

If you keep both shoulders down, centered and relaxed you will notice a greater ease of playing in both arms and better coordination.

You will also notice that your tone improves when you hold the violin up with the left hand a little because you are now pushing in opposite directions with the hands; down with the right hand and up with the left.

You will notice that your left hand is faster, and that the shifts become a little heavier at first. This will eventually lead to faster and more accurate shifting because the left hand has more responsibility.

You will notice that your shoulder blade does not hurt anymore.

Some realize that their vibrato does not work quite as well and they will have to work out a balance between lifting with left hand and pushing down with the chin instead of up with the shoulder to hold up the violin.

2. Touch Points

Don't be afraid to touch the violin in as many places as possible with the left hand. Each touch point is another tool to use to play both with lifting and tapping and shifting.

3. Keep the head on straight!

Watch yourself on a video tape recording and/or work with your teacher to make sure that your spine is aligned and that your chin is not jetting out to go get the violin. Make the violin come to you and align your spine so that there is not tension in the neck. Any tension in the neck or the chest area connects the arms with tension and does not allow them to work against each other in opposition. Imagine a tennis player trying to hit the ball and run with his/her shoulders up and their head on crooked. See the website: <http://www.violinistinbalance.nl/>

4. No tension anywhere but especially not in the left hand

Lifting and tapping

You should start every day with a little lifting and tapping of the fingers. Remind yourself every day what a whole and half step feels like and how to lift and tap the string without tension. There should be no squeezing the fingers down just lifting and tapping the string like you would drum them on a tabletop. Do this as a pre-warm up routine.

Playing a half step should not be squeezing the fingers together but just throwing a finger down on the other finger's fingernail.

Shifting

There should be no squeezing of the fingers down on the string when you shift. In general the hand is completely relaxed and thrown when you shift.

You should also know what interval the hand is being thrown when you shift ie. a whole step, a minor third, etc.

You should also always know what position you are in at all times.

5. Move from the large joints and let the others follow

“The Rule of 60”

William Primrose, one of the great artists of the past century, mentioned another old forgotten technique used in teaching many decades ago; “The Rule of 60”. Sevcik also taught his golden rule; “Practice Slowly”.

When working on a passage that is tricky, play it perfectly as slowly as necessary 5 times in a row, then work rhythms 10 times (see the rhythms page), then slowly another 5 times, then rhythms again, then really fast 5 times, then 5 times slowly. Repeat that sequence twice and you have your 60 repetitions. By the time you have done this every day for a week the passage will be memorized and you will execute it with ease at any tempo. Make sure to do the correct bowings during every repetition.

Is the Fancy Fingering Worth it?

One of the most important decisions we make in building reliable intonation is choosing the most reliable fingering over one we think might sound better because of a particular color we are seeking. Sometimes we like keeping melodies on the same string and we sacrifice intonation for a color when consistent intonation would be much more important. I believe the more “in tune” fingering is much more desirable than a fancy fingering if it is out of tune. Be creative and make your bow arm come up with the colors needed. If you are really set on a “fancy fingering” but are having a hard time making it reliable or if you are just having a difficult time getting a shift in tune try the following intonation instructions:

Never Miss That Leap and Grab Again!

Find the out of tune note(s) and get them in tune using a drone.

Hold the finger(s) down, noticing the pattern number, in tune without the bow for sixty seconds.

Lift and drop the finger(s) 60 times (“Rule of 60”).

The next day do this routine before you run the piece or the passage and then relax, trust and throw the hand. It is amazing how the hand can remember what it felt like to be in that spot.

The List

1. Use a metronome and a drone to get the tempo up to speed
2. Practice until you can play with the recording
3. Memorize
4. Record yourself and conduct it
5. Right and Left Hand Only
6. Fast and slow runs of each section of the piece

Geography

Find your high note. Notice where that note is in relation to the parts of the violin so you have a visual in your head as to where you are going.

How to play a half step

Put your finger on the top of the other finger’s fingernail and let it slide down. **Don’t squeeze ½ steps!**

Use Delay’s Idea

Having spent time in lessons and master classes with Dorothy Delay, I once asked her why I played a section or note out of tune. Her answer was simply yet haunting, “Honey, either you didn’t throw

your arm to the right position or you didn't put your fingers down in the right spot". I hope that I have answered these two concepts with the topics already stated above. She then explained a routine used by Perlman that I wish to share with you here. She stated that when Perlman was performing a new piece he would play it slowly ten times a day working out the left hand and right hand problems as he went. If he had already performed a piece and was simply maintaining the control he would run the piece three to four times daily at slow tempos. I suggest doing that and adding the MIDI piano part so you can tune at a slow tempo and learn to play with the piano part as well.

Blend this with the Alexander Technique of running things fast and slow side by side so the one teaches the other how to relax and throw.

Slow practice is boring to boring people. When running your piece slowly, run it with as much musical energy as possible remembering always that you are practicing/training for a performance. Play as musical and creative as possible with the right hand always making sure that the left hand is ready to play before the right hand has to play.

A Few More Pointers...

Practice tricky sections of a piece with left and right hand alone. For right hand write out the open strings in the passage and practice them until secure. After practicing both hands separate put them back together and you will probably find out which arm was the culprit and your tricky passage will become more secure.

Run your piece slowly with a midi file. Don't forget to work out the bow usage to make it as musical as possible at the slow tempo.

Train with total relaxation: **this is essential!** Reliable intonation is built when all actions happen with a relaxed throw, not by placing fingers by squeezing them down or together for half steps. Lift and tap (open and close) the fingers on the string; do not squeeze them down. Similarly, to shift, throw the hand with the biceps to the new position. Don't squeeze with the fingers or try to keep the shape of the hand. Relax during the shift!!! Also, right hand squeezing can cause many problems. Lean on the bow using leverage not pressing—study the *detaché* exercise page.

Try breathing more on purpose during your slow practice until it comes naturally.

Make Real Mistakes Not Fake Ones!

I have found that recording myself with my pianist has been most effective. After you record yourself, listen and make a **Status Report** on each of the pieces or movements you are performing. Take notes where you think you are (self lesson) and what things you might need to do to have it ready for performance.

When we record ourselves we train our brain to stay in the creative mode instead of the critical mode. That helps us learn how to focus more on the music instead of trying to remember all the things we did wrong so we can practice them. It will also tell us the **real mistakes** instead of what I call fake mistakes.

Technique Does Not Exist!

After all this talk of technique building and the building of reliable intonation I wish to make this statement, **TECHNIQUE DOES NOT EXIST, ONLY MUSIC EXISTS.** After all the years I've spent building and teaching technique I can honestly say that it is only a tool with which to play music. Music, my friends, is where we should spend our creative powers. It brings out the songs of our souls and helps us communicate what is in our hearts to the spirits of the human race and to our God.

RIGHT AND LEFT HAND ONLY PRACTICE GUIDE

Right Hand Focus Points—60% of practice

Relax from the core (neck and everything from shoulders to hips). Start with good posture—violin up, breathe, let there be no tension. Arms, stomach, chest, back, and all joints should be loose and flowing. No left hand whatsoever, just hold up the violin with head off the chinrest.

1. Play musically and work on projection with sounding point control and good articulations. Get a big beautiful, musical sound.
2. Watch and control your sounding point.
3. Work on string crossings and use the whole bow, frog to tip when ever possible. Also, work on getting the perfect sounding point for the dynamic and phrase structure-make it sound good.
4. Straight bow.
5. Flat hair.
6. Move arm first and drag all other bones with loose knuckles from the big bones and joints all the way down to the bow.
7. Remember to move the pennies on the wrist and then from the wrist to the bow is just follow through.
8. Identify, refine, and vary your bow strokes: make each bow stroke sound and feel confident in any dynamic necessary. Even out the down and up bow strokes and the articulations. Don't run out of bow, don't have swoopy bow strokes where you swell the sound on each stroke, and make each note lead into the next up or down in dynamic where needed and possible.
9. You must adjust to the new sound that is being produced. Let your ears get used to the louder and broader tone.
10. Make sure the rhythms and tempos are correct on right hand practice.
11. Do many repetitions of harder sections daily to ensure your sound is confident.

Left Hand Focus Points—40% of practice

Relax from the core (neck and everything from shoulders to hips). Start with good posture—violin up, breathe, let there be no tension. Arms, stomach, chest, back, and all joints should be loose and flowing. No right hand whatsoever, just concentrate on left hand lifting and tapping without squeezing and shifting with a relaxed motion.

1. Run the section or piece using an expressive, non-stop vibrato as appropriate for the period of music.
2. Focus on lifting and tapping: play in the grass, don't dig in the dirt (don't press too hard or squeeze with the fingers).
3. Shift from the arm and the wrist—use the wrist shift whenever possible.
4. Make sure to pay attention to finger patterns (1 2 3 4-pattern #1) and keep the ½ steps close: don't squeeze the fingers together to make a ½ step, put one finger on top of the other finger's fingernail.
5. Notice where your fingers sit geographically on the violin. Memorize where certain notes are found in relation to land marks on the instrument.
6. There is a time to use the right hand in the training of left hand. When the left hand has a shift or note that you cannot hear with tapping you can check with the bow to make sure you are in tune.
7. Do many repetitions of harder sections daily to ensure you can't miss it: hold it, tap it, and do the 60 repetitions necessary.

Reward System (playing with both hands)

1. Three runs of each section practiced. Another run or two at the end of the day.
2. When rehearsing with pianist.
3. During performances for each other.

Reminders

1. Be sure to perform for others in preparation for recitals, concerts or juries.

Write a Phrase—Play a Phrase

1. Get staff paper that has the same number of lines as the most lines in your music.
2. Don't forget to write in the key signatures, bowings, and fingerings that you need, dynamics, composer and dates.
3. Start at the end and work backwards phrase by phrase without using the violin.
4. Look at the last line in your piece.
 - a. Mark your staff paper with the same amount of measures that are on that line.
5. Start writing from the front of the line and go as far as you can.
6. When you are done, look at your music and see where you made mistakes or omissions.
7. Fold your paper over and try again.
8. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until you can write that page out without mistakes easily and then write it one more time as your final draft!
9. Enter that on a clean sheet of staff paper as your final written copy.
10. Allow yourself to play each phrase or page or section as soon as you can write it out.
11. Do your best to create a fun atmosphere doing this. Buy M & M's and reward yourself for each finished phrase.
- 12.
- 13.

Slow Practice Contract

I _____, being of sound mind and body, promise that I will practice slowly with a metronome and a drone every day throughout my practice time on my pieces between the dates _____ and _____ unless I am performing a concert.

I also promise that I will start the following pieces at the assigned slow “daily performance tempo” and speed them up daily leading up to the final tempo the week before juries which is April 7th.

Jury pieces:

Paganini Caprice #13 40=16th note increase to the Final Tempo of 80=quarter note by April 7th.

Saint-Saens #3, I at 40=eighth note increased to the Final Tempo of 80=half note by April 7th.

Other Pieces

Ysaye Sonata No. 3, I fugue in g minor

and

Bach fuga in g minor

I will practice the Paganini Caprice #13 at 40 equals a sixteenth note and that I will increase it to 80 equals a quarter note by the week before juries. That will be a total of 28 days to have the piece up to tempo. My “Daily Performance Tempo” will increase by 15 metronomic numerals every day. I will also play the piece at a considerably slower tempo every day especially as the “Daily Performance Tempo” gets faster.

Practice techniques to use:

Run sections fast and slow to help build the “Daily Performance Tempo”

Practice with left and Right hand separate

Rhythms

Perform it.

Use “The List”

Signed _____ Date _____

Disclaimer

Too much thinking about intonation can lead to sterile playing without musicality. Make sure when practicing slowly that you are thinking about what you have decided musically as you drill out all the intonation problems. All teachers and students should always take into consideration the size, arm and hand lengths, body type, and flexibility levels of themselves and your students. If these are ignored injuries can take place. The rules suggested should be done in moderation and should never be blindly applied to everyone because everyone is different.