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## A Beginning Teacher's Guide to Beginner Violinists

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A BEGINNING TEACHER'S GUIDE TO BEGINNER VIOLINISTS

Anjuli Coe



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The undersigned, appointed by the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University, have examined the Graduate Music Project titled

A BEGINNING TEACHER'S GUIDE TO BEGINNER VIOLINISTS

presented by Anjuli Coe,  
a candidate for the degree of Master of Music Education  
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.



(Project Advisor)



**MUSE 6485 Graduate Project:**  
**A Beginning Teacher's Guide to Beginner Violinists**

**Anjuli Coe**

**Columbus State University**  
**Spring 2009**

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## Introduction

### Beginning Teachers

In the following pages, the beginning teacher will find a guide to establishing a studio and ideas for teaching students. These ideas are meant to be a springboard for developing personalized organization and teaching tools for the violin studio. Ability to play the violin is not the only ingredient for a successful violin studio. Teaching the violin requires skill in understanding students and how they learn. It also requires a significant amount of planning, preparation, organization, and the setting of goals and objectives.

### Beginner Violinists

Beginner violinists may vary from a four-year-old with highly involved parents, to a professional trumpet player who wants to expand their musical experiences, to an elderly woman who always wanted to learn the violin. Students vary in personality, learning style, physical ability, musical background, and personal history. These differences should be understood and utilized by a skilled violin teacher. With enough dedication, practice, and creative instruction, any student can learn the basic skills of violin playing and musical concepts associated with violin playing.<sup>1</sup>

Students should become familiar and proficient with the following skills during the beginning stages of learning to play the violin.<sup>2</sup>

- Posture
- Mental Focus

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<sup>1</sup> Starr, W. (2000). *The Suzuki Violinist*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard Inc. p. 4-5

<sup>2</sup> Slone, K. C. (1985). *They're rarely too young and never too old "to twinkle!"* Ann Arbor, MI: Shar Products Co. p.55-57

- Violin Hold
- Bow Hold
- Playing 1<sup>st</sup> position fingers (in all combinations of half steps and whole steps)
- Playing all 4 strings
- On the string bow control (long bows, short bows, combinations in rhythms)
- String crossings
- Slurs (up to 4 notes) and détaché
- Expressions (dynamics, accents, staccato, legato, tempo)
- Theory (treble clef staff, note durations, music alphabet, some vocabulary)
- Parts of the violin and bow

Activities and repertoire suggestions are provided in this text that will allow the student to learn the skills listed above. The following pages will give a beginning violin teacher a basic guide to establishing a program for beginning violin students.

## **The Studio**

### **Location**

There are many details a teacher should take care of before beginning to teach private lessons. The first of these is of course, location. There are positives and negatives to most locations, which will be outlined in the following pages.



### The Home Studio:

Possibly the most convenient of locations, the home studio is an ideal choice for teachers who live in an accessible area. In my experience, teaching from home can be trying, especially if the teacher has family members who are also home during the lessons. Normal events that go on such as cooking, noisy playing, pets, and any family drama can be distracting for the teacher and the student.

The home studio may be considered less professional than other locations; however, many teachers chose this location for reasons of cost and comfort. Obviously, there is no fee to teach in a home studio and a teacher gets their choice of furniture and décor.

Working from home also has tax benefits because the teacher can deduct normal house expenses as part of a home business. These deductions can include software, teaching materials, books, instruments, subscriptions, and even insurance and retirement plans. Some teachers are also able to deduct furniture for the studio and the depreciation of their home.<sup>3</sup>

In my experience from teaching from a home studio, it is important to set up the teaching space in a closed room or area separate from the rest of the house so the student is not exposed to distractions. It is also a good idea to provide a waiting room for parents and siblings close to the studio and a guest bathroom.

The home studio is a good choice for teachers who can maintain a professional appearance and attitude by giving a student 100% of their attention during a lesson.

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<sup>3</sup> Redfearn, B. (2005, July 12). *7 Benefits of Working At Home*. Retrieved April 21, 2009, from <http://ezinearticles.com/??-Benefits-of-Working-At-Home&id=51130>

#### A Rented Studio:

Rooms available for rent are found in music supply stores,<sup>4</sup> schools, and churches<sup>5</sup>. These types of rooms may not come with any supplies, such as music stands, office equipment, and a piano. However, a portable keyboard can be brought in, as well as a music stand, and all copies can be made before the lessons.

Renting a studio is a good choice for teachers who cannot accommodate lessons in their home, but teachers must take the rental fee into account when setting up lesson rates.

#### A Music School:

Joining an established music program provides advantages over both the home and the rented studio. Many of these programs allow teachers to use their own curriculum under supervision of the program director(s), and being part of a community of music teachers can be fulfilling in the personal life of a teacher. Another significant benefit is that the school has staff that deals with all administrative duties including advertising, payments, and scheduling, which reduces the many responsibilities of the private teacher. However, the teacher has no control over lesson rates as the music school usually charges pre-established fees. The teacher is also required to pay a certain percentage of those fees to the establishment.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of a rented studio in a music store see [www.atlantamusicandarts.com](http://www.atlantamusicandarts.com)

<sup>5</sup> For an example of a rented church studio see [www.irreconservatory.org](http://www.irreconservatory.org)

<sup>6</sup> For an example of a music school see [www.gesmusic.com](http://www.gesmusic.com)

### House Calls:

I occasionally teach in my students' homes. Making house calls is very similar to teaching in a home studio. When teaching in a student's home, a teacher should request a private room that is away from distractions in the home and prices should reflect driving distance. A teacher will also have to transport all supplies for the lesson. This is an option for a teacher whose home cannot accommodate lessons and who does not want to pay a fee.

### **Liability Insurance**

A teacher may want to consider getting liability insurance to protect him or herself in the event of a lawsuit. This is especially important if the teacher is teaching from a home studio. If a relative or friend is over and they fall and break their leg they will probably be covered by homeowners insurance, however, if a student falls and breaks their leg this will not be covered by simple homeowners insurance since he or she is a customer in your home business. A teacher should look into getting general liability insurance for a small business or home business that will cover injuries and property damage of customers and employees. Professional liability insurance will protect a teacher in the case of lawsuits arising from student accusations of unprofessional or damaging behavior on the part of the teacher. Finally, errors or omissions liability insurance is designed to protect someone who is paid to give professional advice, like teaching privately. In very rare cases a student may feel the teacher is to blame for lack in success on the violin, which can result in the loss of a job, audition, or competition. In

such cases, having error or omission liability insurance will cover a lawsuit that may arise from such situation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Advertising and Recruitment**

When starting a new studio, I have found that advertising is a must. While many teachers get students from word of mouth promoting, waiting around for this type of publicity can take years. A private teacher in many ways is a salesperson, selling him or herself as a qualified individual that is paid to produce results. To begin, find places to post ads for free such as music stores, message boards, craigslist.com, restaurants, realtor offices, local organization newsletters, community centers, and the library. A teacher can also contact local private and school music teachers to inform them of openings in the studio. For those willing to spend a little money, advertise in the newspaper or create a webpage. A teacher can also join an organization that will advertise a private studio, such as Suzuki Association of America or American String Teachers Association. Once a studio has several students, have them recruit their friends and other family members and have public concerts at a local church, the park, or the mall.

### **Materials**

Preparing ahead of time with supplies and materials will help save time and energy for all involved. Here is a general list of a violin teacher's studio supplies:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ward, S. (2009). *Home-Based Business Insurance: Business Insurance All Home-Based Businesses Need*. New York, NY: New York Times Company.

<sup>8</sup> Slone, K. C. (1985). *They're rarely too young and never too old "to twinkle!"* Ann Arbor, MI: Shar Products Co. p. 45, 52

**Office Supplies:**

- Pens/pencils/markers
- Colored pencils
- Highlighters
- Dry erase markers
- Small dry erase board with staff
- Receipt book
- Calendar
- Student records notebook
- Hole puncher
- Scissors
- Tape

**Teaching Aids:**

- Fingerboard tape
- Corn pads
- Rulers
- Cardboard paper towel rolls
- Poster board
- Shelf liner (that looks like wood)
- Empty VHS cases
- Thin dowel rod
- Large rectangular erasers
- Recording device (tape recorder, mp3 recorder, video camera, etc.)
- Rubber bands

- Foam padding
- Index cards
- Pictures/diagrams of violin
- Toys
- Rewards- candy, certificates, stickers
- Books about music or violins/violinists (for waiting area)

**Furniture:**

- Mirror
- Keyboard
- Copy machine
- File cabinet (to file music, contracts, and other important papers)

**Other supplies:**

- Band aids
- Tissues

## **Before the First Lesson**

### **Initial Meeting**

When a student is ready to begin lessons the first thing I do is set up a meeting with the student and parents, if the student is underage. The purpose of this meeting is to answer any questions the student or parents may have before the first lesson. This is a good time to share studio policies and have students and parents sign a commitment contract. This is also the time to approve the student's instrument or recommend an

instrument provider. Below is a checklist of what I like to accomplish before and during an initial meeting:

Before the meeting:

- Email or mail a copy of your studio policies to student or parents and ask them to read thoroughly and email or write out any questions they have for the initial meeting.
- Set the date, time, and location of the meeting and exchange cell phone numbers.

During the meeting:

- Introduce yourself; share your passion for teaching and playing the violin with your student.
- Ask any questions you have for the student or parents.
- Go over studio policies thoroughly, answer any questions the student may have (see **Studio Policies** below).
- Have student and/or parent sign a contract (see **Student/Parent Contract** below).
- Examine provided instrument, if applicable, or provide contact information and directions to a recommended provider.
- Measure student to determine appropriate instrument size (see **Sizing**, below).
- Provide a list of materials for students to purchase and recommended providers (see **Student Supply List**).
- Schedule the first lesson as the deadline to have instrument and materials ready to go.

## Student Supply List

As mentioned before, students should be given a list of materials for purchase with recommended providers. The list will look different for various ages and abilities.

The following lists are materials that I require my students to acquire.

### Early Beginner (preschool – kindergarten)

- Box violin (provided by teacher)
- Dowel rod bow (provided by teacher)
- Poster board foot chart (provided by teacher)
- Classical listening CDs (all kinds)
- 3 ring binder

### Other Beginners (1<sup>st</sup> grade – adult)

- Violin/Bow
- Rosin
- Shoulder rest
- Music books (as assigned by teacher)
- Classical listening CDs (include solo violin)
- 3 ring binder
- Metronome
- Music stand

Most of these supplies can be expected by the first lesson, and the box violin can be made at the first lesson. I have found that young children enjoy the process of helping me make their box violin. The activity allows the teacher and child to bond over



a collaborative project. It also is a good idea to put a prize inside the box violin that can be opened and received when the student graduates to a real instrument.

### **Sizing**

Sizing an instrument is a process that should be completed by the teacher rather than the instrument dealer. I have found that instrument dealers often size incorrectly; so I prefer to size my own students. When sizing an instrument, put the instrument under the jaw in playing position and have the student reach out with their left arm until it is straight. At this point, varying schools of thought size the instrument differently. Some teachers size instruments by having the end of the violin scroll touch somewhere in the wrist area, which is the policy I ascribe to. If the scroll lands in the hand, the instrument is too large. If the scroll touches the forearm above the wrist the instrument is too small.<sup>9</sup> Other teachers prefer to have the violin scroll fall in the hand to make sure the instrument is not too small and the student has some growing room.<sup>10</sup> An effective way to mix the two viewpoints and size an instrument is to make sure students are able to wrap their fingers around the end of the scroll while keeping a slight bend in the arm.<sup>11</sup> When a student falls somewhere in between sizes, choose the smaller size to eliminate risk of injury that straining to play a larger instrument may cause.

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<sup>9</sup> As taught by Rebecca Sandrok, a string teacher in Chicago, IL.

<sup>10</sup> As taught by Manuel Diaz, a violin/viola teacher in Columbus, GA.

<sup>11</sup> Deverich, R. (2006). *Choosing a Violin*. Retrieved April 21, 2009, from [www.violinonline.com/chooseviolin.htm](http://www.violinonline.com/chooseviolin.htm).

The following is a sample sizing chart:<sup>12</sup>

<b>Violin Sizes</b>	<b>Arm Length in Inches</b>
<b>1/32</b>	<b>13"</b>
<b>1/16</b>	<b>14" – 15 3/8"</b>
<b>1/10</b>	<b>15 3/8" – 16 7/8"</b>
<b>1/8</b>	<b>16 7/8" – 18 1/2"</b>
<b>¼</b>	<b>18 1/2" – 20 3/8"</b>
<b>½</b>	<b>20 3/8" – 22 1/4"</b>
<b>¾</b>	<b>22 1/4" – 23 5/8"</b>
<b>4/4</b>	<b>23 5/8" &amp; Up</b>

### **Studio Policies**

Studio policies are a document explaining expectations and rules for students and parents in private lessons. This document should also discuss important information such as make up lessons, canceling lessons, attendance policies, payment information and due dates, and withdrawal policies. The following pages are a sample of the studio policies I have in my own studio:

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved April 2, 2009 from [www.student-violins.com/Violin-Sizes.html](http://www.student-violins.com/Violin-Sizes.html)

**Anjuli Coe Violin Studio  
Information and Policies  
January 2009**

**Contact Information**

<Email>

<Phone>

<Studio Location (address)>

Feel free to contact me anytime with questions.

**Private Lessons**

Pricing

30 minute lessons: \$60/mo. (includes 1 half hour lesson a week for 4 weeks)

1 hour lessons: \$120/mo. (includes 1 hour long lesson a week for 4 weeks or 2 half hour lessons per week)

Payment is due the first lesson of each month.

Prices are adjusted accordingly for holidays and 5-week months.

Attendance and Cancellation Policy

Make up lessons will be scheduled for any missed lesson as long as prior notification is given. Last minute cancellations and absence without prior notification will not be made up. Refunds will not be given for missed lessons that are not made up.

Teacher cancellations will be made up or refunded.

Assessment

I will be giving weekly assessments based on preparation level and weekly practice hours. I may also give out additional assignments based on the needs of each individual student that will be assessed. I will provide a formal evaluation report to the participant each semester, if requested.

**House Calls**

I am available to teach lessons in any residence within reasonable driving range. Parents/Students are responsible for all details and arrangements.

Pricing

Same as above but w/ mileage based on current gas prices.

### Cancellation Policy

Please notify me at least 24 hours in advance if there is a location change and at least 2 hours in advance if a lesson needs to be cancelled or rescheduled. Make up lessons will be given for cancellations with prior notification. Make up lessons will not be given for last minute cancellations or absence without prior notification. Refunds will not be given for lessons not made up.

Teacher cancellations will be made up or refunded.

### Parent or Guardian Participation

Parent or guardian presence and participation are important and strongly suggested for young students. Parents and guardians are also encouraged to assist students in their practice and take notes during the lesson. They will be given instructions along side their child in order to best assist them during the week.

Parents, siblings, and other guests are welcome to observe lessons as long as they do not disturb the student.

### Recitals and Other Performances

Students are required to perform in one formal recital per semester. Other concerts and recitals may be scheduled throughout the semester.

Optional community service concerts will be arranged around the Christmas holidays in local nursing homes, hospitals, and shelters.

### Instruments and Other Materials

It is the responsibility of the student to provide instruments and other materials as directed by the teacher.

Required materials:

- Violin in working condition (and correctly sized for the student) – strings must be changed every 6 months to a year.
- Violin bow- bow hair must be changed every 6 months to a year.
- Music books- as assigned by the teacher.
- Metronome
- Music stand
- Rosin
- Shoulder pad (as recommended by the teacher)
- Soft cleaning cloth
- 3-ring binder – for lesson notes, practice charts, and additional assignments.

Recommended suppliers:

[www.Shar.com](http://www.Shar.com) (instruments, supplies, strings)

[www.swstrings.com](http://www.swstrings.com) (instruments, supplies, strings)

[www.hutchinsandrea.com](http://www.hutchinsandrea.com) (music)

### **Practice and Preparation**

Since music is a discipline, as well as a rewarding activity, I require my students to practice six days a week. I do not have a required amount of time, since it is based on the ability of the student. With younger students I may establish a set time with recommendations from their parents but older students I expect to practice as long as they need to in order to accomplish what I assigned to them.

I try to make reasonable assignments each week based on the abilities of my students. If the assignment is not completed satisfactorily I will be left to assume the student is not adequately prepared for his or her lesson.

If there are unique circumstances preventing practice and preparation it is the responsibility of the student to make those known to me prior to the beginning of the lesson.

Students should feel free to contact me if they are having trouble with practicing or if they do not understand an assignment. I would rather know ahead of time so I can offer clarification or advice rather than having to repeat myself unnecessarily during the lesson.

### **Contracts**

Establishing a contract between student and teacher is valuable in many ways. I have found that having a student sign a contract places emphasis on the commitment expected of the student in preparing for lessons. I prefer to have students commit to a certain time amount in their contract, such as the school year or a single semester, so I can count on that income for that amount of time. I have met other teachers who choose not to have a set amount of time in their contract because of issues associated with asking students to commit that far in advance. I have found that making a commit to a certain amount of time can reduce the urge to quit the violin by providing incentive for continuing past those frustrating or difficult times.

Always keep in mind that this contract can be broken for special circumstances such as a parent or student losing their job or moving, or the teacher dismissing the student for behavioral reasons.

A contract should include the following sections: a statement of understanding the studio policies and agreeing to abide by them, and a section for time commitment (optional). This can be attached to the studio policies or presented separately during the initial meeting.

The following is a sample of a contract I usually attach to the end of my studio policies:

<p><b>Studio Contract</b></p> <p><i>I, _____ (name), have read and understood the studio policies and agree to abide by them. I also commit to remain enrolled in the studio until _____ (month/year).</i></p> <p><i>Signed:</i></p> <p>_____ <i>(student)</i></p> <p>_____ <i>(parent/guardian)</i></p>
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## The Big Picture – What to Teach

### Curriculum

I designed the following guide to give me an overall sense of the content and skills that I wanted to teach. This guide helps me to keep everything I teach in perspective. Following this guide or using a similar guide will help a teacher establish “big picture” goals and share these goals with students and parents. This guide can be printed out and included in the student notebook as an easy reference.

<h1 style="text-align: center;">Curriculum Guide</h1>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Music Standards for Beginning Violinists<sup>13</sup></b></p> <p><i>The student will...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in a variety of musical experiences as a means of studying the elements of music</li> <li>• Play music from a variety of genres</li> <li>• Assess and discuss performances using music terminology</li> <li>• Demonstrate appropriate performance behavior both as a listener and participant</li> </ul>
<p><b>CONNECTIONS TO OTHER DISCIPLINES</b></p> <p><b>CARRER PREPARATION:</b> violinists, teachers, commercial musicians, music therapists, recording technicians, and many more!</p> <p><b>ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS:</b> expressive communication, literature in the form of song, music vocabulary, constructive criticism</p> <p><b>HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES:</b> historical context of music literature, social context of music literature</p> <p><b>HEALTH/PHYSICAL EDUCATION:</b> movement to music, coordination, balance, posture, core support, endurance</p> <p><b>MATHEMATICS:</b> subdivision of time into fractions, rhythmic notation</p> <p><b>SCIENCE:</b> acoustics and other physical properties of sound, body mechanics used in violin playing, effects of weather on instrument</p>	<p><b>INSTRUCTION:</b> The following skills and concepts will receive priority in instructional time so that the student can successfully progress to the next level of learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Violin Technique:</b> Students will learn correct posture, violin hold, and bow hold. Students will learn all combinations of fingerings in the first position. Students will learn various bowing techniques.</li> <li>• <b>Pitch and Rhythm:</b> Students will recognize and notate pitches that fall in 1<sup>st</sup> position on all strings, students will learn basic rhythmic notation, students will experience different meters.</li> <li>• <b>Expression and Structure:</b> Students will learn form in relation to repertoire, dynamics, tempo, phrasing, and musical terms and symbols.</li> <li>• <b>Literature:</b> Students will play literature from a variety of genres, students will perform solos, solos with accompaniments, and duets.</li> <li>• <b>Vocabulary:</b> Students will learn basic musical terms and symbols.</li> </ul> <p><b>LIFE SKILLS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Self-Discipline</b></li> <li>• <b>Self-Respect</b></li> <li>• <b>Self-Efficacy</b></li> <li>• <b>Responsibility</b></li> <li>• <b>Time Management</b></li> <li>• <b>Increasing Vocabulary</b></li> <li>• <b>Problem Solving</b></li> <li>• <b>Memorization</b></li> <li>• <b>Following Directions</b></li> <li>• <b>Observing</b></li> <li>• <b>Forming Constructive Criticism and Opinions</b></li> <li>• <b>Keeping Records</b></li> <li>• <b>Cooperative Team Work</b></li> <li>• <b>Public Speaking</b></li> <li>• <b>Performing</b></li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> Based on national standards for music education as listed at [www.menc.org/resources/view/national-standards-for-music-education](http://www.menc.org/resources/view/national-standards-for-music-education)

## Posture

The first skill a student learns at the beginning level is posture. Posture is arguably the most fundamental element in the rate and quality of success for a beginner student. Posture and the relationship between the body and the violin is a growing field of interest among violin pedagogues. Oftentimes, teachers focus on technical abilities in their students and neglect the core foundation of balanced posture.<sup>14</sup>

Susan Kempter (2003), a well known violin pedagogue, discusses how she spends the majority of the initial lessons with beginners on posture. Kempter claims that posture is such a fundamentally important skill to have that she will not have students play a single note on the violin until certain criteria are met, which she calls the “Basic 6.” The six basic elements of posture she requires are in relation to foot placement, the angle of the trunk of the body including the backbone and pelvis, a relaxed neck, a correct bow hold, a relaxed left hand, and a quiet yet attentive demeanor. She includes demeanor as an element of posture because she holds that the mind and body are intricately connected and dependent on each other.<sup>15</sup>

I always emphasize good posture in the early stages of a violinist’s development. I have found that flaws in posture can create problems in technical development because the muscular system is thrown off balance, not to mention the potential of developing serious injury such as tendonitis or chronic back pain, both of which plague many violinists.

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<sup>14</sup> Kempter, S. (2003). *How Muscles Learn: Teaching the Violin with the Body in Mind*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard Music

<sup>15</sup> Kempter, S. (2003). *How Muscles Learn: Teaching the Violin with the Body in Mind*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard Music, 8.



In light of the former discussion I use the following procedure to ensure that my students learn and maintain correct posture. Have the student stand facing the teacher with body evenly aligned and balanced over feet, which are placed together. Have the student take several deep breaths to make sure his or her muscles are relaxed. You may also have the student stretch or stand against the wall to achieve the natural positioning of the body. Once this is accomplished, teach the student the proper placement of his or her feet in rest position and playing position. Rest position requires feet together while playing position requires the feet slightly turned outward with the left foot placed outward so that both feet line up with the edge of the shoulders. The left foot can be angled in the direction of the violin scroll if it is more comfortable for the student. An important point to remember is that not every student is built the same way physically so each student will have their own variation in what is generally considered good posture. The key here is to make sure the student is using his or her body as naturally and comfortably as possible, with the head balanced, the shoulders relaxed, the trunk centered over the pelvis, and the feet comfortably placed to accommodate the natural sway of the body. It is important to remember that posture is an element to violin playing that should always be awarded attention in lessons and practicing.

### **Mental Focus**

Mental focus is an important concept to learn because I have found that students who can stand quietly and engage his or her mind in his or her actions is better equipped to be successful in his or her efforts at music making. The reasons for this are as follows: improvement rates increase when one engages the brain with the body because a person

is not just memorizing muscle movements but learning to control those movements consciously through signals from the brain; focusing allows a student to not only prepare their brain and body for a performance but also allows for a student to listen well enough to form a realistic and helpful self-evaluation of their playing.<sup>16</sup>

I have found that when a student can hear what they are going to play before the bow plays the string it greatly increases their chances of playing correctly. I insist that my students stand for at least ten seconds in playing position with their bow on the strings and take two deep breaths before beginning to play their instrument. I encourage them to sing silently in their heads the first notes they will play and imagine how it will sound, then I ask them to copy the sound they hear in their head. I have used this technique successfully with very active and energetic preschoolers and with a high school student with ADHD.

In my experience, having students listen to quality recordings of various pieces on their instrument increases the quality of their “imaginary playing,” as they are exposed to quality sounds made by professionals. Because of this, I encourage my students to listen to recordings and attend concerts to improve their idea of how they want to sound.

Finally, it is important to have students focus after they finish playing for a moment of self-evaluation. I teach my students to stand in playing position a few seconds after they finish playing and quietly move to rest position. Afterwards I have students give feedback concerning their performance rather than immediately jumping in with comments and criticisms. It is important for students to develop the ability to

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<sup>16</sup> Kempter, S. (2003). *How Muscles Learn: Teaching the Violin with the Body in Mind*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard Music.

critique and teach themselves in the lesson so you know they are capable of doing so outside the lesson.

On a side note, never allow a student to criticize their playing using negative terminology. Instead, encourage positive attitudes and remarks, using appropriate musical terms. Once a student begins to view themselves as inadequate or a failure it can be very difficult to move them beyond those feelings, even if they improve in ability.<sup>17</sup>

Remember that learning new skills involves practice and concentration and can be a potentially frustrating experience for students. I often remind my students that practicing is basically time spent training the brain to send signals to the body on cue and to have the body respond as quickly as possible. I give analogies such as a baby learning to turn a doorknob. At first the baby watches someone open a door and tries to open a door but fails. Finally, the baby figures out that he has to turn his wrist at a certain speed and elevation in order to rotate the knob and open the door. Once the baby's brain practices telling his wrist to rotate and turn the knob it slowly becomes automatic. As an activity, I have students try something difficult, like patting their head and rubbing their belly at the same time. I encourage them to "feel" their brains working as their bodies try to sort the signals out. Then, I have them try the new skill that is giving them trouble and "feel" their brains communicating with their bodies. I also remind them that learning new skills takes practice and sometimes works your brain to the point of a headache, but the rewards are worth the hard work.

Ivan Galamian, a renown violin teacher, says "what is paramount in importance is not the physical movements as such but the mental control over them. The key to facility

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<sup>17</sup> Starr, W. (2000). *The Suzuki Violinist*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard, Inc., 9

and accuracy and, ultimately, to complete mastery of violin technique is to be found in the relationship of mind to muscles, that is, in the ability to make the sequence of mental command and physical response as quick and precise as possible.”<sup>18</sup>

Young children typically have a difficult time concentrating on one task for long periods of time.<sup>19</sup> I believe it is the responsibility of the teacher to regularly change activities and tasks in creative ways to engage a child’s attention and interest. For example, if the goal of a lesson is to teach the child how to play long bows while keeping the bow in the right part of the string and keeping it straight, the majority of the lesson should be spent doing bow exercises that teach this concept. However, you want to make sure you have as many activities as you can think of ready to be applied as needed so there is enough variety for the child’s mind to engage in, even if the activities are all teaching the same skill.

I have observed many teachers who spend so much time correcting during each lesson that they forget to put responsibility on the student for the correction by making sure the student understands the concentration it takes to correct their own mistakes. I have noticed that if you can teach your students to focus, you will find they will begin to teach themselves and improve.

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<sup>18</sup> Galamian, I. (1985). *Principles of Violin Playing & Teaching*. Ann Arbor, MI: Shar Products Co., 4

<sup>19</sup> Ruff, H. A. & Lawson, K. R. (1990). Development of sustained, focused attention in young children during free play. *Developmental Psychology*, 26, 85-93.

## **Violin Hold**

Strongly related to posture, learning to hold the violin properly is a key element in the success of a student.<sup>20</sup> Establishing correct posture and violin hold in the beginning stages of learning the instrument will save the student time from having to correct bad habits later, as I have learned from my own experience as a violin student.

I always insist that the instrument always comes to the student rather than the student going to the instrument. I have found that this basic concept eliminates some of the posture problems that arise from a student reaching out with their neck or leaning towards the instrument. I realize the body has to accommodate slightly unnatural movements while playing the violin, such as turning the neck and holding the arms up constantly, but generally speaking the core of the body should be as if the student was not holding an instrument. The head should also tilt towards the left shoulder and sit heavily upon the chin rest with the jaw. The neck, shoulder, and jaw should not be squeezing the violin to hold it but rather using the weight of the relaxed head and neck to secure the instrument to the shoulder, much like a paperweight rather than a clamp. The violin should be held parallel to the floor and positioned half way between the center of the chest and the left shoulder. The scroll should point in the direction of the nose and left toe (if the student's comfortable standing position is with the left foot slightly turned out). Like all elements of posture, I have observed that this looks different for every student.

I teach the violin hold using what I refer to as the Statue of Liberty analogy. This is a five step process beginning in rest position (step one). Step two takes the violin neck and extends the violin straight out to the left side. Step three is turning the wrist and

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<sup>20</sup> Starr, W. (2000). *The Suzuki Violinist*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard, Inc. p. 53

violin to make the button point straight up. Step four brings the violin to the shoulder and step five turns the neck and clamps the jaw on the violin.

### **Bow Hold**

The bow should be held in a flexible and natural looking hand that is best equipped for the various bow strokes that exist in violin repertoire.<sup>21</sup> With my preschool and elementary students I begin with teaching what I call the Thumper bow hold.

Thumper's teeth are made by the middle and ring finger with the index and pinky being the bunny ears. The thumb is Thumper's jaw that is always bent, which can be referred to as a "Tarzan Chin", because it looks like the exaggerated chin of the cartoon character, Tarzan. The jaw joins the teeth under the first joint of the middle finger. Thumper bites the carrot (bow) in order to hold it steady.

Another analogy that I use with my students of all ages is a family going to the pool. The baby (pinky) is too young to swim so he plays outside the pool, the ring and middle fingers jump in the pool, and the index finger dips his feet in the pool. This analogy helps students visualize the positioning of the fingers on the bow.

### **Fingering**

When teaching the left hand there are only a few points to remember. Always make sure the student maintains the correct body posture. I have found that beginning students tend to neglect their posture when focusing on placement of the fingers and playing in tune. I also constantly monitor students' left hands to make sure they play with correct and relaxed positioning. When students start to get tense and squeeze the

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<sup>21</sup> Galamian, I. (1985). *Principles of Violin Playing & Teaching*. Ann Arbor, MI: Shar Products Co., 45

violin neck while they play, I point out that they are squeezing the life out of their violin and instruct them to imagine that the violin neck is the neck of a kitten or puppy. In regards to positioning, I make sure the student keeps their wrist straight and thumb in line with the index finger. The remaining fingers hover over the fingerboard in ready position to be dropped at any moment, which I refer to as “umbrella fingers” or “helicopter fingers,” as your fingers are hovering over the strings, as opposed to “rocket fingers” which would be standing straight up. There are many activities you can teach that encourage correct positioning of the left hand. For example, I have students drop specific fingers to the string at my direction without moving any other parts of the hand or other fingers. I also have students tap their pinky on the string, which forces the other fingers to hover.

I begin by teaching the index finger, known in the violin world as first finger. I do not put tapes down to mark the location of the pitch, instead I have students start on an open string pitch and sing a whole step on “do, re.” This teaches them to hear and sing the pitch before they find it with their finger. This is slow and painful work that takes patience but in the end is worth teaching the student to hear pitch on their instrument. I do the same thing when introducing the other fingers, “mi, fa, sol”. Eventually, once the student can sing the pitches and find those pitches with relatively accurate intonation, I may add tapes to speed up the process of learning repertoire, if necessary. If tapes are necessary, I remove them within six months to the first year so that my students can begin more disciplined work on hearing intonation. I also remove tapes earlier if necessary to insure the student is actually hearing pitches rather than just placing their fingers on the tapes. Students that have a more musically developed ear may not need

tapes or may only need tapes for a short time, while other students may have trouble hearing pitch and may need tapes to train their ear as well as their eyes.

### **Self-Discipline/Self-Efficacy**

I have found that students who are able to develop self-discipline and self-efficacy (also known as the ability to learn independently), are more successful in learning the violin. A student who is not encouraged to be self-disciplined will have trouble persevering through learning and practicing difficult skills and may end up giving up and withdrawing from lessons. This is a skill that should be taught in collaboration with parents to the younger students. Teachers should explain to parents that they should help with practice, but should also give the student gradually increasing amount of responsibility in remembering and completing assignments to build their self-discipline. As discussed in the sections before, the ultimate goal of the teacher should be to train their students to teach themselves. I strive to give my students opportunities through self-assessment and journaling to grow in their ability to learn independently.



## **Guideline to Early Lessons**

### **Lesson Plans**

Most of the private teachers I have observed do not prepare lesson plans, which I consider to be a weakness in the profession. Especially in the early lessons, I have found that preparing lesson plans provide the framework necessary to smoothly transition between skills being taught and accomplish goals. I have also discovered that many students work faster and have more productive practice time when they have a pre-set goal or objective, rather than just playing what they have been working on and getting new assignments.

When choosing objectives or goals, I keep the age and development of the student in mind and plan appropriately. I identify a goal that is challenging but not frustratingly difficult to accomplish in the time frame allowed. Use a template (see the sample provided on the following page, that I designed for my own studio) that provides direction without removing flexibility and creativity within the teaching process.

### Lesson Plan Template

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b><u>Lesson Objective</u></b>  <i>In this section the teacher identifies the goal for the lesson. What is it that the student should know? What skills should be learned? What questions should be answered?</i></p>	<p><b><u>Teacher Preparation</u></b>  <i>This section is for the teacher to write out any preparations needed such as personal practice, copies to be made, materials needed, teaching aids to be created, etc.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Opening Activity</u></b>  <i>Instead of just jumping right into assignments, start with an activity such as listening and moving, spelling words on the violin, or echoing different rhythms on the violin.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Comments/Assessment</u></b>  <i>Assess how the student did in the opening activity. For example: Did the student echo back the right rhythms? Did the student move to the beat? Basically, did learning occur?</i></p>
<p><b><u>Technique/Warm-up</u></b>  <i>Even the youngest students should have a warm-up activity that represents stability and procedure in their practice and lessons. This is where scales, etudes, bowing exercises, etc. are listed.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Comments/Assessment</u></b>  <i>Assess how the student did while performing their warm-up and technique. For example: Did the student focus during warm-up? Was there improvement in technique?</i></p>
<p><b><u>Review</u></b>  <i>List former assignments in this section that you wish to review.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Comments/Assessment</u></b>  <i>Assess review. Was there improvement from the last time this was performed in lesson? Did student practice review material?</i></p>
<p><b><u>New Repertoire</u></b>  <i>In this section, list the piece you are currently working on with the student and any specific things you are looking for.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Comments/Assessment</u></b>  <i>Assess the progress of new material. Did the student meet your expectations on preparation?</i></p>
<p><b><u>Assignments</u></b>  <i>Simply copy student assignments for next week in this section so you have a record of what to plan around for the next lesson.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Weekly Evaluation</u></b>  <i>Give your student an evaluation of overall preparedness, focus and improvement in lesson, and behavior.</i></p>

**Student Practice Guide**

Each week I provide my students with an organized practice guide that lets them know what is assigned and what is expected at the next lesson. The following practice guide allows space for assignments and teacher instructions as well as a place for students to log practice time. I print out copies of this guide and place them in each student's notebook. For younger students, making a check or x marking under days practiced may suffice but older students should log the amount of time spent. For example, if a student practiced their scale for 10 minutes on Monday, under M it should say 10" or 10 min. etc.

Use the sample provided on the following page as a template.

<b>Violin Assignments</b> <b>Date:</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>
<u>Warm-Up</u>							
<u>Technique</u>							
<u>Review</u>							
<u>New Repertoire</u>							
<u>Other/Listening Log</u>							

## What to Teach in Early Lessons

The following are my suggestions for information to cover in the first eight or so lessons, organized by grade level. The suggestions are meant to be a general guide for lesson topics and objectives that have an age appropriate flow and sequence. When teaching each of the topics below, utilize the many activity and game ideas provided in the next section to add depth to a lesson. Have lessons follow a systematic flow based on the lesson plans provided above, and be sure to allow adequate review and practice time when a student is learning a new skill. Understanding that students learn at different paces, some of these lessons may be expanded over several weeks and others may be easily completed in one lesson.

### Preschool-Kindergarten:

In my experience with the youngest students, the key is to have parents involved in both the lesson and weekly practice time. These students are probably too young to remember the details of what they are supposed to practice, especially during the first few weeks, so they need their parents to remember for them. The basic skills to start learning are focus, posture and how to hold the instrument properly. Interspersed within these first lessons should be a variety of games and activities that not only make time go by smoothly but teach important concepts in music.<sup>22</sup>

### The First Lesson:

- Create box violin with student, include secret prize<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Slone, K. C. (1985). *They're rarely too young and never too old "to twinkle!"* Ann Arbor, MI: Shar Products Co. p. 18-22

<sup>23</sup> Instructions for making a box violin: taken from Emily Williams, a violin/viola teacher in Wheaton, IL.

- Fill an empty VHS case with tissue
- Cover with shelf liner (preferably faux wood)

- Explain how student will graduate into real violin once they have learned to hold their box violin correctly
- Create foot chart,<sup>24</sup> having student practice standing in rest position and playing position
- Begin focus lessons by providing an object (stuffed animal) to stare at while listening to a short recording or the teacher playing a piece
- Practice Assignments: Stand on foot chart, listen to recording while watching a specific object several times a day (one time for each year of child's life)

#### The Second Lesson:

- Re-teach and review first lesson
- Give student box violin to take home
- Adjust and attach sponge for shoulder rest on violin if needed
- Teach playing position with box violin, have parent place instrument under child's chin and check posture
- Have child hold violin with chin while focusing on object and listening to music
- Teach child how to remove violin from under chin and place in rest position with correct rest position feet

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• Glue ruler to top of box violin in proportion equal to a fingerboard  
Instructions for making a dowel rod bow; also taken from Emily Williams

- Have dowel rod cut to proportions of a violin bow, attach large eraser as the frog

<sup>24</sup> I make foot charts by tracing each student's feet on a large piece of poster board in rest position and playing position (one on top of the other). The goal is to show students where their feet should be when resting and playing.

- Practice Assignments: Stand on foot chart, place violin in playing position and resting position, hold violin under chin while listening to music for as many times as the child's years.

#### The Third Lesson:

- Re-teach and review second lesson
- Teach bow hold
- Have student pick up bow and adjust their bow hold with parent's help
- Teach poem, "Up like a Rocket" (see **right hand activities**)
- Practice Assignments: Continue working on rest and playing positions, practice bow hold, practice the movement poem, "Up like a Rocket"

#### The Fourth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review third lesson
- Check resting and playing positions, have student move violin from resting to playing positions without help
- Have a focus activity
- Check bow hold
- Review poem, "Up like a Rocket"
- Teach "Finger Taps" (see **left hand activities**)
- Practice Assignments: Practice violin and bow hold, review "Up Like a Rocket," practice "Finger Taps," continue expanding focus level by listening to longer pieces while holding violin

#### The Fifth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fourth lesson
- Have student echo clap various rhythms (see **repertoire bibliography**)
- Have student air bow various rhythms in a paper towel tube
- Have student air bow rhythms on violin
- Check focus by having student hold violin under chin and listen to longer pieces
- Have student step in place while holding violin under chin
- Practice Assignments: Have student warm up with “Up like a Rocket” and “Finger Taps,” practice bowing rhythms on their box violin, have student practice walking around the house with violin under their chin.

#### The Sixth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fifth lesson
- Continue work on playing rhythms
- Teach “Colors” (see **left hand activities**)
- Practice Assignments: review previous assignments, practice “Colors”

#### The Seventh Lesson:

- Re-teach and review sixth lesson
- Secure posture, bow hold and violin hold

#### The Eighth Lesson:

- Review all previous lessons
- If the student is ready, graduate to real violin!
- Introduce modified bow and violin hold on real instrument
- Review previous skills learned on real instrument



### Continuing Lessons:

Continue work on building basic skills, using lots of review and fun activities. Have students begin with playing rhythms, long and short notes on the A and E strings. Teach fingerings for the A and E string. Introduce early pieces, watching for consistency in skills learned earlier. Eventually have students add the D and G strings to their repertoire. Teach basic theory concepts of the music alphabet, dynamics, and scale. Develop aural skills in rhythm and melody.

### Elementary:

I have observed that elementary school is the most common time parents and students consider taking violin lessons. In talking to parents and asking why they wait so long to start lessons, the most common answer I have received is that students begin to show personal responsibility around the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, which leads the parents to believe they are ready to take on the responsibility of learning to play an instrument. During the first lessons students should be given personal responsibility but I continue to involve parents. I either request that parents are present during lessons or I provide detailed updates on my expectations and student progress and schedule parent/teacher conferences at least once a month. Through my experience with elementary aged students, I find that they are familiar with routine and consistent expectations from their school experiences, so a private teacher should help in establishing a routine within the lessons.

I have had students who expect immediate results and become easily discouraged or bored when they are not playing a piece on the first lesson. To help avoid this

frustrating situation, fill lesson time with various games and activities that helps the student build skill and keeps them engaged in learning music until their physical skill catches up with their interest.<sup>25</sup>

#### The First Lesson:

- Teach foot positioning for resting and playing position (foot charts are unnecessary at this age)
- Teach violin hold with proper posture
- Practice Assignments: Work on moving with violin from resting to playing position, listen to music that includes violin playing

#### The Second Lesson:

- Re-teach and review first lesson
- Teach bow hold
- Have student echo clap various rhythms (see **repertoire bibliography**)
- Practice rhythms in a paper towel tube
- Practice Assignments: Practice bow hold and playing rhythms in tube

#### The Third Lesson:

- Re-teach and review second lesson
- Combine bow and violin by having student play first sounds on the E string
- Play long and short notes on E and A strings
- Play rhythms on E string, stopping between each set to check posture
- Add rhythms on A string, stopping between each set to check posture

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<sup>25</sup> Slone, K. C. (1985). *They're rarely too young and never too old "to twinkle!"* Ann Arbor, MI: Shar Products Co. p. 22-27

- Begin work on reading and writing rhythms
- Practice Assignments: Review violin and bow hold, practice rhythms on A and E string

#### The Fourth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review third lesson
- Review combinations of long and short notes on E and A
- Work on playing continuing rhythms without stops in between each set on E and A strings separately
- Work on string crossings between E and A by playing one rhythm on E and the next on A
- Continue work on reading and writing rhythms
- Practice Assignments: Review previous assignments, practice string crossings and continuous rhythms, create own combination of rhythms

#### The Fifth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fourth lesson
- Hear personal combination of rhythms
- Review previous lessons
- Continue work on reading and writing rhythms
- Teach placement of the first finger on E and A string with and without the bow
- Teach “Colors” (see **left hand activities**)
- Practice Assignments: Review previous assignments, practice placing the first finger, memorize “Colors”

#### The Sixth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fifth lesson
- Work on blue fingering (see “Colors” in **left hand activities**)
- Add second finger (whole step away from the first)
- Add third finger (half step away from second)
- Teach A major scale (starting on open A)
- Practice Assignments: Review previous assignments, practice A major scale

#### The Seventh Lesson:

- Re-teach and review sixth lesson
- Teach different ways to play scale (rhythms, different durations, etc)
- Teach first piece (view **repertoire bibliography**)
- Practice Assignments: Review previous assignments, review scale, practice piece

#### The Eighth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review seventh lesson
- Continue work on first piece
- Practice Assignments: Review previous assignments

#### Continuing Lessons:

Add more pieces, gradually increasing skill, teach playing on the D and G strings, add more scales in first position, introduce early etudes, include many fun games and activities, and teach music theory skills and sight reading.

### Jr. High and High School:

Since many students are not introduced to playing instruments in school until middle or high school orchestra, many students may not consider taking private lessons until this time. Less parental involvement should be expected, though involvement should still be encouraged. Teachers should be honest about the work and time involved in learning the violin should discuss this with students regularly. I have had several teenage students who began lessons, not realizing how much time, effort, and skill went into playing the violin. They quickly became bored or embarrassed about the pace of their progression. Through these experiences I noticed that older students tend to be self-conscious about their playing so lots of encouragement and challenging musical activities are a must.

#### The First Lesson:

- Teach posture, rest position, and playing position
- Teach violin hold
- Teach bow hold
- Practice Assignment: Practice resting and playing position with violin, practice bow hold

#### The Second Lesson:

- Re-teach and review first lesson
- Have student make first sounds on the instrument
- Play combinations of long and short notes on the E string
- Teach note durations

- Have student play note durations the teacher draws on dry erase board on E string
- Practice Assignments: Memorize note durations, practice playing combinations of long and short notes on the E string

#### The Third Lesson:

- Re-teach and review second lesson
- Continue work on the E string
- Introduce the A string
- Have student play long and short notes on the A string
- Teach rhythms on the E and A strings with stops in between each (see **repertoire bibliography**)
- Teach “Finger Taps” (see **left hand activities**)
- Practice Assignments: Student continues working on playing long and short notes on the E string and adds the A string. Student practices rhythms assigned on A and E strings.

#### The Fourth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review third lesson
- Continue work on E and A strings
- Teach the 1<sup>st</sup> finger on E and A
- Teach recognition of A, B, E, and F# on the staff
- Have student find notes on the keyboard and match with violin
- Teach “Colors” (see **left hand activities**)
- Practice Assignments: Practice playing the 1<sup>st</sup> finger in tune

#### The Fifth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fourth lesson
- Continue 1<sup>st</sup> finger work
- Add 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers
- Teach A major scale starting on open A
- Teach recognition of notes on A and E strings on the staff
- Begin work on first piece (see **repertoire bibliography**)
- Practice Assignments: Work on A major scale and first piece

#### The Sixth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fifth lesson
- Teach different ways to play A major scale (rhythms, different durations and speeds)
- Continue work on first piece
- Continue sight reading activities
- Practice Assignments: Review previous assignments

#### The Seventh Lesson:

- Re-teach and review sixth lesson
- Continue work on repertoire
- Add new repertoire
- Practice Assignment: Review previous assignments, practice new piece

#### The Eighth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review seventh lesson
- Continue work on repertoire

- Add new repertoire
- Practice Assignment: Practice previous assignments

#### Continuing Lessons:

Continue adding new repertoire, eventually add D and G string, add new scales and etudes, and continue work with theory and sight reading.

#### Adult:

Adult students pose numerous challenges to the beginning teacher. The adult students I have taught often failed to realize the time and effort required to play the violin well and many gave up in the first few months for lack of time. This is an important topic to discuss with an adult student before beginning lessons. A teacher may even want to set a required weekly time commitment for adult students so they can schedule in practice hours. Adult students probably will not need fun activities to keep their interest engaged, but music should still be presented in an interesting way and I assign many active listening and skill strengthening exercises. Adult students will also move much faster than younger students, and should be assigned different repertoire. I have found that adult students rarely enjoy learning children's songs so I assign easy classical pieces instead. I strongly recommend using the Nicholas Laoureux method (see **repertoire sources**). Encourage adult students to listen to music that includes violin playing while driving or at home and regularly monitor their listening list to keep them accountable for the assignment.

#### The First Lesson:

- Introduce the parts of the violin



- Teach posture
- Teach resting and playing positions
- Violin hold
- Teach bow hold
- Practice Assignments: Memorize parts of the violin, practice playing and resting positions, practice bow hold, listen to violin related music recordings

#### The Second Lesson:

- Re-teach and review first lesson
- Test parts of violin
- Teach playing combinations of long and short notes on A and E
- Teach note durations, have student play note durations requested
- Teach the location of A and E on the staff, have student play A and E with different durations from reading music
- Assign an easy note reading exercise that uses only A and E strings (see **repertoire bibliography**)
- Practice Assignment: Review previous assignments, practice playing long and short note combinations on A and E, practice assigned note reading exercise, continue listening to music recordings

#### The Third Lesson:

- Re-teach and review second lesson
- Teach playing on D and G strings
- Teach location of D and G on the staff

- Assign easy note reading exercise on the D and G strings
- Assign note reading exercise on all 4 strings
- Practice Assignments: Practice note reading assignments, review previous lessons

#### The Fourth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review third lesson
- Continue work on note reading
- Add the first finger to all strings
- Teach the location of A, E, B, and F# on the staff
- Assign note reading piece using open strings and first fingers
- Practice Assignments: Practice note reading assignments, review previous lessons

#### The Fifth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fourth lesson
- Teach the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on all strings
- Teach the location of B, F#, C#, and G# on the staff
- Assign piece that uses open, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers
- Practice Assignments: Continue work on review and new material

#### The Sixth Lesson:

- Re-teach and review fifth lesson
- Teach the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger on all strings
- Teach the location of C, G, D, and A on the staff
- Teach the A major scale and the D major scale

- Assign beginner piece that uses all notes learned
- Practice Assignments: Work on new piece

#### Continuing Lessons:

Add more repertoire and technical exercises, teach basic theory, and continue work on sight reading.

### **Activity and Game Ideas for Lessons**

In my experience, implementing creative activities to teach basic skills keeps students actively engaged in lessons and practice time. When choosing activities keep in mind the interests and learning style of your student. For example, if your student responds well to visual cues, include activities that use visuals or that has students reading or writing. If your student is more of an aural learner, use a lot of modeling and musical examples. If your student is a kinesthetic learner, have them engage in a lot of movement rather than standing in one place for the entire lesson. If you are unsure of what kind of learner your student is, there are many quizzes and surveys you can find online to find out what their learning style is, or you could simply try various activities and see which ones work best.

The following pages are descriptions of activities that I have used successfully to teach different skills and musical concepts. They are arranged in each category by difficulty. The categories are as follows:

Right Hand Activities – for the development of the bow hand

Left Hand Activities – for the development of the fingers

Movement Activities – for the development of musicality and coordination

Listening Activities – for the development of the ear

Theory and Sight Reading Activities – for the development of the mind and eye

Other Activities – for fun and reinforcement

## Right Hand Activities

### Up like a Rocket

Skill: Developing the bow hold

Ages: Preschool – Early Elementary

Materials: Violin bow

This is a bow exercise that is designed for the purpose of focusing on your bow hold while shifting the position of your arm.

Start with your bow hand at your belly button and the bow stick standing straight up. The bow should remain horizontal to the floor during the activity.

*Up like a rocket* (move bow up, pointing towards the sky)

*Down like the rain* (move bow back down to starting point)

*Back and forth like a choo-choo train* (move bow back and forth in a smooth motion)

*Round and round and round like the sun* (move bow in 3 large circles)

*Up on your head, curve your pinky and thumb!* (place frog on top of head, keeping the stick straight and check for correct bow hold)<sup>26</sup>

### Bumper Thumb

Skill: Keeping the thumb bent while holding the bow

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin bow

I developed this activity to teach students to maintain a correct bow hold, touch thumb knuckle to various parts of the body such as the nose, forehead, knee, bellybutton, opposite elbow, etc.

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<sup>26</sup> Activity used frequently by Suzuki method teachers, unknown origins

Touch and Away

Skill: Placing the bow on the strings

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

Have student touch bow to string and remove again without making a sound at different parts of the bow (tip, middle, and frog).<sup>27</sup>

Rock n' Roll

Skill: String crossings

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

Have student “rock n’ roll” between designated strings without making a sound.<sup>28</sup>

See Saw

Skill: Playing string crossings

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

Have student rock between strings, stopping to play a rhythm on each string. Start with crossing between neighboring strings, move to skip strings until ending with crossing between E and G.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Activity taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

<sup>28</sup> Activity taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

<sup>29</sup> Activity taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

## **Left Hand Activities**

### Finger Taps

Skill: Dexterity in fingers

Ages: Any

Materials: None

I developed this left hand dexterity exercise based on similar exercises taught to me by several of my own teachers. This exercise allows students to practice moving their fingers independently. Have students hold arm up as if they were holding a violin, with their wrist turned in, and tap each finger a set number of times to their thumb. A more advanced version of this is to have students tap fingers on the strings in different positions. This exercise not only teaches finger independence but builds the technique ability of moving the fingers from the base joints. This activity can build upon itself by having students strengthen their fingers and striking their thumb or strings with enough force to make a sound.

### Colors

Skill: Fingering combinations

Ages: Any

Materials: None

There are basically five possible combinations of fingerings on the violin in a single position. These can be taught and remembered easily by associating colors with each combination. The combinations and color associations are:

1 2 3 4 = YELLOW

1 23 4 = BLUE

12 3 4 = RED

12 34 = GREEN

1234 = ORANGE

Using this code, students can identify half and whole step combinations, move their fingers to form the combinations, play different combinations, and color in fingerings on their music.<sup>30</sup>

### See the Little Monkey

Skill: Fingering a scale on one string

Age: Preschool-Elementary

Materials: Violin and bow, song text

Have the student sing the song while fingering the notes, and then have student play with rhythm while teacher sings song.

*See the little monkey (open A)*  
*Climbing up the ladder (1<sup>st</sup> finger on A)*  
*Climbing way up high (2<sup>nd</sup> finger on A)*  
*Pick a pink banana (3<sup>rd</sup> finger on A)*  
*See the little monkey (3<sup>rd</sup> finger on A)*  
*Climbing down the ladder (2<sup>nd</sup> finger on A)*  
*Climbing way down low (1<sup>st</sup> finger on A)*  
*Eat a pink banana (open A)*<sup>31</sup>

### Walking Up and Down the Stairs

Skill: Playing five-note scale on one string

<sup>30</sup> Based on fingering activity taught by Emily Williams, violin teacher in Wheaton, IL

<sup>31</sup> This game was taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

I developed this activity as a variation on teaching the A major scale. Have student walk up the stairs: open, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> fingers. Have student walk down the stairs: 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, open.

### Running Up and Down the Stairs

Skill: Playing five-note scale on one string

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

This activity is the same as “Walking Up and Down the Stairs,” but at a fast tempo. This activity can be done with slurs or separate bows to teach coordination between fast fingers and fast or slow bow.

### Skiping Up and Down the Stairs

Skill: Independent fingers, interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup>

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

I developed this activity to teach early scales in 3rds and finger independence. Have the student play ascending and descending intervals of 3rds on different strings. Open, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, open.



### Hot Cross Buns/Cold Cross Buns

Skill: Playing the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger in whole and half steps away from the 1<sup>st</sup> finger

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

Have the student play the song, “Hot Cross Buns” starting on a high 2<sup>nd</sup> finger, and then have the student play “Cold Cross Buns”, starting on a low 2<sup>nd</sup> finger.<sup>32</sup> I also use this activity when introducing the idea of major versus minor keys.

### **Movement Activities**

#### Follow the Leader

Skills: Focus, coordinated movement, watching the teacher, leadership, creativity

Ages: Preschool – Early Elementary

Materials: None

I picked up this activity from teaching groups of children, but I found it also works well in private lessons. I use this simple activity to teach skills such as holding the violin, posture, and moving to the beat. Have student mirror the actions of the teacher with or without a violin, then let the student lead. Add music for variation.

#### Move to the Beat

Skill: Feeling steady pulse or meter

Ages: Any

Materials: Music recordings

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<sup>32</sup> Activity taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

I learned this activity from teaching general music in elementary school. Playing a recording or a piece on the violin, have students move in some way to the beat so they learn to feel a strong outer pulse in music. Movements include but are not limited to marching, walking, skipping, patching, clapping, tapping and swaying.

### **Listening Activities**

#### Visit Elmo and Cookie Monster

Skill: Aural recognition of high and low

Ages: Preschool-Kindergarten

Materials: Toy Elmo and Cookie Monster, violin

Elmo's house is up high (the high notes played on the violin), and Cookie Monster's house is down low (the low notes played on the violin). Play a series of high and low notes and have student identify who's house is being visited, then play scales going higher or lower and have student guess who is will be visited based on the direction of the scale<sup>33</sup>.

#### Rhythmic Words

Skill: Creating rhythms

Ages: Any

Materials: None

I designed this activity to teach students rhythm. Give students examples of how to turn familiar words or phrases into rhythms. Start with the student's name and have

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<sup>33</sup> This game was taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

student speak and clap the rhythm of their name, then move on to other categories (example categories: favorite food, favorite place, states, countries, etc.).

### Open String Memory

Skill: Aural recognition of open strings

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

I developed this game to teach my students to play by ear. Play open strings, have student close eyes or turn around and identify which string is being played without looking.

### Active Listening

Skill: Listening to music

Ages: Any

Materials: Writing supplies, music recordings

This activity is based on many activities I conducted while teaching music in an elementary school. Prepare worksheets to focus listening as homework or an in-lesson activity. For example, have students follow along with music as they listen, draw contours of what they hear in the music, and identify simple forms.

## Theory and Sight-Reading Activities

### Fruit Pie

Skills: Playing rhythm, composing

Ages: Preschool-Elementary

Materials: Pie pan, fruit die-cuts or toy fruit

Teach rhythms represented by each fruit from the key provided below:

Quarter note = GRAPE

Pair of eighth notes = AP-PL

Triplet = STRAW-BER-RY

Group of four sixteenth-notes = HUCK-LE-BER-RY

Eighth note plus two sixteenths = GOOSE-BER-RY

Note that these rhythms correspond with beginning rhythms in Suzuki method book 1 “Twinkle Variations.”

This activity can be done in various ways, and more complex rhythms can be added once these basic rhythms are learned. Begin by having the student clap or play each rhythm until it becomes familiar, then have the student bake their own pie out of rhythms, playing each rhythmic ingredient in order. You can also start with a full pie and have the student play rhythms as they are removed from the pie.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Words inspired by “Blue Jello” from Yurko, M. (1992). *Music Mind Games*. Miami, FL: Warner Brothers Publishing, Inc., 78.

### Popsicle Stick Dictation

Skill: Reading rhythm

Ages: Any

Materials: Popsicle sticks

This is a useful activity for teaching the visual recognition of rhythms. Arrange the popsicle sticks to create various rhythms (one popsicle stick for a quarter note, two joined by a third for a pair of eighth notes, etc.). Have the student clap or play the rhythms and create their own rhythms. This activity can become more complex as longer rhythms are created and performed. This activity can also be used to teach rhythmic counting systems using syllables (such as ta, ti-ti) or numbers (such as 1, 2&).<sup>35</sup>

### Musical Math

Skill: Reading note durations

Ages: Elementary – Adult

Materials: Writing supplies

Prepare a worksheet of math problems using note durations rather than numbers. Begin with simple addition and subtraction, move on to division and multiplication.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Activity based on “Blue Jello” rhythm dictation activities from Yurko, M. (1992). *Music Mind Games*. Miami, FL: Warner Brothers Publishing, Inc., 81-85.

<sup>36</sup> See Adair, A. J. (1884). *Ready-To-Use Music Activities Kit*. West Nyack, NY: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 72.

## **Other Activities**

### Error Hunt

Skill: Playing position and posture

Ages: Any

Materials: Violin and bow

I developed this activity to reinforce proper playing position and posture. Have student turn around or close their eyes. The teacher gets into playing position with instrument but makes some error such as having an incorrect bow hold, slouching, having the violin on the wrong shoulder, etc. Have the student then look and try to find all the errors. Then, give the student a turn to provide errors that the teacher will find.

### Finish the Song

Skill: Repertoire memory

Ages: Any

Materials: Student and teacher violins and bows

The teacher or student begins playing a familiar piece and stops after a few measures or phrases, the remaining participant completes the piece starting where the first person stopped.<sup>37</sup>

### Old MacDonald Had a Farm

Skill: Reinforcing rhythms in a song

Age: Preschool-Elementary

Materials: Student and teacher violins and bows

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<sup>37</sup> As taught by Rebecca Sandrok, violin teacher in Chicago, IL

The teacher begins playing the tune of Old MacDonald Had a Farm, having the student take over at different times during “everywhere a moo-moo,” “here a cow, there a cow,” which correspond to Twinkle rhythms, and “E-I-E-I-O.”<sup>38</sup>

### Draw a Violin

Skill: Learning the Parts of the Violin

Ages: Any

Materials: Writing materials

I developed this activity to create variety from simply looking at a picture or diagram that some one else created and learning parts listed. Have the student draw a violin and bow and label all parts on each.

### **Activity Sources**

#### Ready-To-Use Music Activities Kit

Author: Audrey J. Adair

Publisher: Parker Publishing Company, Inc.: West Nyack, NY

Date: 1884

Designed for older elementary to high school students, these theory worksheets are very useful to private teachers as homework or an in-lesson activity. The worksheets cover topics such as, reading the staff, reading rhythm, recognizing pitch direction, meter, scales and key signatures, intervals, symbols and terms, composition, and ear training.

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<sup>38</sup> Activity taken from Benjamin Baxter, violin teacher in Winder, GA

### A Galaxy of Games for the Music Class

Authors: Margaret Athey and Gwen Hotchkiss

Publisher: Parker Publishing Company, Inc.: West Nyack, NY

Date: 1975.

Though designed for the K-12 school music classroom, this book is an extensive source of games and activities that can be used in a private lesson setting as well as a group setting. *A Galaxy of Games for the Music Class* gives instructions for the game and the making of materials. The book is divided up into categories, and further by grade level. The categories are: Games for Rhythmic Response, Games for Reading and Writing Rhythm, Games for Reading and Writing Melody, Games for Learning Music Notation, Games for Ear Training, Games for Developing Singing, Games about Composers and Literature, Games about Musical Instruments, Games for General Review, Games Just for Fun, and Musical Word Games.

### Music Mind Games

Author: Michiko Yurko

Publisher: Warner Brothers Publishing, Inc.: Miami, FL

Date: 1992

*Music Mind Games* was developed to teach music theory in a pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade general music class by an innovative teacher. The games described in this book utilize materials that are available for purchase, but many of the materials can be re-created by a teacher for use in private lessons. This book covers a multitude of games that are visually and mentally stimulating. The games cover music theory skills such as the



music alphabet, line and space notes, rhythm, melodic and rhythmic dictation, note and rest durations, meter, note names on the grand staff, music symbols, tempo, scales, chords, major and minor keys, and “Musopoly” (a musical game of Monopoly). These games can help a private teacher make learning music theory more engaging and meaningful.

They’re rarely too young and never too old “to twinkle!”

Author: Kay Collier Slone

Publisher: Shar Publications Company: Ann Arbor, MI

Date: 1985

This text was written as a supplementary guide to Suzuki violin teachers working with very young students. It includes several chapters on activity and game ideas for both private lessons and group lessons that are age appropriate for preschool thru early elementary students.

### **Selecting Repertoire**

#### **Repertoire Sources**

The following music books are suggestions for use in choosing beginning student repertoire and technical exercises. The list is arranged alphabetically beginning with sources or performing repertoire and moving into technique repertoire.

Performing Repertoire:

52 Masterpieces for Violin & Piano

Compiler/Arranger: Roger Halle

Publisher: Belwin Mills Publishing Corporation: Miami, FL

Date: 1942

Though an old source, the 52 arrangements of classical and folk pieces add fresh variety to the standard beginning repertoire. All of the pieces are in first position but some have more complex bowing styles that make them appropriate for more advanced students.

A Practical Method for Violin

Author: Nicholas Laoureux

Publisher: G. Schirmer: Milwaukee, WI

Date: 1907

This one volume beginner method book moves at a gradual pace beginning with exercises on open strings and slowly adding each finger on each string. The method is great for teaching sight reading and for introducing the fingers one at a time. The method is especially appropriate for middle school – adult students. This source also includes original repertoire in the form of student/teacher duets.

### Easy Classics for Violin

Compiler/Arranger: Peter Spitzer

Publisher: Mel Bay Publications, Inc.: Pacific, MO

Date: 1997

This source includes beginning level arrangements of familiar and unfamiliar classical duets. The violin 1 part is the melody while violin 2 serves as the harmony, so the violin 1 part can easily be performed as a solo. A piano accompaniment is also available. The pieces range from Tchaikovsky's *Beauty and the Beast* to the *William Tell Overture* by Rossini.

### Fiddle Rhythms

Author: Sally O'Reilly

Publisher: Neil A. Kjos Music Company: San Diego, CA

Date: 1992

This source is a collection of fun and easy pieces that are delightfully illustrated. Each section teaches a new rhythm by presenting exercises and original pieces that emphasize a specific rhythm.

### First Things First

Composer/Arranger: Robert S. Frost

Publisher: Neil A. Kjos Music Company: San Diego, CA

Date: 2000

A collection of original pieces by Frost and arrangements of folk and classical tunes, these easy beginning pieces are set up as duets but can easily be performed as a solo. This book includes songs that are played on all four strings using blue and red fingerings (see “colors” in **left hand activities**).

### Solos for Festival and Fun

Compilers/Arrangers: Albert Stoutamire and Kenneth Henderson

Publisher: Mel Bay Publications, Inc.: Pacific, MO

Date: 1985

These arrangements of classical pieces are in first position, with some being simpler than others. This is not a source for early pieces but can be used after a few months.

### Solos for Young Violinists

Compiler/Arranger: Barbara Barber

Publisher: Summy-Birchard, Inc.: Miami, FL

Date: 1997

This six volume collection quickly advances beyond beginner level in the first volume, but the first few arrangements are unique to this collection. The classical arrangements are readily enjoyed by students of all ages. Piano accompaniment and listening CDs are also available. Volume one also includes 1<sup>st</sup> position scales as preparations for each of the early pieces.

### Suzuki Violin Method

Compiler/Arranger: Shinichi Suzuki

Publisher: Summy-Birchard Inc.: Miami, Florida

Date: 1978

Created for use in Shinichi Suzuki's highly successful violin method, these books are used by thousands of teachers around the world and have become the standard in beginning repertoire. Though intense method training is an important part of teacher education in the Suzuki method, one does not have to be a Suzuki teacher to use the method books as a source for repertoire. The ten books are carefully arranged to teach all the skills necessary to play the violin in a graded progression starting with *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* and ending with Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64*. The books combine arrangements of popular folk tunes and standard violin repertoire, all edited by Suzuki. The most recent edition was revised by Suzuki researchers and teachers after the death of Suzuki. Each volume has a CD and piano accompaniment available separately.

Technique Repertoire:

### Easiest Elementary Method, Op. 38

Author: Wohlfahrt

Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc.: Milwaukee, WI

Date: 1967

The primary source for beginning etudes and technical exercises, this time proven method includes aurally pleasing teacher accompaniments with each exercise. The

graded lessons begin with open strings and add fingers gradually. The book also includes simple scales with teacher accompaniments.

### Scale Studies for Violin

Author: J. Hrimaly

Publisher: Carl Fischer Music Library: New York, NY

Date: 1900

Scales and arpeggios in all keys are arranged starting with 1<sup>st</sup> position and moving up to cover multiple octaves, shifting, and playing in 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> position. The 1<sup>st</sup> position scales and arpeggios are a useful source for beginning violin students.

### School of Violin Technics, Op. 1, Part 1

Author: Otakar Sevcik

Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc.: Milwaukee, WI

Date: 1933

Part 1 of Op. 1 presents valuable exercises in the first position. Though normally used as mechanical exercises for intermediate to advanced students, a beginner can learn important fingering skills from the earlier exercises. The exercises cover all the possible finger combinations in first position on the violin in the form of repetitive runs.

### The School of Violin Technics, Book 1

Author: Henry Schradieck

Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc.: Milwaukee, WI

Date: 1967

The first volume of this collection includes scale-like exercises that build dexterity and quickness of fingers in various positions. The first section of this volume is a valuable source for exercises useful to beginners to become comfortable with playing different fingering combinations on all strings.

### **Administration**

In addition to teaching duties, administrative duties are also a part of a violin teacher's job description. The following duties are a list of communication and record keeping suggestions for a violin teacher.

### **Payment Receipts**

Keeping payment receipts are not only important for filing taxes, but I also use them to keep track of payments received. Otherwise, it is easy to overlook a payment or misplace a check. Payment receipt books can be purchased from an office supply store or created as a Microsoft Excel or Word document. On the receipt, list the amount, the payment method/check number, and the date. Also make a mark if money is carried over from a previous payment or if money is still owed.

### **Progress Reports**

The lesson plan template provided includes a section for progress assessment for each lesson. Consistently maintaining these records each week will provide a concrete record that is easily transferred to an assessment grade and provided to students and

parents. Keeping updated progress reports will also aid a teacher if a parent conference is called.

### **Letters to Parents**

An initial letter should be sent at the beginning of each semester that outlines the studio policies and schedule of holidays. This letter serves as a reminder for parents and students of teacher expectations.

In my experience, regular communication with parents will aid in a student's success because their involvement and support encourages the student to succeed. Update parents on progress and skills learned regularly through email or letters sent with students.

### **Parent Conferences**

If behavior issues arise from a school aged student, a parent conference may be scheduled. The purpose of this meeting is to find ways to stop inappropriate or unacceptable behavior before considering a forced withdrawal. Encourage parents to schedule a conference if they have something important to discuss, rather than making an unexpected phone call, talking during a student's lesson time, or delaying another student's lesson by talking afterwards. In severe cases, immediate attention may be required but usually a parent can come in on another day.



## **Newsletter**

Though time consuming, a simple newsletter will help students keep up with upcoming events and scheduling conflicts. A newsletter can include a calendar with anticipated breaks and holidays, upcoming concerts that are optional or required, and even a featured violinist or composer. This activity can also be an opportunity for a teacher to develop their own knowledge and writing skills in preparing essays for the newsletter. Consider having students submit their own articles or art work for the newsletter. A newsletter should be sent out at least once a semester.

## **Additional Research**

A professional teacher is one who is not only proficient in his subject, but one who continually seeks to develop his skills and understanding in the field of education. Beginning teachers should always enhance their knowledge in the field of pedagogy through research and reading. There is a wealth of information available to teachers written by other professionals in the field. Consider getting subscriptions to string or education related magazines. These will provide regular reminders to expand ideas and teaching methods. In addition to reading published articles, online databases are available to search unpublished theses, doctoral dissertations, and more on the subject of string pedagogy. There are also hundreds of books relating to the subject that can be immensely helpful to teachers.

One should take the information provided in these pages and expand the ideas to meet individual teaching styles and individual student's needs. This is only a starting point where suggestions meet practice. Some of the thoughts provided here may not be

useful to some teachers; nevertheless, the idea that should be taken away is that teaching takes organization, preparation, creativity, and objectives.

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