

Exercises for Vibrato

Vibrato is one of the most expressive tools we have as string players! Developing a wide range of vibrato speed and width (and practicing control over those choices) is like taking 3 primary paint colors you've been given and creating 100+ shades. Especially in combination with bow speed, contact point of the bow, and other variables — we're talking about nearly infinite expressive possibilities!

Exercise #1: Top Taps

- 1) Find the fourth position (or the area where the neck of your instrument meets the body) and tap your palm to the top of the strings
- 2) Ensure there is no “break” in your wrist, but a relaxed, straight line from wrist to elbow. This should be a FULL ARM ACTIVITY— if doing it correctly, you'll also see some rotation in your upper arm
- 3) Once comfy with the motion, speed it up a bit!
- 4) Finally, maintain the full arm motion while allowing your palm/fingertips to get “krazy-glued” to the strings. Your arm moves, your hand stays “stuck”!

Exercise #2: Polish the Fingerboard

- 1) Start by placing one finger (any finger works, but 2 or 3 is a great place to begin) lightly on a middle string — just enough contact to keep it resting in place without pressing down.
- 2) Now, with your arm nice and relaxed, start “polishing” the fingerboard by sliding your hand back and forth along the string. The motion should come from your *whole arm*, not just your fingers!

You'll feel a smooth rolling movement in your forearm, with your finger gently gliding across the string.

- 3) Keep your hand shape relaxed and consistent — no floppy fingers!
- 4) After a few reps, try shortening the motion slightly, while keeping the same fluidity and direction. This smaller version is the *vibrato gesture in slow motion* — *your arm leads, your hand follows, and your finger stays flexible and connected.*
- 5) Pro tip: Keep your thumb light and mobile on the side of the neck.
- 6) Try this on all four fingers to build consistency and comfort!

Exercise #3: Vibrato Impulses

1. Set your metronome to 60 beats per minute.
This slow tempo gives you time to focus on each motion with precision and ease.
2. Choose a finger and place it down on a string.
Keep your finger firmly planted — do not let it slide or lift. You're going to stay in place and just “roll” the finger back slightly (toward the scroll) and then return to the starting position.
3. Start with 1 vibrato impulse per beat.
At this speed, each impulse will sound like two distinct pitches: the regular note and a lower one when the finger rolls back.
 - Important: The motion comes from bending and releasing the first knuckle joint (the one closest to your fingertip).
 - Your finger should stay glued to the string — no hopping, lifting, or gliding.
4. Work through different rhythms:




- Quarters (1 impulse per beat)
 - Eighths (2 impulses per beat)
 - Triplets (3 impulses per beat)
 - Sixteenths (4 impulses per beat)
5. Do this on every finger and every string.
The goal is to build consistent, relaxed motion in all positions and across the whole fingerboard.
6. Stick with 60 bpm for at least a week.
Once the motion feels natural and relaxed, gradually increase the metronome speed over time.

Exercise #3: Vibrato Scales

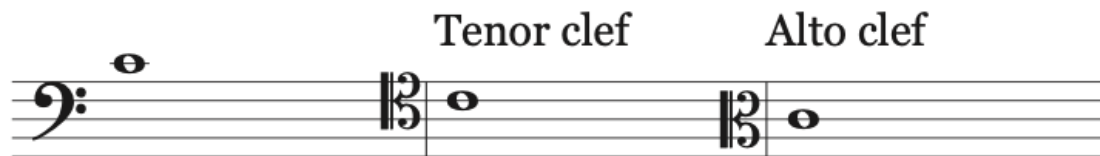
- 1) Choose any scale that's comfy for you— we will be playing with long whole notes, using full bows.
- 2) Keeping a consistent, slow bow speed on each note, begin the note with extremely slow and thin/slight vibrato pumps.
- 3) As you continue the note, gradually speed the vibrato up to your top personal speed, as wide and fast as you can go!!!!
- 4) Then, let it gradually decrease (reverse process), winding down to slow relaxed vibrato, and eventually, nothing (straight tone).
- 5) Move on to the next note (scale degree) and repeat!

Pro Tip: Think about transferring arm weight to each finger you are on. Always be mindful of left-hand thumb tension!

Introducing the Tenor Clef

Besides using this  and this  composers sometimes use a movable C clef . Wherever that symbol is placed, the line passing through it is middle C. Different placements change the clef's name.

All three of these notes are the same: middle C.



Each measure sounds the same: F, A, C, E.



Why would they do such a thing?

Mostly to get rid of ledger lines. You may be used to reading this:



But, in tenor clef, you don't have to deal with so many ledger lines:



Tips For Reading Tenor Clef

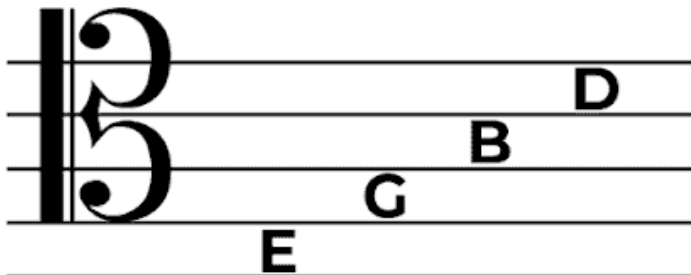


A handy tenor clef mnemonic device to help you remember the notes is:

Dogs **F**ight **A**ll **C**ats **E**agerly

Notice how the first letter of each of these words is the letter name of each of the lines of the tenor clef staff.

Here are the notes for the spaces of the tenor clef notes on the staff:



A possible mnemonic device here is:

Every **G**ood **B**oy **D**ances

Think of Tenor Clef Like a Shifted Bass Clef

Tenor Clef vs. Bass Clef – What's the Difference?

The tenor clef and bass clef are a perfect fifth apart. That means most notes in tenor clef are five steps (notes) higher than they would be in bass clef.

What's a Perfect Fifth?

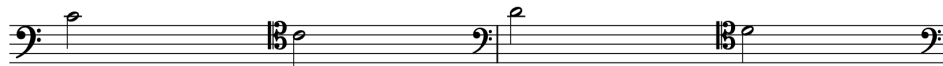
A perfect fifth is the distance between five letter names.

For example:

A to E: A-B-C-D-E

D to A: D-E-F-G-A

So if a note is on the first ledger line in bass clef (C), it would be written a perfect fifth lower in tenor clef (on the fourth line of the staff).



A Trick That Works for Cellists

If you're ever unsure, try this:

Shift the note up three lines or three spaces from where it would be in bass clef. That gives you the correct pitch in tenor clef!

Example:

In bass clef, open D is on the middle line.

Three lines down = G = open D in tenor clef.

Use Your Cello's Tuning to Help You

Cellos are tuned in perfect fifths (C–G–D–A), and that's actually super helpful!

Here's how:

If a tenor clef note is below the top line, you can:

- Read it as if it were in bass clef
- Play it on the next higher string

** This trick stops working above the top line because we don't have an E string!

