

RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL BEGINNER PROGRAM

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Session 2.2



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REMEMBER: these are just **MY** suggestions and how I use them in my teaching. **YOU** can take and use **ANY** of them, and blend them with your own ideas. **YOU** know what will work for **YOU** and **YOUR** kids!

- Intro - teaching situation/philosophy
- Why teach in groups?
- Selection methods, how to choose which students/which instruments
- First few lessons
- First year - Unison
- Classroom connection: role of classroom teachers/music teachers
- Use of books
- Tricks and games/catchcries
- Questioning, open/closed
- Set up for success/sequencing
- Classroom management
- How to practise
- Cello for non-cellists/violin for non-violinists etc (get help)
- How we learn? Hear it See it Feel it!

Choosing Instruments and General Classroom Set-up

- **QUALITY** comes from **QUANTITY** – I have a class of 60+, so I want a string **ORCHESTRA** from Day 1. How do I choose instruments? I kind of **DO** and **DON'T**.
- **BASSES** and **VIOLAS**? I believe we should **START** them in the first year of the program....**WHY?** (I can do a “Fill-in” later, if required for Senior groups)
- All violins/vlas **STAND**, but can sit on bottoms, with legs crossed and instruments **IN FRONT** of them for singing. The “up and down” means they are also getting some exercise!

- ALL celli and bass seated – usually celli in a “block” or rows on the right, with basses behind them.
- Avoid music stands if you can.
- I teach from the keyboard out the front. NOT a piano, as I want to SEE them all – there are 63, with weapons!!
- I ALWAYS play piano, to give aural references, for singing and playing
- I use rhythms when playing scales – they are happy to play a tango, samba, waltz, rock etc. – and that’s ALL on D Major scale x 4 and varied rhythms later
- ALL instruments have 1/2/3 ; 1/3/4; 1/4 finger markers. How can they LEARN what “in tune” is, with everything they have to do, as beginners. It’s ONE less thing, but it reinforces muscle memory, as well as aural aptitude.
- HELPERS do not have to be string players, for purposes of walking around, fixing posture, fallen shoulder rests etc, but DO have to be string players if demonstrating or doing STAFF meetings.

Motivation

- Their greatest motivator is their own success.
- Maintain YOUR enthusiasm. Let them see you are excited about their progress.
- Tell them you are proud of them and praise them often. Let them hear it in your voice. Make the lessons fun. Sound like YOU’RE having fun
- Use rewards and bribery shamelessly....it works.
- Form an ensemble from day one. Tell them they are part of the TEAM
- Perform as soon as you can and as regularly as possible – both public and class performances, group and solo. Hold after school concerts/demo lessons at the end of each term or semester. Have group and solo items, invite parents, principal and classroom teachers. Perform at fetes and at Parade / Assemblies or other classes.

- Concerts - Take them to Symphony Orchestra schools concerts, organise visiting recitalists or even your own quartet.

Method: It is important to structure your programme:

Beginner Primary:

- Establish good discipline from day one. Set your ground rules clearly and stick to them.
- You cannot BEGIN to teach, unless you have their attention. You must EARN their respect. They will not automatically give it to you.
- Have a musical “cue” for silence after tuning (e.g. D major arpeggio descending)
- Lesson one should be on care and maintenance of the instrument

Some Practical Tips

- Plan the room set up. Leave spaces so you can walk around.
- Teach them to set up the room, while you are tuning (this will need supervision at first). Avoid clutter - if space is limited, cases outside or at back of room.
- Position the piano well, if teaching from there.
- Encourage good posture always. Step-by- step instructions
- Violins and violas should stand as much as possible. Let them sit on the floor while you're explaining or demonstrating for any length of time. Violin/viola cannot fall off lap. Bows behind when not using them (or not at all in Term 1)
- Celli and bass must be seated. Basses must have hands free, so NO standing. “jack-in-the-box”
- "Sit forward on your chair; feet flat :1-2." Say this every time you begin to play. (See other “catch-cries” below)
- SING EVERYTHING – fingers/letters/solfa
- Be prepared to repeat yourself. Remember that's how we all learn.

- First year string playing is most successful in unison.
- Use a piano or disc accompaniment if available
- Pizzicato can be used for at least Term One, including concert.
- Should I use fingerboard marks and for how long?
- The four thought processes of **READING** a note:
- What's the name of the note?
- Which string is it on?
- How many fingers?
- What does it look like?
- Teaching note reading: when do I start? Hand staff!
- Shoulder rests/sponge/ Pinkie Nests. Cello / bass boards
- Bow with left hand, back-to-front, so as not to confuse
- Where should they be at end of each term? (VERY approximate guidelines)
- Show me the fingers and sing the letter names / fingers
- Sing and show the other instruments' fingers
- Change the activity frequently
- Bowing action – open close. Point to me and away. Finger in elbow, open and close arm – no scribbling with the “ELBONE”

During the first years:

- Use finger patterns (These work for violin and viola):

Open:	1	2	3	4
High:	1	2	3 4	
Middle:	1	2 3	4	
Low:	1 2	3	4	

(More about this in Violin and Viola Forums)

Tips and Catch Cries – short and sweet!

- Get ready cue (D Major Arpeggio)
- Teacher “mirrors” class:
- Stand with one foot under each shoulder – sway
- Give me a wave with the hand that holds the violin (or holds the bow)
- Learn Resting and Playing position: (Teacher “mirrors” class)
- Show me your violin – arm up – violin under – don’t squash bridge
- Find button – up-over-shoulder-head to the left
- Rock; Water-pistol (squirt!) Letter C for Pizzicato
- From the knuckles to the elbow is a (CLAP!) Straight line! (Left arm)
- Left hand: G’day mate, going this way? Make a letter C
- Fingers like wiggly worms/fairy wings/butterfly wings
- Find you “home-base” note (first finger “on the mark”)
- Pussy Cat’s PAWS, not Pussy Cat’s CLAWS
- 54321 release to soft paws
- Jack-in-the-box (celli) or all in ensemble
- Sit forward on your chair, feet flat: ONE TWO (Stamp feet)
- Basses are great! Sit up straight!
- (or Strings are great, sit up straight!)
- Use fingers/letters and SING everything e.g. au clair
- “STAFF MEETINGS”: **this is when the staff “demonstrates” the WRONG way – and the kids correct us. REMEMBER: ONE mistake at a time only!**
- Rhythms not together – speeds all different
- Pitch not correct – need to check that fingers are not “almost, kind of, sort of or nearly”, but EXACTLY on the mark
- Posture – left wrist, elbows too low, standing with one leg crossed over, sitting badly (Celli/ bass)
- Tiny/short /stiff bows

- Pizzicato with weak L hand or badly placed point of pizz contact (I usually have a tiny cute sticker up the fingerboard to show where they SHOULD be plucking)
- LOTS of CONCEPTS can be reinforced this way, as long as the CORRECT model has been demonstrated well
- This also provides them with a kind of “checklist” for practice
- Can be BROAD or SPECIFIC, but always ONE concept at a time.
- Correction by the kids can be either “hands up” answers , or “come out and help me” (e.g.) for posture

Bow Hold

- Right to tighten, left to loosen (bow and fine tuners)
- Pussy cat’s PAWS, not pussy cat’s CLAWS (both hands)
- Use a straw to learn bow hold – teachers: try in LEFT hand 😊
- 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 (Hold tightly and gradually loosen.....NOT ZERO!)
- Around, around, around, on top, BENT!
- No banana thumbs – Happy face, not sad. THUMB placement?

Step by Step instructions:

- Shake, shake, shake - palm towards the ceiling
- bend, straighten, bend, straighten bend, (which one do we want?)
- find the line - turn it over - “aye-aye captain!”
- Rabbit’s ears - circle – “Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle” (rabbit’s nose)
- NO FOXES – what do foxes eat?
- Thumb under - Ready, set: FLOP - Pinky Ballerina
- Finger inside elbow - Open /Close – no scribbling with the ELBONE
- DOWN to the Valley; UP to the mountain
- Oil the rusty gate

- Set up and flagpole, vertical, horizontal, halfway, windscreen wipers
- FLAGPOLE, Statue of LIBERTY (To adjust elbow to correct height)
- Check your C-Curves – automatic straight bow and arm levels
- Invisible shelf – (keep elbow up)
- Sharpie pens - Silver to Gold
- M for middle and later, B for balance Point
- The moral of the story is.....
- Sing the BOWING (Down / up) (e.g. Ode to Joy)
- Sing the bow speeds (Fast / slow) (Whole / /half) (e.g. Twinkle)
- Don't tread on the puppy dog's tail – he'll growl at you
- Flagpole for Silence, Statue of Lib: GOLD or Statue of Liberty: SILVER etc

Reading: Use a HAND STAFF for 3 different clefs

Teach “steps and skips” on hand staff

3 skips to 1 and 2 skips to 4

Notes:

Possibly one of the most important tips:

NEVER make enemies of the grounds staff or Admin staff in a school.

You will NEVER get anything done!! Make the time to say hello and get to know them by name. Your job will INSTANTLY be easier.