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The surest way to kill interest in young viola players is to perform bad arrangements [...] viola parts should be as interesting as those for any other instrument (Hill, 1950)

CHOOSING AN INSTRUMENT

- Students must start on small violas with good quality C strings – not violin strung. Check that the string doesn't change pitch when you play it
- To reduce the unevenness of sound quality – use strings that are of good quality and work well together
- Be careful with the size – choosing an instrument that is too big too soon is setting students out to fail. Violists must feel comfortable first and develop a good sense of basic technique before moving to larger instruments

Help your violist connect to their instrument – do you understand the differences in teaching violin and viola?

SET-UP

- Reduce tension from the start. With the increased size, it is crucial to develop awareness of tension in the body, especially around the neck and shoulders.
 - The instrument should rest on the shoulder and the natural weight of the head resting on the 'jaw' rest
 - The increased size puts extra tension on the upper arm – a little increase in size already adds a big tension
- Holding the instrument. Violas are all markedly different – consider new approaches and finding the best position for holding the instrument considering the body shape of the student. Some violists find a more relaxed posture with the instrument slightly lowered – as long as the point of contact is consistent this should not be a problem

LEFT-HAND SET-UP AND TECHNIQUES

- String height is higher
 - finger percussion and dexterity increased – more action and speed required
 - string response is slower – more finger action from the start required to help
 - changed point of contact with the fingerboard
 - finger-pad contact in melodic lines – richer sound and more relaxed hand
 - tip of fingers for faster passages
- Distance between the strings is greater
 - Fifths could become an issue
 - Ensure the distance is not unmanageable – students could benefit from a new carved bridge to suit their finger length
 - Use cello technique – different fingers and shifts to even out the sound in melodic lines. Avoid using the same finger, especially in larger violas
- More shifting in melodic lines, rather than string crossings – always find the most musical fingerings that suit the instrument considering violas are all different

- Start shifting sooner and use it more often
- Use fingerings that work melodically. Some instruments sound better staying in position, others sound better on the same string. Make melodic decisions – often fingerings used on the violin don't work as well on the viola. Be creative, don't compromise on beauty of tone
- Pulling first finger back rather than stretching the fourth finger – cellist technique
- Change the centre of gravity of the hand depending which finger is playing
- Width of the instrument is greater – makes it considerably harder to get around the instrument and play in lower strings, especially in higher positions

BOWING

The tone is crucial to viola players. Each violist's sound is unique to them, it becomes like their business card. It is crucial to have a bow that matches the instrument. A stick that is too light, too weak or not flexible can have a bad impact in the sound production. The stroke should start with a 'bite' to prompt the string to vibrate – again similar to cello technique – otherwise, a weak attack will delay the sound and cause a fuzzy tone.

- Heavier arm weight is required to sustain the sound
 - Greater use of pronation from the middle to the tip to sustain the sound and keep the grip with the string
- Smaller and heavier bow – condensed and full rich tone from the start is crucial

PHRASING IN ENSEMBLE – MUSICIANSHIP WITHIN THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE VOICES

Violas are the centre of chamber music playing. Teach students the art of playing middle voices – keep them mentally engaged and active participants the making of music – what is their role within the ensemble?

- Melodic support and leadership
 - Violists help lead the melodic contour and can greatly impact melodic phrasing decisions by anticipating musical phrases
 - Provide harmonic support and lead crescendi and diminuendi
 - Teach violists how crucial this role is for successful chamber music
- Bass line support and ensemble cohesion
 - Violists support the bass lines in matching articulation and harmonic progressions
 - Violists constantly adjust intonation and provide a bridge between the violins and cellos/basses: teach harmonic intonation – how their notes fit within each chord

REPERTOIRE

There is so much repertoire to develop technically as well as a solid viola identity and tone. With little research, one will be able to find repertoire that is stimulating and interesting – even without having the melody. Look for (in all the parts – not just violas):

- Strong supporting lines
- Interesting rhythms
- Occasional melody

CHOOSING A VIOLA

Approximate Age	Player's arm	Viola size	Measurement	Bow length
6-7 years	20"	12" viola	12"	24.5"
	50.8 cm	(1/2 violin)	30.5 cm	62.2 cm (1/2 violin)
7-9 years	21.5" – 22"	13" viola	13"	27"
	54.6 – 55.9 cm	(3/4 violin)	33 cm	68.6 cm (3/4 violin)
9-12 years	23"	14" viola	14"	29.25"
	58 cm	(full size violin)	35.5 cm	75 cm (full viola)
	24.5"	15" viola	15"	29.25"
	62.2 cm		38 cm	75 cm (full viola)
	25"	15.5" viola	15.5"	29.25"
	63.5 cm		39.4 cm	75 cm (full viola)
	26" and larger	16" or 16.5" viola	16" or 16.5"	29.25"
	66 cm	and above	40.6 to 42 cm	75 cm (full viola)

REFERENCES

Hill, V. (1950). Let's Glamorize the Viola. *Music Educators Journal*, 36(5), 46-47. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3387423>

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