



MISS STORTON'S GUIDE TO:

artforms Safely playing the Viola

It is really important that we learn a good posture for playing the viola in order to prevent any long-term physical discomfort or injury. This guide will show you the correct way to hold your viola and bow.

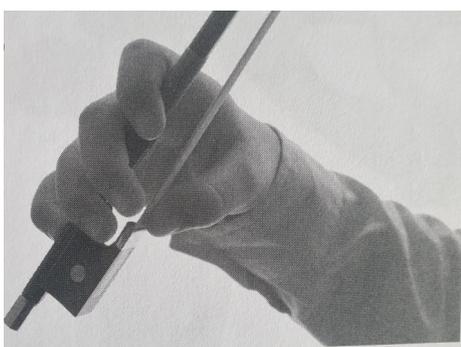


Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, with your right foot slightly behind the left. You should balance your weight equally between both feet. Relax both of your shoulders and make sure your head is straight. Make sure you are standing up straight without locking your knees.

Keep your viola parallel to the ground, with the top of the viola flat like a table. Ensure your nose is pointing towards the scroll (end) of your viola.

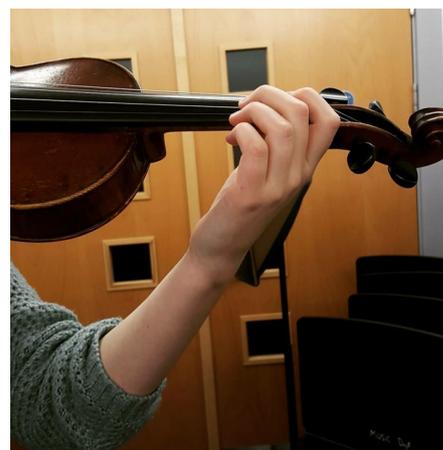
If sitting to play the viola, your feet should be flat on the ground and you should sit up straight, with your music stand at a good position so that you are not straining your neck.

Ensure there is enough space around you!



This photo shows the beginner bow hold: get into this position by creating a 'dog' with your right hand. Your middle two fingers should come over, whilst the thumb sits underneath on the silver strip. Your little finger should curve and sit on the top of the bow, and your first/index finger curves over the black rubbery bit. Your bow should remain straight and be parallel to the bridge. Push out from your right elbow, making sure you don't pull your arm backwards and keeping your right wrist flexible.

When using the left hand fingers, ensure that your left wrist is straight and that you do not collapse your hand against the neck of the viola or stick your wrist out. The fingers should be curved and you should press down notes with the fleshy tips of your fingers (it is much easier if you cut your nails!). Your left thumb should be in line with your first finger and be pointing up to the sky.





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We should also know how to take good care of our violas, as they are often expensive instruments and have great sentimental value too.



Apply rosin to your bow at the beginning of each lesson. Try not to touch the horse hair on your bow, as the natural oils from your skin can build up and make the hair go black. Once this has happened, that bit of the bow will no longer take on rosin and it will require a full re-hair.

You should also twist the end of your bow left to slacken the hair off a bit when you pack your instrument away, and then twist it right to tighten the hair at the start of each lesson/practice. The gap between the hair and wood should be about the width of your finger.

Always hold your viola on its left shoulder when you are not playing, so that you are less likely to drop it or knock it on something.

It is important that you do not store your viola anywhere that is too hot e.g. next to a radiator, or too cold e.g. leave it in a car outside. Sudden changes in temperature or extreme temperatures can cause the wood to crack and the glue to come apart, which damages your instrument.

You should wash your hands before playing your viola to avoid damaging the varnish.

Do not try to tune your viola yourself, you should wait until your next lesson for your teacher to do it for you. Viola pegs are not like guitar pegs and if a string gets over-tightened it can snap.



It is also important to look after our hearing when playing a musical instrument or listening to music. Make sure you never have earphones on too loud!

When playing in large groups, violas can occasionally generate sufficiently loud levels of sound to cause permanent hearing loss. This is typically worse in the left ear as it is nearer the instrument. The ability to hear higher frequency harmonics is crucial to violists, and so sufficient protection is recommended.

Practice mutes can be used to reduce the sounds from violas, but I would mainly advise ear plugs when playing in orchestras. Day-to-day playing should be fine, just take a break if you develop earache.