GETTING STARTED WITH VIOLIN AND VIOLA

by White House of Music

Tips for Aspiring Violinists and Violists

Blog Summary

- Many students begin in elementary school, start in small group instruction, and learn basics like hand development, bowing, and reading music as they work toward making a good sound.
- Choosing a properly set-up violin or viola, along with essential accessories like rosin, shoulder rest, case, and method books, makes learning easier and more enjoyable.
- Students typically perform in school concerts during the year, and consistent, short practice sessions, along with proper instrument care, help build skills; private lessons can supplement school learning.

Signing up to Play the Violin and Viola

As we learned in our other "Getting Started" blog articles, the process of learning an instrument varies significantly between the piano, percussion, and guitar. The violin and viola have their own unique distinctions that lend to a slightly different learning process as well!

Violin and Viola Recruitment and Places to Play

Many school districts recruit students in elementary school, with most initial recruitment between 4th and 6th grades. Quite often, this recruitment process takes place the year before initial enrollment. Once they've enrolled in orchestra, string students will often begin by learning in a small group environment before migrating to a large group rehearsal environment within a month of first picking up their instrument.

What Will First-year Violinists and Violists Learn?

The first step in learning a string instrument involves right and left-hand development. The right hand and arm are the most important to master, as they produce the tone of your student's violin or viola. The left hand controls pitches and allows the musician to play in tune.

First-year students will also begin to learn to read music, although very young musicians may wind up learning to read music at a later date. The goal for novice string musicians is to learn to make a good sound.

Where Can Violin and Viola Students Perform?

A new string musician's first opportunity to perform will be at a concert in December or perhaps January. This is traditionally followed by a second concert toward the end of the school year, and some school districts may include a third performance at some point during the school year.

Making Sure Your String Instrument Makes the Grade

One common pitfall novice violinists and violists may encounter when first starting is purchasing an inferior-quality instrument. Subpar string instruments may feature poor parts and materials, making it difficult for a student to play. If the pegs aren't set up properly, your instrument may be impossible to tune. Fiberglass bows are a decent option for the beginner string musician, but they also need to be designed properly to achieve a good sound.

The sides, back, and neck of your student's instrument should be made from maple, while the top is typically made from spruce. A quality fingerboard will be produced from harder woods like ebony. Manufacturers such as Yamaha, Eastman, Mathias Thoma, Glaesel, Kohr, Christopher, Lewis, and Scherl & Roth produce good quality rental instruments for beginners. When it is time to consider purchasing a student or step–up orchestra instrument, please visit The White House of Music's String Shoppe or speak to any of our sales associates at our many locations.

Violin and Viola Accessories and Supplemental Materials

A beginner string student normally needs several accessories to ensure their violin or viola is played properly and remains well-maintained throughout the instrument's life. Rosin, a cleaning cloth, a shoulder rest (beginner students will normally start with a sponge substitute, while middle school musicians will migrate over to a regular rest), a carrying case, a bow, and a music stand will typically be required to maintain good posture during practice. White House of Music offers accessory packs as an option for the

beginner musician.

Each school district will have its own selection of method books, which are stocked on the White House of Music database. Just visit one of our stores, mention the name of your teacher and your student's school, and we'll pull the right books off the shelf for you!

Practicing With a Violin and Viola

As with many instruments, it is typically recommended that beginner musicians spread their practice sessions over multiple short periods of time rather than practicing a few times a week for extended periods of time. Students will likely receive excellent instruction from their orchestra director, but private lessons always offer a welcome opportunity to enhance a musician's abilities.

There are a few things to keep an eye on during your student's practice sessions:

- Ensure the bow stays at a right angle to the strings as it is drawn. The elbow and wrist being able to flex is an important part of keeping the bow straight and at a good angle to the strings to achieve a good tone.Your student's left hand and wrist should not collapse and remain fairly straight to help with playing in tune.
- The hair on the bow should be tightened before practice and loosened after each practice session. 3-4 turns should be sufficient.
- Avoid over-application of rosin, but be sure to apply with each practice session.
- Wipe off the instrument with a rag after playing, especially under the strings where rosin may collect.
- During winter months, make sure your student has a humidifier in their case to keep the instrument's wood from separating and allowing it to maintain its good tone.

If you have any questions about instrument maintenance, private lessons, or violin and viola accessories, don't hesitate to reach out to your local White House of Music store. We're more than happy to help your student Make Music For Life!

Fill out this form to be paired with a teacher that fits your instrument and scheduling needs!

Request Lessons Now