

The left thumb

Where should the thumb be placed on the neck of the violin in first position? **Leopold Auer:** place the thumb opposite the second finger playing F natural on the D string. **Galamian:** between the first and second fingers, or opposite the first. **Flesch** and **Ševčík:** opposite the first finger playing E on the D string. **Suzuki:** between the first finger playing E on the D string, and the nut.

One approach to finding a natural thumb position is first to drop the hand to the side and relax it completely. Without the violin, quickly raise the hand into playing position. Keep the arm and hand completely relaxed, and note the natural position of the thumb. Repeat, this time placing the thumb on the neck of the violin. This may be the best basic thumb position for your particular hand, ie the position that the thumb moves away from, and returns to, in the course of playing.

It is so important to keep an open space between the base of the thumb and the first finger, without squeezing together. Like the fingers, the thumb has three main joints. It does not begin at the point where it appears to join on to the hand, but has its base joint (the 'ball' of the thumb) near the wrist. Trying to use only the upper two joints of the thumb, without the base joint also taking part, causes stiffness which can affect the entire hand.

1. Warm-up exercise

To stop squeezing the neck too hard between the thumb and the fingers, play this fingering pattern without the thumb touching the neck. Capture the feeling of the thumb's independence from the fingers, and then find the same feeling with the thumb in its usual position.

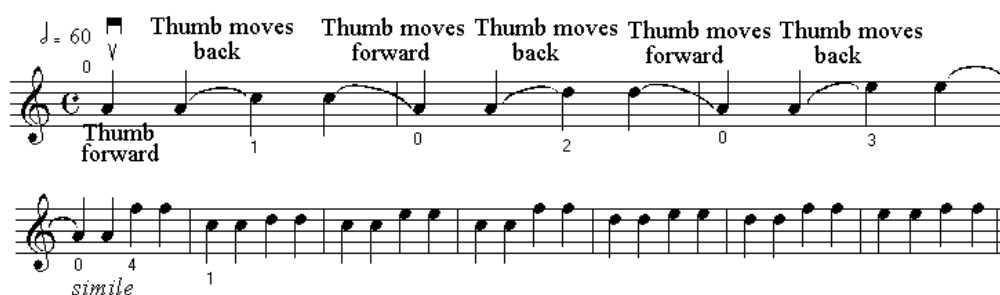
- Keep the side of the first finger lightly touching the neck, but play with the thumb about a centimetre away from the neck. Position it exaggeratedly forward, somewhere opposite the third finger.
- For the purposes of the exercise use *arm weight* to stop the notes, 'hanging' the arm from the fingers. Relax the entire weight of the head into the chin rest to hold the violin firmly, or rest the scroll against the wall.



2. Thumb independence

To reduce over-pressing with the thumb as you stop notes with the fingers, move the thumb backwards and forwards along the neck while lifting and dropping the fingers. Play the fingering pattern on each string.

- Slowly move the thumb backwards and forwards as shown in the first three bars. Begin with the thumb far forward, somewhere opposite the third finger, and move it back to between the first finger and the nut.
- Change direction with the thumb at the same time as changing direction with the bow. That is, if the thumb is slowly moving towards the bridge, and you are on an up-bow, start moving the thumb towards the scroll when you change to the down-bow. This ensures that the thumb is always moving when raising or lowering a finger. Do not momentarily stop moving the thumb as the finger is dropped or raised.



Next month's BASICS returns to the left/right hand, with