

Finger pressure

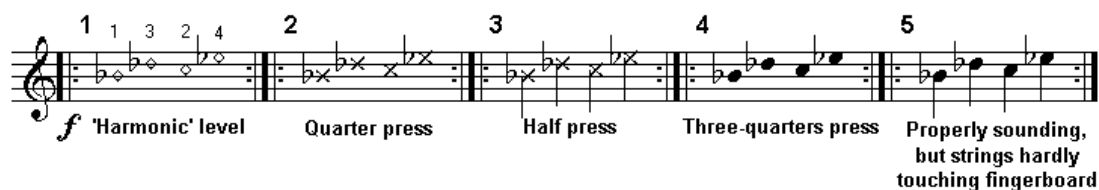
The body works as a whole: tension in one area creates tension in other areas. If the fingers and thumb overpress, the base knuckle joints and the palm of the hand become tight. If the hand is tight the wrist tightens. If the wrist tightens the upper arm tightens, if the upper arm tightens the neck and shoulders tighten, and so on. Rather than trying to 'relax' the hand, aim for a feeling of the hand always being *soft*, constantly keeping a check on the following:

- The fingers stop the string just enough to produce a clean note, without pressing further
- The thumb counter-presses against the neck of the violin 'as much as necessary but as little as possible'
- The fingers that are not on the string remain relaxed
- The fingers do not squeeze sideways against each other
- The base knuckle joints remain relaxed
- The wrist remains relaxed
- The upper arm does not pull in too far to the right
- The violin is not squeezed hard between the shoulder and the chin

The best amount of finger pressure is the same everywhere on the fingerboard: *as much as necessary but as little as possible*. This is one of the single most important aspects of left hand technique. Great ease comes into the hand when the fingers are light, and sensitive to the elastic give of the string - like the right hand feeling the give of the bow, bow-hair and string.

If the player's mental picture is one of 'dropping fingers = press the string to the fingerboard', the hand can become tense. It may be that the string does touch the fingerboard, especially in low positions, or it may not; but the aim should remain one of 'bending' the string just enough for the note to sound properly. Playing on the 'bounciness' of the string makes the hand feel soft; playing into the hard fingerboard can make the hand feel hard.

In this exercise the idea is to start with the fingers lightly on the string, as if playing harmonics, and gradually to increase the finger weight until it is enough to stop the string cleanly. Play *forte*. The sound produced will be harsh and scratchy when the fingers are light on the string, and will gradually improve as they stop the string more.



- 1 These notes will not sound as real harmonics but place the fingers as if they were, just touching the surface of the string. Play *forte*, feeling the bow deep in the string while the fingers remain light. The sound will be distorted.
- 2 Keeping the bow heavy, play the same notes again while pushing the string a quarter-way down. Keep the left hand and fingers completely loose (floppy).
- 3 Playing heavily with the bow, push the fingers half-way down.
- 4 Push the fingers three-quarters down.
- 5 Finally, press the fingers down just enough to stop the note properly. It may be that the pressure is so light that although the pads touch the fingerboard, the string itself does not.

Play similar notes (avoiding natural harmonics) on each string in low, middle and high positions. Also use double-stops.

Practice method

Play whole passages - or even whole movements - with the fingers just touching the surface of the strings, then pushing the string a quarter-way down, and so on. Even a few minutes playing like this can bring an entirely new feeling of ease to the hand.