

Shifts of an octave

Exercise One

A quick way to improve the accuracy of ascending shifts like octaves is to practice them using three methods of shifting - Classical shifts, Romantic shifts and Combination shifts - regardless of the type of shift you are actually going to use in the piece.



- * **Classical shift** (or 'beginning' shift): the hand moves with the finger that begins the shift.
- * **Romantic shift** (or 'end' shift): the hand moves with the finger that ends the shift.
- * **Combination shift**: the shift begins with the finger that begins the shift, and ends with the finger that ends the shift.

Practising individual octaves using all three methods of shifting develops your feeling for the exact distance of the octave. After playing this exercise for only a short while, you will find that all your octave shifts anywhere on the fingerboard have improved in ease, accuracy and confidence.

- * In the first three bars of each group shift slowly, with a glissando. Memorise the feel of the hand in both the lower and the higher position.
- * In the fourth bar play the octave as simply two notes, connecting the notes well but without a glissando. Forget about 'shifting', and play 'note-note' rather than 'note-shift-note'.

The image shows four staves of musical notation for Exercise One. The first staff is marked 'sul A' and contains four measures of music, each starting with a shift from a lower note to a higher note. The first three measures use glissando, and the fourth measure is a 'note-note' connection. The second, third, and fourth staves each contain four measures of music, each starting with a shift from a lower note to a higher note. The first three measures use glissando, and the fourth measure is a 'note-note' connection. The key signature is one flat (B-flat).

Play on each string.

Practice method

Practicing any individual shifts in a piece, use the same approach and apply all three methods of shifting. The following example shows a way of practicing the 1-4 shift in the opening theme of the Tchaikowsky Violin Concerto:

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (D major). The staff contains a sequence of notes with fingerings indicated above them. The sequence is: 1 1 4 1 1 1 4 1 | 1 4 4 4 1 4 4 4 | 1 1 4 4 4 1 1 | 4 3 4. The notes are: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5 | D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5 | D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5 | D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The first three measures are repeated, and the fourth measure is a single note (D4).

Exercise Two

This sequence covers every octave shift from any finger to any other finger. Playing through it every now and then will improve all the individual octave shifts in your general playing.

- * Play slowly at about quaver = 40.
- * As with all shifts, it is important to 'hear' in advance the note you are shifting to.
- * Crescendo into the upper note, moving closer to the bridge. Sustain the sound through the change of bow.
- * First play slurred, and then with separate bows.
- * Written out here as far as fourth position, continue higher up the string.

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sul G

Then play the same notes and fingerings with a sharp attack, as shown below. Attack each note decisively, without testing the notes by banging the fingers down hard on the string:

sul G

Also play with four (or eight) fast strokes to a note. The faster the strokes, the faster the shift must be for the finger to arrive in time for the bow stroke. Play with machine-like regularity, timing the shifts so that they are inaudible, and the passage sounds the same as if you were playing in one position across two strings.

sul G

Play on each string.