Intonation

Tuning to the open strings

- As a matter of routine while working on intonation in any passage, compare the pitch of every stopped G, D, A or E with the open strings.
- Do this even when the note is repeated. For example, you have checked third finger D♮ on the A string with the open D string, and in the next bar the same finger plays the same note – check it again, and in every other bar in the piece.
- Go through this process many times in the course of learning or working on the piece.

Open strings vibrate sympathetically when a stopped G, D, A or E is played, bringing a 'ringing' quality into the violin sound.

If the stopped note is below the open string, the whole length of the open string vibrates. For example, watch the open A string while playing first finger A♮ on the G string.

If the stopped note is above the open string, the open string divides into sections, each section visibly vibrating separately. For example, watch the open G vibrating in two distinct parts while playing third finger G♮ on the D string.

Holding down fingers

Sometimes the fingers need to stay down on the string after being played, rather than lifting immediately. Sometimes the left hand action is more like a pianist's – as soon as the new finger touches the string the old finger lifts.

In either case practise holding fingers down for an exaggeratedly long time, even to the point of slight awkwardness. Afterwards the normal finger action and intonation will feel much more secure.

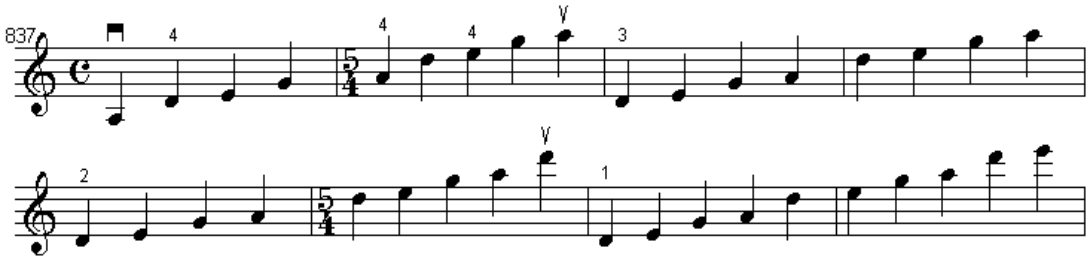
Tuning to the open strings: warm-up exercise

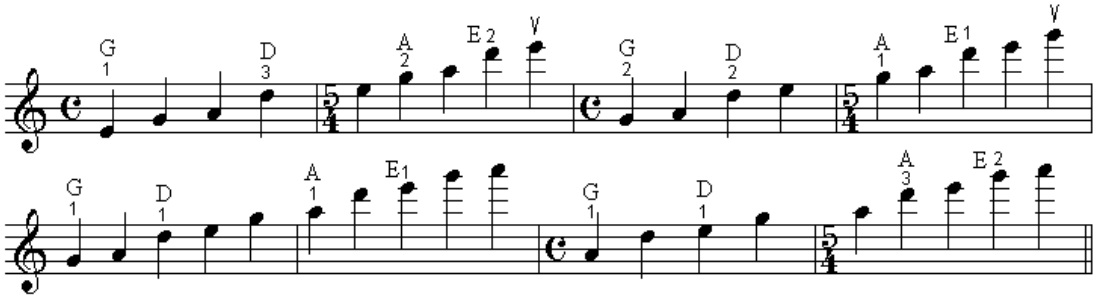
This simple warm-up routine, which includes every finger on every open-string note, is a time-effective way to maintain the 'skeleton' or basic structure of the left hand finger placement.

Intonation is an aspect of tone production: while tuning these notes to the open strings listen to the *quality* of the note, not only the pitch.

- Play (for example) first finger A♮, a tone above open G. Play without vibrato. Roll the finger very slightly higher and lower, to find where the open A has the widest sympathetic vibrations.
- Notice the sound gaining and losing edge: when the finger is in the very centre of the note, the sound has an open, 'soft-centred' quality, and the open A vibrates the most. When the finger is a fraction too high or low, the sound becomes tighter and slightly hard-edged, and the open A vibrates less.

Use slurred as well as separate bows. Play through as a continuos sequence.





Hold down fingers

- In the examples practise holding the fingers down as marked. Afterwards the passage will feel much more secure even if in normal playing you do not hold them all down.

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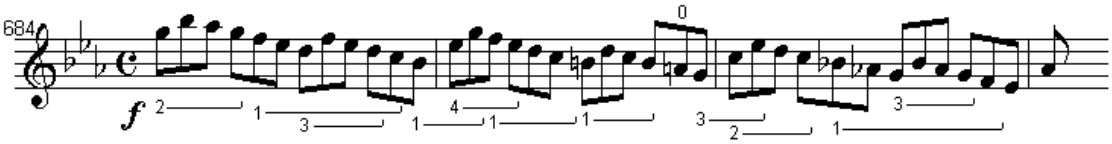
Example

42 Etudes ou caprices, Kreutzer
No 5, bar 1



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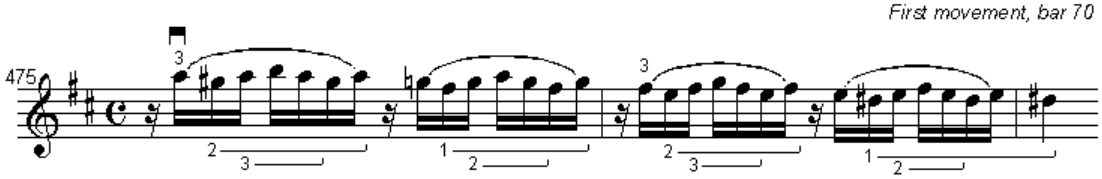
Example

Violin Concerto no. 4 in D, K218, Mozart
First movement, bar 70



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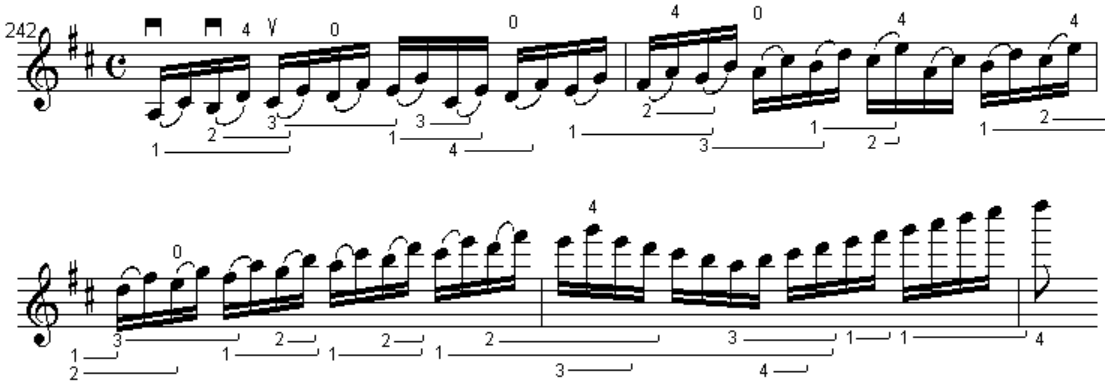
Example

Violin Concerto in D, op. 61, Beethoven
First movement, bar 97



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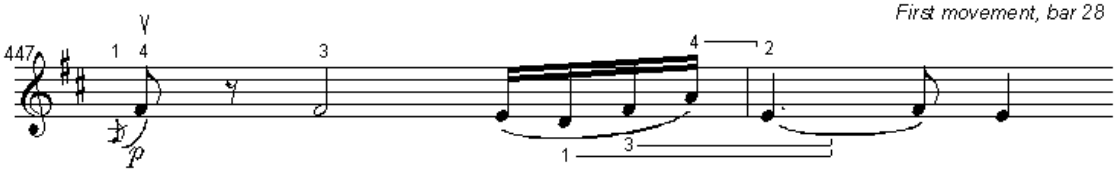
Example

Violin Concerto in D, op. 35, Tchaikovsky
First movement, bar 28



- The line indicating 'hold down the fourth finger' is a reminder to prepare the second finger E♮: place it on the string before lifting the fourth finger. For a moment, until you lift the fourth finger, all four fingers will be on the string.

After getting the feeling of placing the second finger E♮ between the held-down first and third fingers, and the feeling of the four fingers on the string together, the hand and fingers will feel more secure – even though you would not hold all these fingers down in normal playing.

Next month's BASICS