

# Tone production

Divide the area between the bridge and the fingerboard into five 'soundpoints':

**Soundpoint 5** Near the fingerboard (light, fast strokes)

**Soundpoint 4** Between the fingerboard and the middle

**Soundpoint 3** Middle, between the fingerboard and the bridge

**Soundpoint 2** Between the middle and the bridge

**Soundpoint 1** Near the bridge (slow, heavy strokes)

Learning a phrase or passage on all five soundpoints is one of the 'master methods' of practice on any string instrument. It sensitizes you to the feel of the bow in the string, leading to immediate improvement in tone and the finest control. It does not make any difference what the actual soundpoint is that you will use eventually.

Near the bridge the string has a great deal of tension and feels hard under the bow. The bow has to be very heavy and slow to be able to engage the string. Near the fingerboard the string feels looser and softer. The bow has to be light and fast to avoid crushing the string.

Every sound produced by the bow comes from 1) a particular speed of bow with 2) a particular amount of pressure. Both of these are dependent on 3) the tension of the string at that particular distance from the bridge.

- Begin on **soundpoint 5**. Use fast, light strokes. Experiment with the proportions of speed and pressure to find how to make the strings vibrate as widely as possible, with a ringing, resonant tone.
- Repeat the phrase or passage playing only on **soundpoint 4** with the bow slightly slower and heavier.
- Repeat on **soundpoint 3**. Because of the heavier bow pressure and slower bow speed, either use less bow or slow down the tempo of the phrase or passage.
- Repeat on **soundpoint 2**. Play at a slower tempo. Sink the bow heavily into the strings, feeling the different 'give' of the hair and wood of the bow.
- If possible, repeat on **soundpoint 1**. Play the phrase or passage at a very slow tempo. The bow speed will have to be extremely slow, and the bow pressure extremely heavy.

Example

Violin Concerto no. 2 in D, K211, Mozart

Practise the first phrase:

Soundpoint 5 *pp*

Soundpoint 4 *mp* Repeat many times

Soundpoint 3 *f*

Soundpoint 2 *ff*

Soundpoint 1 *f* Very slow and heavy

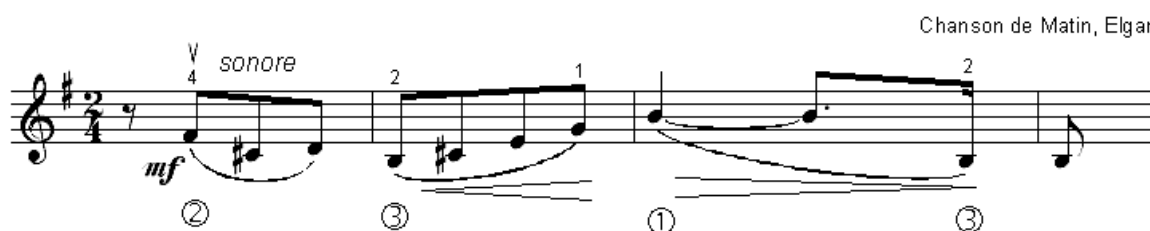
Example 1



Practising on each soundpoint produces excellent results in fast passages as well as in slow, although you can normally miss out soundpoint 1:



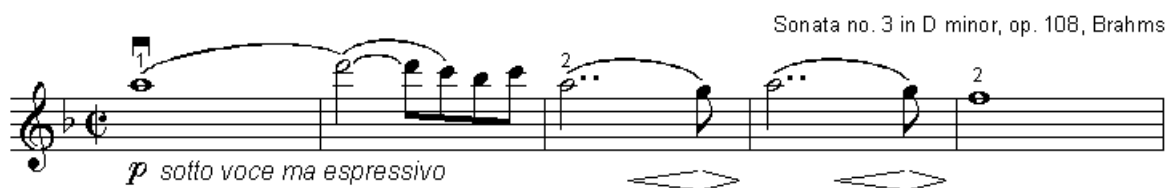
Example 2



① ② ③ = soundpoints.

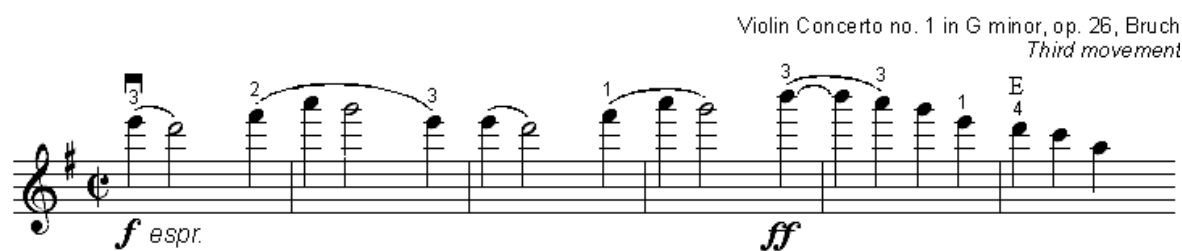
This practice method works even when the soundpoint does not stay the same in the actual passage. In this example the bow might change between about soundpoint 3 and soundpoint 1. Nevertheless, after practising it on individual soundpoints the phrase will feel easier and under much more control when you play the true dynamics and soundpoints.

Example 3



It is also good to practise on each soundpoint whatever the dynamic of the actual passage. This example is probably best played somewhere around soundpoint 3-2. Nevertheless, practise on all five soundpoints, from the fingerboard to the bridge.

Example 4



Practise high-position passages on each soundpoint from the fingerboard to the bridge, even though the short string-length means you should actually be playing near the bridge. You simply have to play extremely lightly near the fingerboard to get proportions of speed, pressure and soundpoint that work.

Another approach is to begin nearer the bridge and squeeze the five soundpoints closer together. In this passage you could practise on soundpoint 3 - 2½ - 2 - 1½ - 1.