

Classical shifts

Classical shifts are also known as Beginning shifts because you move the hand on the finger that begins the shift.

Ascending, shift up on the lower finger until you are in the right position to place the upper finger directly on its note. The note that you shift to with the lower finger is called the intermediate note.

In (1) the note you are shifting to, fourth finger B^b , is in 5th position. Shift with the first finger to 4th position. This note, F, is the intermediate note. Having arrived there simply drop the fourth finger on B^b .

Although the sound of the shift is an octave, the actual distance of the shift is a perfect 5th, B^b to F played first finger to first finger.

Descending shifts work in the same way. The actual distance of the octave shift in (2) is again a perfect 5th (fourth finger to fourth finger).

Intermediate note practice method

Example

Violin Concerto no. 5 in A, K219, Mozart
Third movement

- (1) Play the two notes of the shift, and the intermediate note, with equal tone.
- (2) Play the intermediate note shorter.
- (3) 'Ghost' the intermediate note (play with harmonic-like left finger pressure and almost no bow pressure, and use the smallest possible length of bow stroke).
- (4) Still thinking of the intermediate note, play A followed by F^\sharp as if there were no shift – simply two notes one after another.

Example

Sonata in E minor, op. 82, Elgar
Third movement

Romance in G, op. 40, Beethoven

Example

The intermediate note does not have to be in the same position as the final note of the shift. In Example 4 the fourth finger A^b is an extension. The intermediate note, D, sets the position for the following notes and should be kept down on the string.

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

Example

Memorising the feel of the position

Galamian likened the left hand to blind people feeling their way around an object with super-sensitive touch. This is most obvious in shifting, where the hand orientates itself by the feel of the strings, neck and shoulder of the violin, and all the other physical conditions of playing the arrival note.

Romance, op. 11, Dvorák

Example

Memorise the feeling of the first and fourth finger in 3rd position

Take the hand away from the neck of the violin

- (1) Learn the feeling of playing fourth finger F, third position. Also learn the feeling of playing first finger C, third position, since this is the finger the position is based on.

Feel where the thumb is positioned on the neck; the tip of the fourth finger contacting the string and the shape of the finger; the balance of the hand on the finger and at the wrist; any contact of the hand with the body of the violin or the neck; the position of the elbow, and so on.

- (2) With the first finger on C (shown as x-notes), play the fourth finger F. Memorise the feeling of the fingers/hand/arm. Then take the hand away from the neck of the violin and drop it to your side (shown as //).

Return the hand to the violin, finding exactly the same feeling of the C and the F as before, and play the F in tune. 'Hear' the note mentally in advance. Do not tap the string with the finger to test it before playing it with the bow. Do not look at the fingers and string – *feel* where to place the notes.

- (3) Practise the shift using first finger C as an intermediate note. Feel the fourth finger F based on the first finger C.