

Fingertips

The precise area of the fingertip that contacts the string affects the entire left hand and arm. If the fingertip placement is correct then everything else falls into place, i.e. the space between the fingers at the bass knuckle joint or middle joint, the angle of the knuckles to the fingerboard, the position of the wrist and upper arm, and other factors including the position of the thumb.

Space between fingers

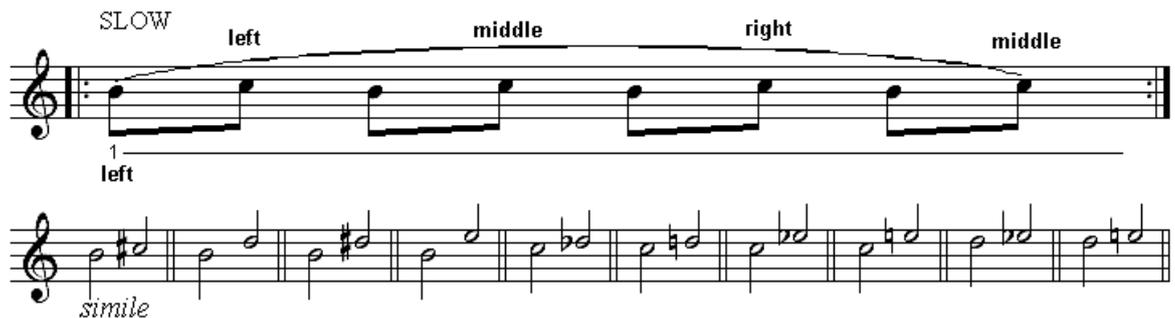
The amount of space between fingers naturally varies from player to player and from one group of notes to another, ranging from a real gap to no space at all. What is important is that there is never any *sideways pressing* between two fingers, for example squeezing the fourth finger against the third finger when playing the third finger.

The space between the fingers is partly determined by which part of the fingertip stops the string. For example, on the A string if you place the first finger B slightly more on the left side of the fingertip (from your point of view), and place the second finger C next to it more on the right side of the fingertip, the fingers will open sideways at the base joints. If you place both fingers on the left side of the fingertip the fingers squeeze together.

The following simple exercise offers a quick way to gain complete control of the fingertip placement:

- Hold a lower finger down on the string (e.g. the first finger), while raising and dropping a higher finger (e.g. the second finger).
- Keep the lower finger exaggeratedly more on the left side of the fingertip.
- Raise and drop the upper finger first on the left side of the fingertip, then on the middle, and then on the right side of the tip.
- As you do this the space between the two fingers will widen and narrow (the pitch of the note staying the same).

Example



- Remember to keep the *lower finger* on the *left* side of the tip (not as a rule, but in this exercise).

Angle of base knuckle joints to fingerboard and elbow position

The more the finger is placed on the left side of the fingertip, the more the knuckles are angled up, i.e. the base joint of the little finger is clearly much higher than the base joint of the first finger; the more the finger is placed on the right side of the fingertip, the more parallel are the knuckles with the fingerboard.

The hand placement varies according to the specific notes. The default should set the knuckles neither at too much of an angle in relation to the fingerboard, nor too parallel to it, but at some natural point in between.

The elbow helps the fingers by taking a slightly different position for each string, i.e. a little more towards the E string when playing on the G string, a little more towards the G string when playing on the E string. This movement is called 'elbow steering'. The more the fingers are placed on the left side of the fingertip, the more the elbow wants to move to the right. The more to the right the fingertips are placed, the more the elbow wants to move to the left.



Example 1

- Play a short phrase several times, each time experimenting with higher or lower knuckles to find the most comfortable hand and elbow position.
- Repeat the phrase several times while moving gradually between a left, middle and right fingertip placement:



Finger rounded or straight

When you place a finger more on the tip than on the pad, the finger naturally curves. When you place the finger more on the pad, the finger naturally straightens.



Example 3

- Notice the curve of the fourth finger and ease of movement when you play on the tip.
- Experiment with placing the fourth finger more on the pad: notice the finger straightening and probably feeling weaker and less mobile.

Left wrist

The fingertip placement also affects the positioning of the left wrist, particularly when using the fourth finger. In Example 4 notice how the left wrist wants to stick out when the fourth fingers are placed too much on the pad.

In low positions the ideal is for the left forearm and the back of the hand to be in a straight line. The wrist neither collapses in nor pushes out, the hand bending neither to the left nor to the right.

Pushing the wrist outwards when using the fourth finger may actually lengthen the distance the finger has to reach (if the wrist pulls the base joint of the finger further away from the neck of the violin).



Example 4

- Practising by exaggeration, play the phrase once or twice with the wrist slightly giving in, and with the fourth finger very much on its tip. Afterwards the fourth finger action will feel very easy, as will keeping a straight line at the wrist.