
BASICS

The ‘track’

Vibrato

In vibrato the finger rolls backwards and forwards on the string. The line on which the finger rolls is called the ‘track’. One vibrato cycle: 1) the finger on the note in tune, 2) the finger rolled back, flattening the pitch slightly, 3) the finger rolled forward again to the in-tune note.

To see the track clearly, place the third finger on the string in first position. Slowly rock the fingertip up and down the string, as though doing a slowed-down vibrato. Roll the finger forwards until the fingernail touches the string; roll backwards on to the pad of the finger. As you do so, press the finger into the string unnaturally heavily so that you impress a ‘groove’ into the tip of your finger, i.e. a line pressed into the skin by the string. Then with a ballpoint pen draw a line along the groove before it disappears. The line extends from slightly right-of-centre at the nail, running slightly diagonally back towards the pad of the finger.

Note: the ‘slightly right-of-centre’ placement depends entirely on which finger is used, the shape of the finger and the specific note being played. The best guide to follow is usually what feels natural, balanced and comfortable. But as a general principle in first position the left-of-centre placement is least for the first finger, slightly more for the second finger, and most for the third and fourth fingers.

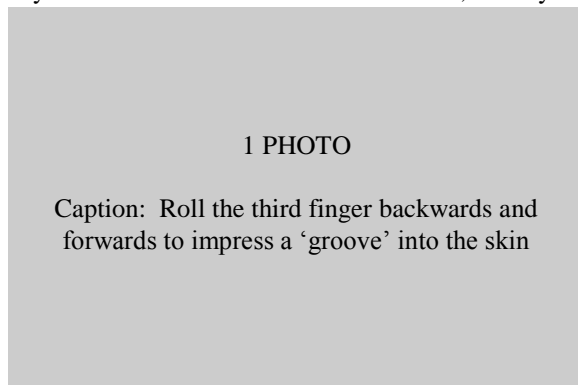
Although the width (and speed) of vibrato varies constantly with the changing expression of each note and phrase, in general how wide should the rolling movement be? In other words, how much of the track should be used?

The area of the line nearest to the nail is normally avoided because if the finger rolls that far forward the finger will tilt over towards the bridge (it should normally lean the other way towards the scroll, as shown in Figure 1). So draw another line across the track about three millimetres away from the edge of the nail (i.e. you should now have a sort of ‘t’, with a long vertical line and short horizontal line near the nail).

This still leaves a long line running back to the centre of the pad of the finger. Vibrating the whole of this distance is still much too wide. So draw another short horizontal line just one or two millimetres away from the first horizontal line (i.e. a ‘t’ with two horizontal bars very close together).

While sometimes vibrato will be wider than this, this portion of the track is the length of the ‘rolling’ that the vibrato will generally require.

If you are used to a wider vibrato than this, when you make it narrower the vibrato may seem inaudible and



expressionless in comparison, and you quickly go back to the wider vibrato that you had before.

- Use non-vibrato as a continual reference point to prevent the vibrato becoming over-wide (and slow).
- After playing non-vibrato, a wide vibrato seems *very* wide in comparison, and much more variety of colour comes into the playing.

Figure 1

BASICS

Stopping the string

'Rolling' a finger into the string in order to stop the string is an extremely subtle but crucial aspect of technique on the violin and viola. It is so slight as to be generally unnoticeable, and yet without it the left hand may become tense.

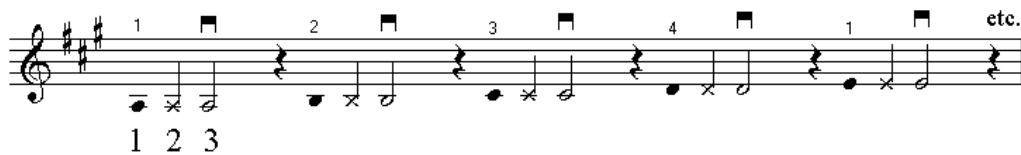
Rolling fingers into the string is the same as the movement of the fingertip in vibrato. In vibrato, rolling makes the pressure of the finger heavier in the forward movement of the vibrato and lighter in the backward movement, i.e. 'heavy-light, heavy-light'.

(Place the palm of your hand flat on a table-top, relaxing the weight of the arm into the hand. Now slightly roll the hand from one side to another: feel how the side of the hand presses into the table more than the flat of the hand does.)

In the same way, rolling fingers into the string (instead of pressing vertically downwards), automatically stops the string enough without pressing, and the least thumb counter-pressure is needed.

Sometimes there is no rolling at all, and the fingers do simply drop down on to the string (e.g. in a slurred ascending passage). Sometimes the fingers are dropped at such an angle that they automatically have the slightest 'roll' on impact. The rolling is then the first vibrato 'ping' of a note, so that dropping the finger and beginning to vibrate are one action. Sometimes the fingers may be rolled into a note more obviously, such as when playing the first note after a rest.

Play a two-octave scale of A major in first position, with a pause between each note.



- 1 Silently place the note in tune, with the finger in its normal, rounded shape. This is written as a stemless note.
- 2 Then roll the finger back on to the pad, away from the tip and lowering the pitch (Figure 2). At the same time release the string, so that the finger rests on the string as lightly as if to play a harmonic (written as an x-note). Completely relax the thumb.
- 3 Roll forward on the pad of the finger. As the finger rolls, the string will automatically be pressed down towards the fingerboard, without much counter-pressure from the thumb.

Roll until the tip of the finger is on the right pitch, and then play this note pizzicato.

Feel how relaxed the thumb is. There may be a feeling of it sliding upwards a little, as the finger goes down, but it hardly has to press against the neck at all.

Repeat, playing the note with the bow instead of pizzicato. Play the in-tune note only, without a slide - make sure the bow stroke begins at exactly the same moment as the finger arriving at the in-tune note.

1 PHOTO

Caption: The first finger ready to roll forwards into the note A.

Figure 2