
BASICS

Bowing patterns

The great Russian violin teacher Yuri Yankelevich offers a clear example of the importance of always attending to building secure foundations. The standard of his 18-year old students at the Moscow Conservatoire was naturally very high, and for any of them to be playing Paganini Caprices or any other virtuoso repertoire was nothing unusual. Yet lesson after lesson he would work hard with them on Kreutzer Etude No. 2 using bowing variations.

Using bowing variations means to apply a specific bowing pattern to the whole study, e.g. bowing each group of four notes with two notes slurred, two notes separate, or three slurred one separate, and so on. The simple repetition, and the variety of note patterns that are covered, makes this one of the single most effective methods of practising and improving bow control.

Example

Etude No. 2 Kreutzer

The image shows two staves of musical notation for Kreutzer Etude No. 2. The notation consists of eighth notes in a steady rhythm. Above the notes, there are groups of four notes, each with a '4' above it, indicating a four-note bowing pattern. The first staff shows the beginning of the piece, and the second staff shows a continuation of the pattern, ending with 'etc.'.

Most editions of Kreutzer include a selection of useful bowing variations to use. Ivan Galamian (International Edition) gives over 60 patterns; Lambert Massart (*L. Massart, L'art de travailler les Etudes de Kreutzer*, Bibliothèque-Leduc) 150 patterns.

However, for normal daily use, or when used as a potent warm-up exercise, the following few patterns may easily be enough to bring about noticeable and rapid improvement in tone and easy handling of the bow.

Begin with basic combinations of slurs over two, three or four notes:

Example

The image shows two staves of musical notation, each with four numbered examples of bowing patterns. The patterns are: (1) two slurred notes, two separate notes; (2) two slurred notes, two slurred notes; (3) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note; (4) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note; (5) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note; (6) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note; (7) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note; (8) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note.

Also contrive awkward groupings, e.g. two slurred one separate (No. 9); combine different length slurs (No. 10); include hooked bowings (No. 11); contrast slurs with separate bows (No. 12):

Example


The image shows one staff of musical notation with four numbered examples of advanced bowing patterns. The patterns are: (9) two slurred notes, one separate note, one slurred note, one separate note; (10) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note; (11) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note; (12) two slurred notes, one slurred note, one separate note, one slurred note.

Using one bowing pattern at a time, play through the whole study entirely at the extreme heel, using very little bow. Repeat at the middle and point. Repeat with more bow in the lower half; middle, and upper half. Repeat using whole bows. Repeat the whole series starting up-bow.

How much bow to use, and what dynamic, depends on the aspect of bowing you wish to practise. Playing at the point you may decide to play *forte*, using only a few centimetres of bow (13); another day you may wish to practise broad strokes using a full third of the bow for the slurs (14); playing at the extreme heel, you may decide to use only a few centimetres of bow, playing *pianissimo* (15):

BASICS

(13) At the point (14) At the point (15) At the heel



ff 3 centimetres *ff* One third *pp* 3 centimetres

Example

The most important thing is to listen carefully to the tone, catching every sound that comes out of the instrument. Each note must be clean, rounded and resonant, free of scratch or whistle.

One of the single most common faults in tone production is in bowing too far from the bridge with either too weak or too pressed a tone. Pay careful attention to the point of contact, playing near enough to the bridge for the string to provide sufficient support for the bow. One of the most powerful exercises for tone production consists of taking one group of notes and playing it at several different distances from the bridge. Repeat each bar several times, looking for exactly the right proportions of speed of bow and weight:



Near fingerboard Between finger-board and middle Middle Between middle and bridge Near bridge

Light, fast Slightly heavier, slightly slower Slightly heavier, slightly slower Heavier, slower Heavy, slow

Example


Another approach is to take bowing patterns from the pieces that you are currently playing, and apply those patterns to the study:

Sonata in F, K377, Mozart
First movement




Example

You may wish to choose fingerings that cause string-crossing problems for you to have to solve:



Violin Concerto in D minor, op. 47, Sibelius
Third movement

energico
poco f



Example

Play in the same part of the bow, with the same stroke and at the same tempo, as the passage:



Another way to incorporate bowing patterns into your daily work is to use them on scales:



Example