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## BASICS

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# Placing fingers

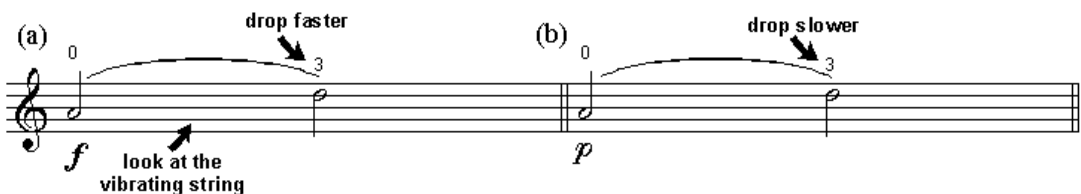
One aspect of left hand technique is to place the fingers on the string softly rather than landing them with an audible ‘thud’ on the fingerboard. In order to be able to move around the fingerboard with great lightness, speed and ease, the fingers need to use as little energy as possible as they shorten and lengthen the strings.

When you play an open string, the string vibrates between the bridge and the nut. When you put a finger down on the string, shortening the string length, the string vibrates between the bridge and the finger. The finger is therefore like a ‘moveable nut’. The important issue is for the string lengths to change as quickly as possible from one to another – not with as hard a finger impact as possible.

Everything we play is either ascending or descending, with either slurred bows or separate bows. Of the four combinations possible, it is only slurred ascending notes that require the left fingers to fall with real speed and energy – and even then only when playing *forte*. All the others – descending notes either slurred or separate, or ascending separate bows – gain no benefit from the fingers placed hard, fast, or with any sort of ‘thudding’ impact on the string.

The finger must drop the fastest when playing slurred notes, ascending, on one string, *forte*:


Example



While bowing the open A string in example 1a, look at the place on the string where the third finger is going to drop to play the D. Playing *forte*, the string visibly swings widely from side to side. The third finger is dropping on to a moving surface, not on to something static or stationary. While it should still not hit the fingerboard audibly, if the finger does not literally ‘stop’ the string quickly there is a brief moment of ‘fuzz’ in the sound before the new string length is properly established. In example 1b the finger can drop more slowly without fuzz because the sideways vibration of the string is less.

However, if the new finger is a ‘prepared’ finger there is absolutely no advantage in dropping the finger with any sort of percussive impact however loud the note. Prepared fingers are any finger on a new string played either slurred (2a) or separate (2b); or any lower finger on the same string – i.e. playing down from the fourth finger to the second finger on the same string (2c), the second finger should be ready on the string before lifting the fourth.

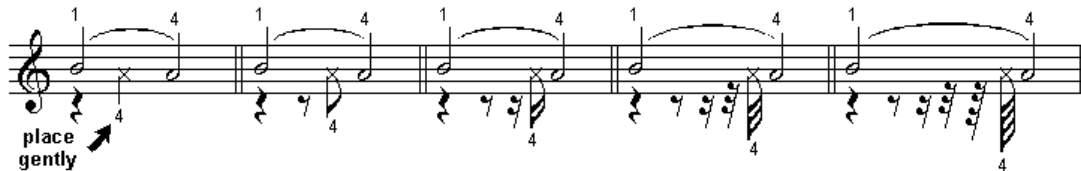
Example



All that matters in 2a is that the third finger stops the string to create the new string length before the bow plays the note. Whether this is done so that there is a ‘thud’ as the finger hits the fingerboard – or whether the finger lowers so slowly that first it touches the string lightly and then gradually stops it harder – makes no difference at all, so long as the finger ends up in place before the bow moves. Any extra impact from the finger must be a waste of energy.

# BASICS

The timing of placing the finger can be represented as follows, and can be turned into a useful technique-building or warm-up exercise:



Example

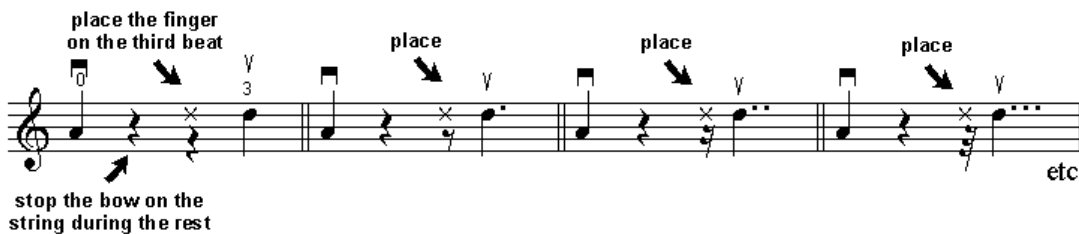
- The x-note represents placing the fourth finger silently on the string in advance of the bow. Place the finger later and later, but always with the same lightness and lack of impact as in the first bar.
- While playing the B allow the bow to begin to move towards the D string. Feel the movements of the fourth finger and the bow as one combined action, not two actions that need to be co-ordinated with each other.

In one sense every finger is 'prepared' since the finger must always be ready before the bow moves to play any note. There is clearly nothing to be gained in example 4 by striking the fingerboard with an audible impact. It is the speed and timing that is important – i.e. the third finger creating the new string length for the D before the bow begins to move each up-bow – not the impact of the finger.



Example

Practise co-ordination by experimenting with placing the finger early:



Example

- At the end of each down-bow stop the bow on the string. Place the third finger on the string without moving the bow (shown as an x-note). Bow the note.
- Make the rest gradually shorter and shorter. As you do so the speed of placing the finger will have to increase until the finger is dropping on to the string very quickly. However quickly it falls, continue to place the finger gently throughout with no audible sound of the finger hitting the fingerboard.

One effective practice method is simply to finger a phrase without the bow. The fingers should go 'pitter-patter' around the fingerboard rather than strike with any sort of percussiveness (unless specific finger accents are required on a particular note for extra articulation). Heavy or 'thudding' fingers may not only make the left hand cumbersome, but may also work counter to the music by creating unwanted accents.

Playing example 6 without the bow, drop the fingers with speed but as lightly as possible. In particular watch out for the fourth finger G on the A string: this finger should not 'bang' the fingerboard:



Example