Positioning the left hand

The single most important factor in positioning the left hand is which part of the fingertip contacts the string. This affects the angle of the base knuckle joints to the neck of the violin.

- If the third or fourth fingers are placed too much on the left side of the fingertip (from the player's viewpoint), the steep angle of the knuckles causes the fingers to collapse on to each other (below, left).
- If the third or fourth fingers are placed more on the right side of the fingertip, while the first finger is placed slightly more on the left side, a fan-like shape develops in the fingers. The knuckles are more parallel with the neck and the fingers remain upright and independent (below, right).

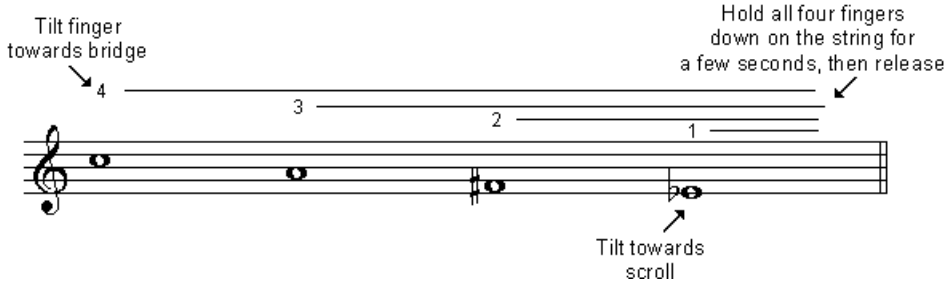
When lowering on to the string and raising again, the shape of the finger should ideally stay more or less the same throughout, whether on the string or off. If the hand is positioned as shown in the photo on the left, the fingers have to straighten slightly to reach their notes. With the fingers more upright they can keep their curved shape.

Everything depends on the actual notes. There are plenty of occasions when the position shown on the left would be entirely appropriate. As a general rule, however, the most natural, free movement of the fingers is from the base joint, not dropping partly with a movement of the hand. This is easier when the fingertip placement enables the hand to widen at the base joints (below, right).

Reaching-back exercise

Most hands benefit from being partly balanced on the upper fingers, the lower fingers reaching back to their notes.

You can do this silent exercise with the violin, or on the back of your hand.



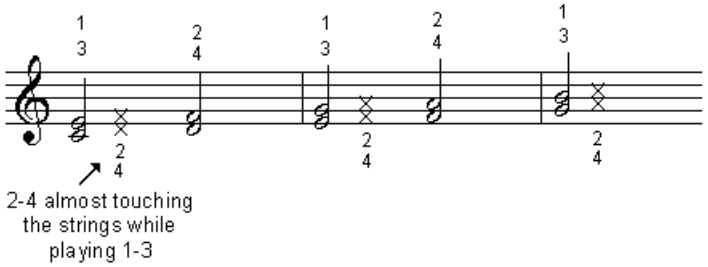
- Hold down the fourth finger. Keeping it on the string reach back as far as you can with the third finger, and then the second and the first, ending up with all four fingers on the string widely spaced.
- Exaggerate widening at the base joints by tilting the fourth finger towards the bridge, and the first finger towards the scroll.

BASICS

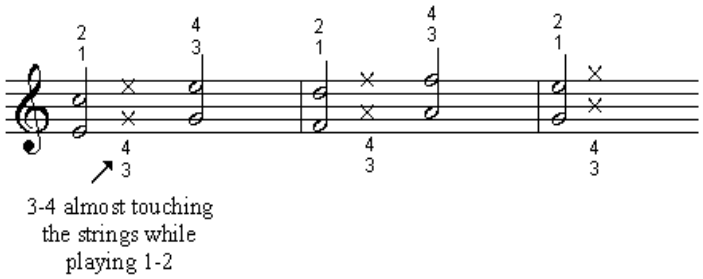
Practising double-stops

One of the most straightforward methods of building a good left hand position is simply to practise double stops. Thirds are an obvious choice, but broken sixths and fourths are very good too.

- Practising thirds to benefit the hand position, exaggerate by hovering 2–4 over their notes, almost touching the string, while you play 1–3:

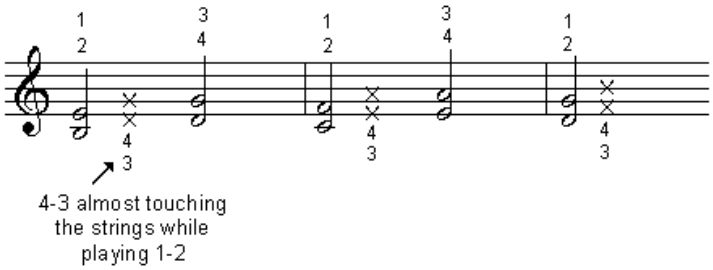


- Practising broken sixths, hover 4–3 over their notes, almost touching the strings, while you play 2–1:



Broken fourths may be even more helpful at encouraging the fingers to stay above the strings because you have to bring the hand round much further.

- Hover 4–3 over their notes, almost touching the strings, while you play 1–2:



Open as widely as you can between the first and second fingers when playing these double stops.

Note the 'V' shape between the first and second fingers (right). This is created by placing the first finger more on the left side of the fingertip, while placing the second finger more on the right side.

Using the fingertip placement is the way to bring the base knuckle joints closer to the neck, and the fingers over the notes. You can easily create great tension if instead you keep the first and second fingers parallel (previous page, left) and use too much clockwise forearm rotation in an attempt to get the knuckle joints parallel with the neck.