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## BASICS

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# Playing from the hand

A slight downward curve at the wrist (below, left), when playing in the upper half, is often more natural than a straight line from the forearm to the back of the hand. However, there are two reasons for supporting the wrist to prevent or lessen the curve.

- 1 Playing into the string with the hand, which is a major element of right hand technique, injects tone directly into the string without needing weight from the rest of the arm. This has the effect of raising the wrist slightly in the direction of a straight line.
- 2 Supporting the wrist channels power from the arm or hand directly into the string. If the right wrist collapses in the upper half, power may be lost because the energy does not get as far as the bow – it ‘leaks out’ at the wrist. Then it is natural to ‘try harder’ because of the lost power, and the playing becomes full of effort.

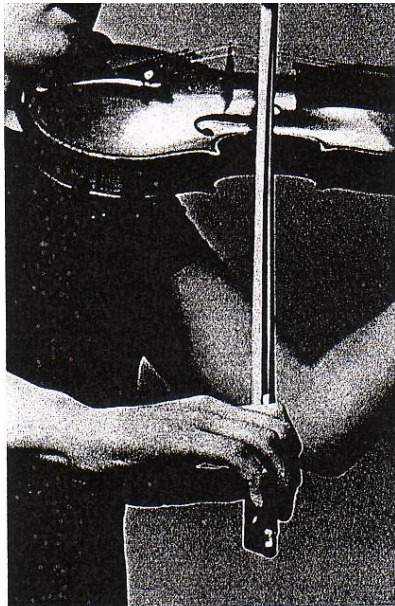
The photo on the right shows the wrist when it is ‘supported’ in the upper half. The amount shown is a slightly exaggerated for the purposes of the illustration: if you can see the wrist raised, it is probably too much.

Supporting the wrist to produce sensitive and expressive bow contact directly from the hand, rather than from the whole arm, follows the principle of ‘the more subtle, the closer to the fingers’.

This principle says that the more delicate the action in the bow arm, the closer to the hand or fingers the action originates; the bigger, the more powerful the action, the closer to the upper arm the action originates.

The softest, most subtle changes of tone may require only a slight change of contact of the fingers on the bow; playing heavy, three-string chords may require a large and powerful movement of the upper arm. In between these two extremes, many bow strokes use some degree of ‘playing into the string from the hand’.

The same principle of ‘the more subtle, the closer to the fingers’ applies equally to the left arm. Shifting is led from the fingertip, rather than from the forearm or upper arm. Vibrato is also led from the fingertip, regardless of whether it is a hand or an arm vibrato.



(a) Natural slight downward curve



(b) Supporting the wrist to channel power into the string

All the different proportions of arm weight and hand weight (leaving aside other factors that contribute to tone) are needed for different strokes and effects: all arm, no hand; all hand, no arm; half arm weight, half hand; and all the combinations in between.

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## Warm-up exercise

The movement of the hand in this exercise is so slight as to be almost invisible. Before doing it, make a large version of the movement in the air without the bow:

Put your arm out in front of you as if playing on the D string, with a straight line from the forearm to the back of the hand. Then lower your hand to an angle of 45° while keeping your forearm level with the floor. This is a 'high wrist'. Return your hand to the straight-line position.

Use a tiny amount of that movement in the following exercise.

- Play the following pattern in the upper half, using only the hand movement to play the stresses. Do not play each note with a fast-slow bow-speed: use one, even bow-speed for the whole bar. Use the arm to transport the hand and bow along the string, and move the hand down from the wrist to make the sound.
- Lever the bow into the string with the hand moving at the wrist. Do not press the first finger to exert pressure, or turn the hand on to the first finger. Feel the extra weight from the hand distributed evenly amongst the fingers.

## Application to the general repertoire

- To practise producing expression from the hand, or to practise supporting the wrist when playing *f* in the upper half, play from the hand more than usual, i.e. go to the other extreme and raise the wrist slightly.

Example ❶

Example ❷

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