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# BASICS

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## Spiccato

### Understanding that the bow hold does not matter

In a way, you do not need to 'learn' how to play *spiccato* at all, any more than you need to learn how to bounce a ball. You know that if you throw a ball directly down at the ground, it will bounce up vertically, and if it hits the ground at an angle, it will bounce off at an angle. You know by instinct, and through trial and error.

Playing *spiccato* is just as natural. You do not even need any special bow hold. Although the fingers affect the stroke in various ways, the bow hand and fingers should not be the first thing you think about when playing *spiccato*. You can prove this very easily by playing *spiccato* while holding the bow in your fist instead of with a proper bow hold.

- Experimenting on one note, hold the bow in the middle of your fist, as though holding a hammer. Play *spiccato* in various parts of the bow in the lower half.
- Try longer and shorter strokes; faster and slower; higher and lower bounce; higher and lower in the bow; more and less tilt of the bow hair, from playing on the side of the hair to playing with flat hair.
- At each place in the bow play a perfectly good, clean *spiccato* simply by moving the bow with your arm and guiding the bouncing of the hair on the string with natural instinct.

Once it is clear that even when holding the bow in your fist you can play a perfect *spiccato*, playing it with a normal bow hold seems very easy.

### Up not down : play *spiccato* like a pianist

The feeling of playing *spiccato* is that the bow comes up out of the string, not that it goes down into the string. Think up–up–up–up, not down–down–down–down.

Watch pianists playing short staccato notes, the equivalent of *spiccato* on the violin.

They do not appear to make a downward movement of the finger into the key to play each note, but more an upward movement *away* from the key. There is a sudden acceleration at the very bottom of the downward movement, like touching something quickly to see how hot it is. This creates an illusion that the key has been struck by the finger coming up, not going down.

Playing *spiccato* with the bow is the same:



The feeling is one of pulling the *spiccato* out of the string, like a pizzicato, rather than of moving the bow down into the string. The arrows represent the curved nature of the bow stroke: catch the string at the bottom of the curve:



