

BASICS

Drop-outs

Every note in a fast passage must be clear. Clarity is more important than sheer speed, since fast passages usually sound more brilliant when played a fraction more slowly – but with every note clear – than when played a little faster but with some of the notes not clear.

Notes that ‘drop out’ are notes which, in a group of notes that should be even, are played shorter and/or more quietly than the surrounding notes. The most common notes to drop out are notes before or after a change of bow, string or position. Other factors, such as not completely stopping the string before the bow plays it, or lifting fingers too early, may also cause notes to drop out.

- Equalize notes that drop out by playing them *longer* and *louder* than the surrounding notes.

Example 1

Nigun, Bloch

Suppose you notice that you cannot really hear the notes before the shifts (marked '+'), i.e. the scale comes out as follows (x-notes = the note barely sounding):

- Practising by doing the opposite, play the drop-outs longer and louder. Play the other notes up to tempo:

Afterwards, you may be amazed at how much clearer, and therefore more brilliant, it immediately sounds

Example 2

Violin Concerto no. 1 in G minor, op. 26, Bruch
Third movement

(1) The string crossing (marked '+') may make the triplet come out as strong–weak–strong. The middle note may be weakened further if the third finger is not ready on the string in time before the bow. The x-notes represent the notes barely sounding. (2) Repeating several times, practise playing the middle note longer and louder than the outer notes.

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Violin Concerto in E minor, op. 64, Mendelssohn
First movement

Example ③

(1) The third note of each triplet, occurring before a change of bow and a wide string crossing, must be given its full musical value to avoid being lost altogether. (2) Practise playing the drop-out note longer and louder.

42 Etudes ou caprices, Kreutzer
No. 30

Example ④

(1) The B is often lost altogether, partly because in this phrase the A string is an easily-missed middle string between the D and the E strings; partly because psychologically you may already be looking ahead to gripping the E string with the bow to play the staccato fourth note. (2) Practise by accenting and sustaining the A string.

Partita no. 3 in E, BWV1006, J. S. Bach
Preludio

Example ⑤

(1) Give the middle string of each slur its full musical value to avoid the note dropping out like this. (2) Sink the bow deeply into the middle string of the slur.

Violin Concerto no. 4 in D, K218, Mozart
First movement

Example ⑥

(1) The notes marked '+' will drop out if the fingers are lifted too early. (2) Practise playing them longer.

As with any purely technical practice method, it is worth remembering that 1) if you know exactly what you want musically without overlooking a single note, and 2) if you *listen*, then such a thing as a note dropping out will occur less often in the first place. Nevertheless, some notes need more technical strengthening than others.