
BASICS

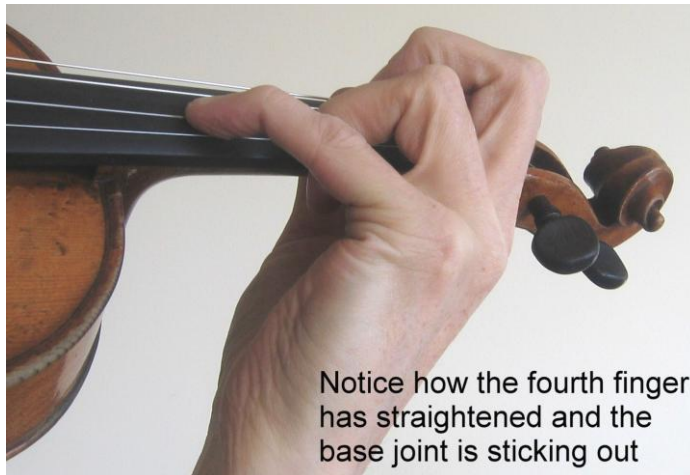
Fourth finger base joint

The ideal is for the fingers of the left hand to be rounded, and for the shape of a finger not to change as it moves up and down. Naturally, the shape changes as the finger reaches over to another string, or extends out of position and so on; but the principal up-and-down movement is with a curved finger, moving from the base knuckle joint, without any forwards-and-backwards movement in it.

Yfrah Neaman likened the fingers to helicopters, or vertical take-off planes, which hover above the landing-pad before landing, as opposed to ordinary aircraft which approach the runway from afar.

Many players find that the fourth finger has an unwelcome tendency to collapse in the middle joint and straighten (Ex. 1), which may make the finger feel clumsy, weak or tense. Instead of simply dropping onto the string, the tip of the finger moves almost horizontally to reach it, because it is starting from so far away; and after lifting off the string, the finger often has a funny resistance point somewhere in the middle of the movement which causes a 'bump': if you move the finger slowly, you reach a point where it seems to be unable to go any further, and then it suddenly snaps back faster and further than you intended.

Ex. 1



Notice how the fourth finger has straightened and the base joint is sticking out

This condition can always be remedied. First, it helps if you place the fourth finger more on the tip of the finger, which makes the finger naturally assume a curved shape; if you place more of the pad of the finger on the string, the finger will want to straighten.

The area of the fingertip makes a difference as well. It may help if you think of keeping the fourth finger more upright. Note the different part of the fingertip contacting the string in Examples 1 and 4. Also make sure that the hand position is not balanced too much on the first finger, with the fourth reaching up, rather than balanced (when appropriate) on the fourth finger, with the lower fingers reaching back.

In Example 1, note how the base knuckle joint sticks out, and the angle of the hand is turned too far away from the neck of the violin. The finger may have to straighten simply in order to reach the string. Although the illustration in Example 4 is an exaggeration, note the 'V' shape between the second and fourth fingers. In Example 1 the fingers are more parallel.

The way to achieve this fan-like spread of the fingers is to widen the hand at the base joints. Because of the natural curve of the knuckles, widening brings the base knuckle joint of the fourth finger closer in to the neck of the violin without having to use extra forearm rotation.

At first, widening the space may feel awkward and unnatural; yet it is actually quite easy to form a new habit which you quickly get used to and forget about. The following simple exercise rapidly transforms the entire shape and balance of the left hand.

(1) Place the fourth finger, on its tip, high up on the G string somewhere in the region of a B (Ex. 2).

Push the base knuckle joint of the fourth finger down as though trying to touch it against the string.

Allow the base joint to remain soft, giving and 'springy'.

You might like to practise first on the back of your hand (Ex. 3). Then find the same feeling on the string.

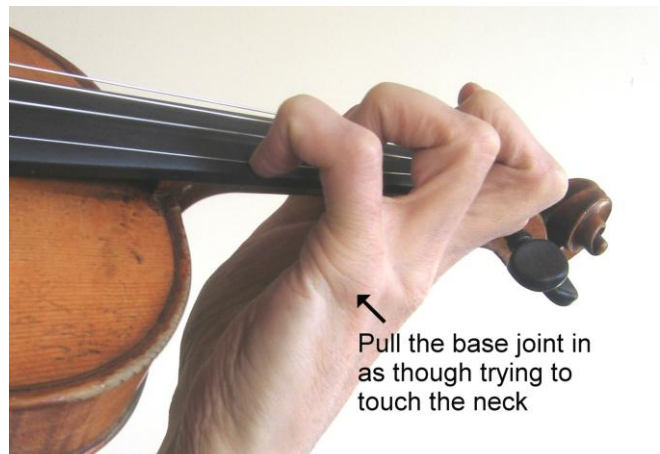
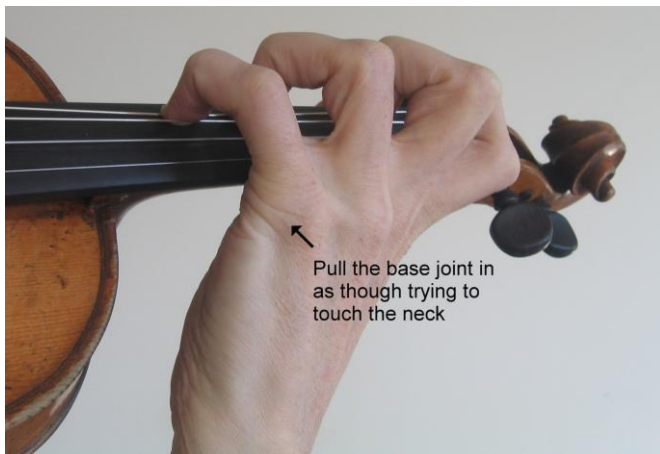
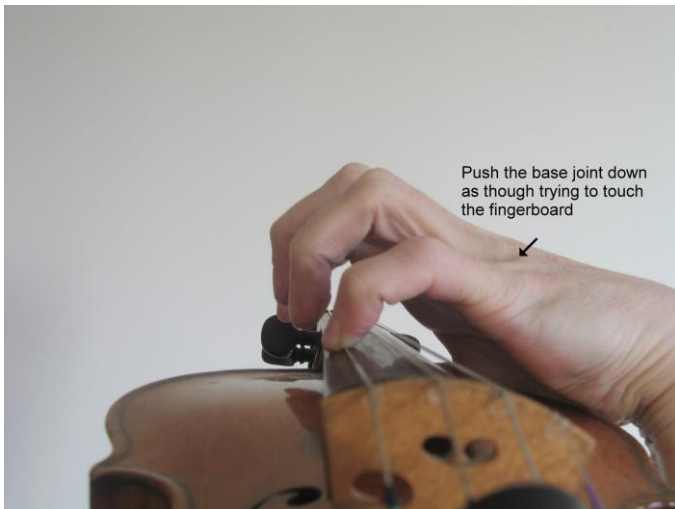
BASICS

- (2) Then place the tip of the fourth finger on the note D on the G string (Ex. 4).

Pull the base joint in as though trying to touch the neck of the violin.

Feel every joint in the finger, hand, and wrist soft and springy. Do not contract a single muscle anywhere in the hand except those directly required to pull the base joint in towards the neck.

- (3) Repeat with the tip of the fourth finger on the D string, on the note A.
(4) Repeat on the A string, on the note E.
(5) Repeat on the E string, on the note B (Ex. 5).



Although the ultimate aim is to remain soft and springy, what you are doing in this exercise is very extreme. If the muscles in, say, the thumb or wrist seem to react by contracting (“tensing”), it will not cause any harm. As you do the pulling-in exercise, simply notice where you are tightening, do the best you can to release, and try to increase the space between each base joint. Do the exercise for only seconds at a time, and relax the hand completely between each go.

If there is any feeling of resistance or difficulty, gradually and continually push against the boundaries (while always remaining gentle with yourself, and never ever forcing). By progressing little by little, you may be amazed at how quickly you discover an entirely new ability to keep your fourth finger curved and moving freely from the base joint.

BASICS

