
BASICS

Changing position

Shifting from one position to another is usually one of the most common causes of faulty intonation, lack of facility, and lack of confidence; so any time spent improving the accuracy and ease of shifting brings great rewards in overall technical security.

There is no such thing as a shift

The best approach to shifting is a musical one, where you simply decide that *there is no such thing as a shift*:

Arpeggio sequence used by Sevcik and Flesch

(1) (2)

Sul G

Note Note Shift Note Note Note Shift Note Note Note Note Note Note Note

(1) The thing to avoid is that you play one note, then make a shift, then play the next note.

(2) Instead, forget about the shift and play with a feeling of ‘note–note’.

When you stop thinking about shifting, the immediate improvement in ease and accuracy is easy to feel and hear; and the correct timing occurs naturally and instinctually.

Understanding timing

The time for the shift must be taken from the note before the shift. Ivan Galamian seems to suggest the opposite (see insert); but surely he must have meant that it must not *sound* as though the note before the shift has been shortened, since one of the commonest faults heard in shifting is that of *not* shortening the note preceding the shift.

You can easily demonstrate that the time for the shift *must* be stolen from the note before the shift. Play a slurred arpeggio with the metronome set to click on each note. The common tendency is to begin to shift at the moment that the finger is actually meant to be arriving on the new note:

Metronome click

Finger stays on the E to the very end of the note

Finger begins to move on the beat

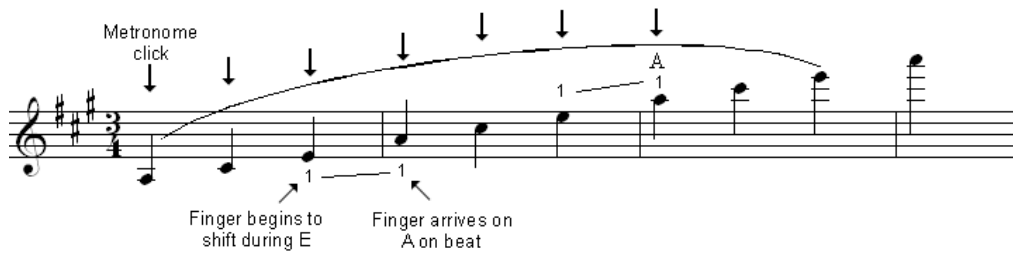
This causes an array of problems since it upsets rhythm and co-ordination. Not shifting early enough may also lead to left hand tension: many difficulties in shifting arise from tightening the hand in reaction to the natural feeling of hurry that is caused by leaving too late.

Instead, in order to arrive in time exactly on the beat you have to begin to shift during the previous note, not at the end of it:

One of the commonest faults found in shifting is that of shortening the note preceding the move...Conscious attention to the rhythmic value and sound of the note preceding the shift is imperative until correct habits are formed.

Ivan Galamian:
Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching
(New Jersey, 1962), 26.

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As long as the arrival note is exactly in time, it will not sound as though the note before the shift has been shortened, whatever you do. This is true even if the note before the shift is played very short, with the rest of the note's value being taken up by the shift. This becomes even more true, the faster the passage.

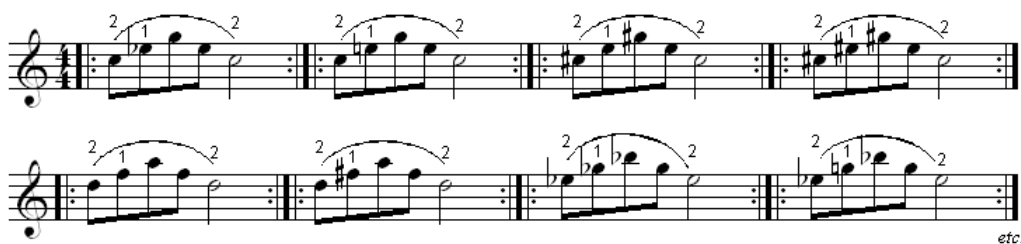
The only way that the note before the shift can sound as if it has been shortened, is *if you play the arrival note of the shift too early*.

- As a general rule cut the value of the note before the shift by half and use the remainder of the time to shift.
- Then gradually lengthen the note before the shift, and increase the speed of the shift, until it occurs at exactly the right moment, i.e. a fraction of a second before the shifted-to note should sound.



Arpeggio shifts

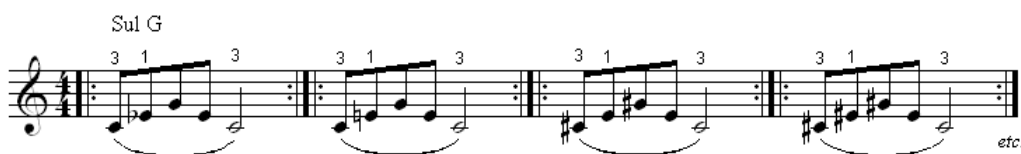
While there may be a perception of there being no such thing as a shift, at the same time you need to be familiar with the 'geography' of the fingerboard. Make up shifting exercises using the same fingerings that you use in playing arpeggios. Afterwards, the arpeggio will have a feeling of 'playing itself':



Variation:



The shift up from third finger to the first is another common fingering to practice:



Practise the 4-1 arpeggio shift in the same way:

