
BASICS

Intonation

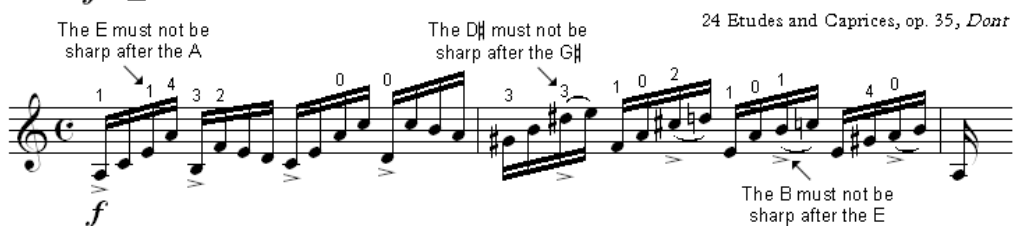
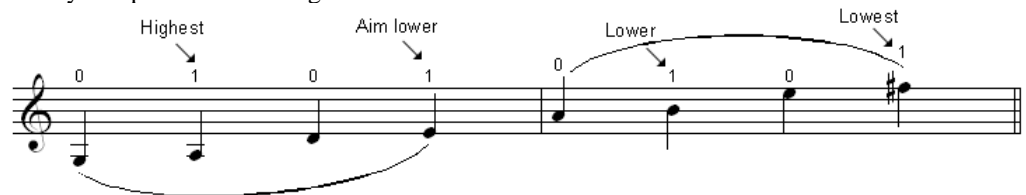
Beyond the most elementary levels of playing, notes that you play out of tune are usually out of tune in the same direction each time. They will not sometimes be sharp, sometimes flat, completely randomly. This makes intonation much easier to correct, since it is entirely predictable.

For example, a common reason for notes being out of tune lies in the way a finger must compensate when it moves across the strings to play a note one fifth higher or lower.

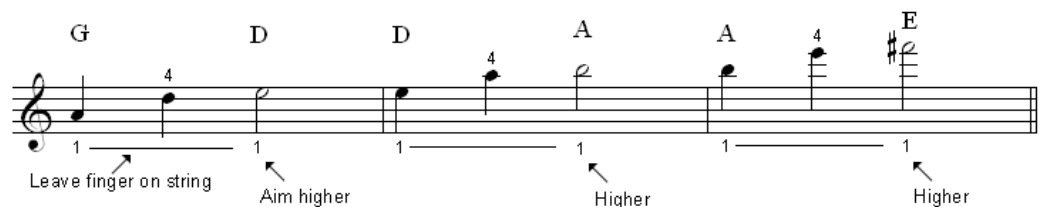
Perfect fifths: back, across, or forwards?

Playing in low positions, when you move from a lower string to a higher string the finger must often aim not 'directly across' to the next string, but 'slightly back'.

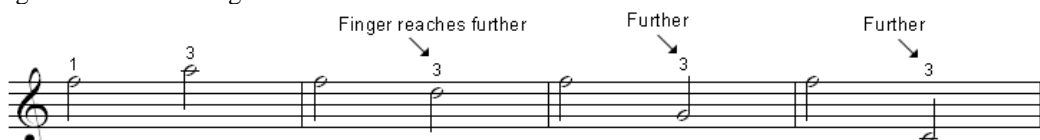
For example, if you play first finger A on the G string, then first finger E on the D string, B on the A string, and F# on the E string, you have to pull the finger back very slightly flatter each time, to avoid getting progressively sharper on each string:



In high positions, when playing from a lower string to a higher string you have to do the opposite and push the finger slightly forwards:

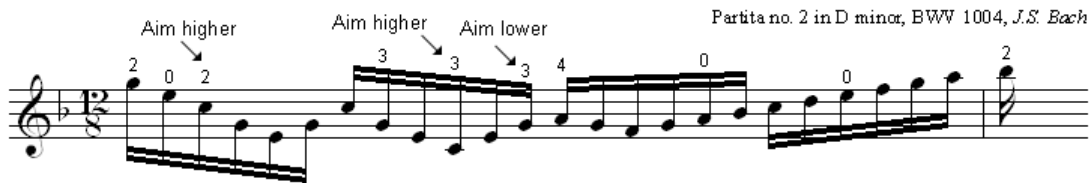


Playing from a higher string to a lower string works the other way round. Playing, say, first finger F on the E string, followed by third finger A, the feeling of the distance of the major third seems less than if you play third finger D on the A string:



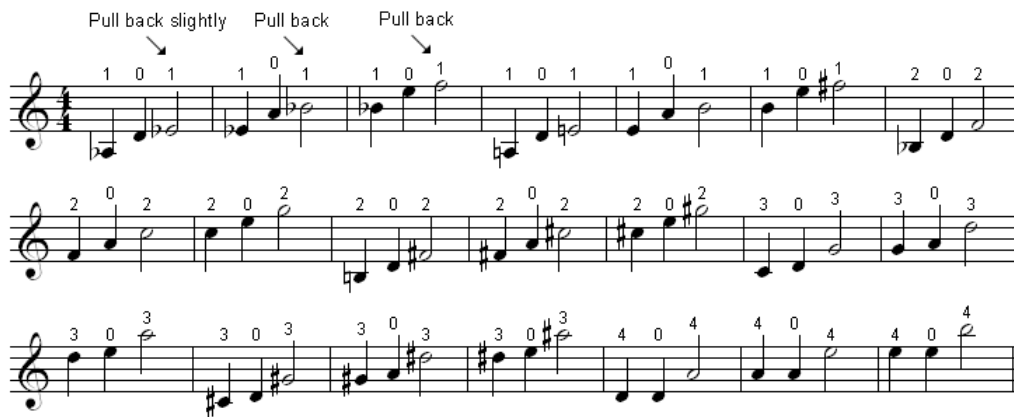
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This is because of the extra distance the finger has to reach to get to the A string, or the other strings. There is more widening at the base joint, which makes it seem a larger distance.



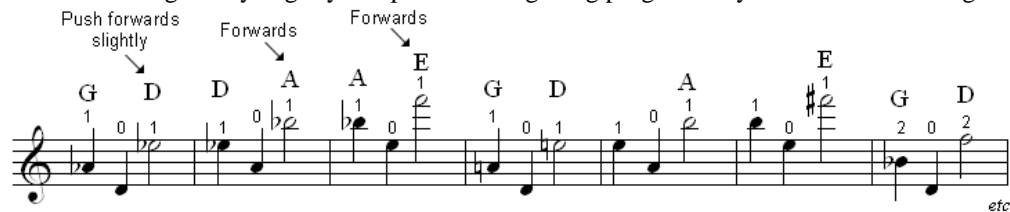
Warm-up exercise 1

Use the following simple sequence as an instant warm-up exercise. It quickly sensitises the left hand to the necessary degree of 'pulling back', leading to an immediate improvement in all-round intonation:

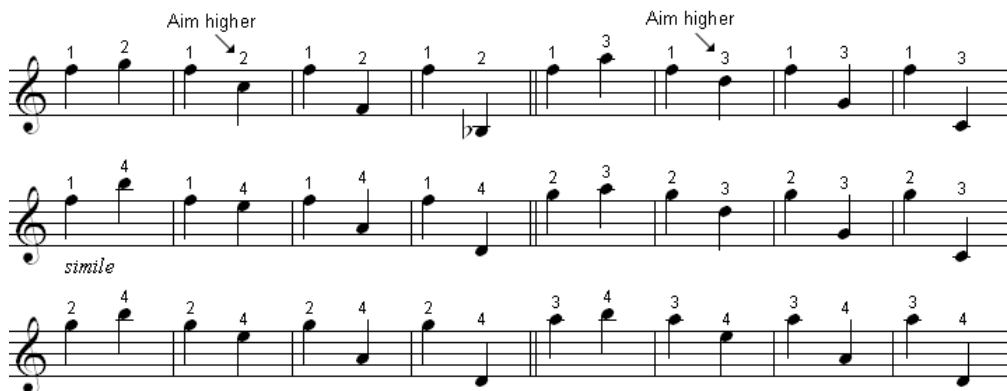


Also play the exercise backwards, starting with the last note and finishing with the first, to practise aiming the finger higher to the next lower string.

Also play exactly the same stopped notes but one octave higher, with the same open strings in between. Now you have to aim the finger very slightly sharper to avoid getting progressively flatter on each string:



Warm-up exercise 2



Play the same pattern one octave-and-a-half higher. Now you have to aim the finger very slightly flatter each time, to avoid getting progressively sharper on each string.