
BASICS

Accents

Accents are as much an essential part of musical language as consonants are to speech. They range from a simple stress, or leaning onto a note, to the most powerful attack.

Smooth or accented

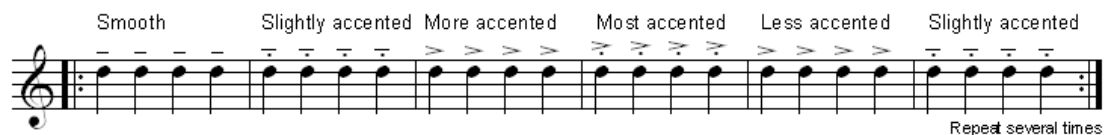
There are three ways to begin a note: you can creep in, starting from a whisper, and then almost immediately develop the sound into the desired tone of the note; or you can ‘begin as you mean to continue’, so that the sound at the very beginning of the stroke is the same as the sound a little later on; or you can begin more loudly at the start of the stroke and then diminuendo, which is then an accent.

There are three main factors in tone production: bow speed; pressure (or weight) into the string; and the distance from the bridge. To play a perfectly even stroke, the factors that make up the stroke must be even, so the speed and pressure, and the distance of the bow from the bridge, must remain constant throughout the stroke.

To play an accent, the pressure-pattern is ‘heavier-lighter’, and the speed-pattern ‘faster-slower’.

As a quick warm-up exercise, play repeated strokes on one note while changing between smooth and accented strokes.

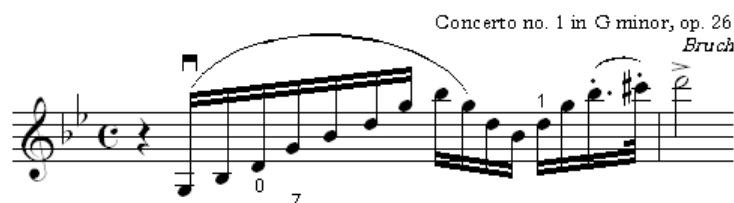
- Begin very smoothly, with perfectly even speed and pressure.
- Gradually make the strokes more accented (gradually more heavy-light, fast-slow) until they are very heavily accented.
- Then gradually make them smoother until they are perfectly even again.



Accented string crossing

The way to make string crossings smooth, during slurred *legato* passages, is to have the hair of the bow close to the new string that you are going to move to; it is also essential to begin the movement towards the new string while playing the note before the string crossing, rather than moving to the new string at the exact moment that you want the note to sound.

However, you do not always want string-crossing to be smooth. Even in an apparently smooth-looking string-crossing passage, you may want to play more sudden string-crossings in order to maintain the articulation:



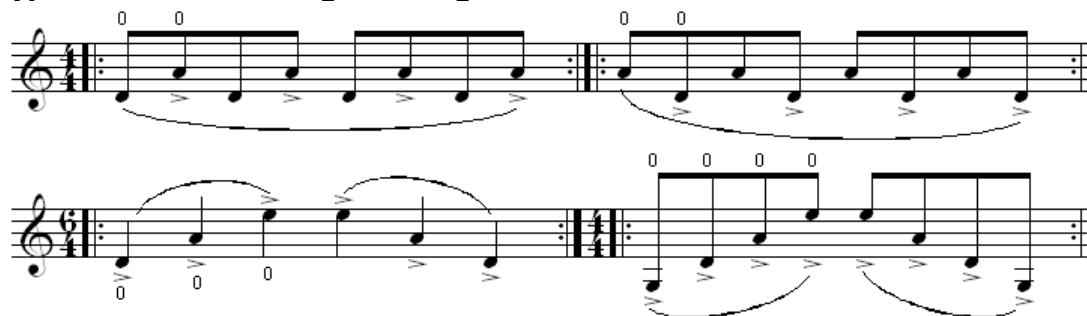
In this passage, the **first note** speaks clearly because it is the first note in the bow, and may even be played with an actual accent; the **second note**, second-finger B^b, speaks clearly as the finger drops on to the string; then, do not ‘smudge’ or blur the beginning of the **third note**, open D, by crossing too smoothly.

Instead, cross slightly later and faster, and start the open D with an accent to make it speak.

The same applies through the rest of the group: the **third-finger** G on the D string speaks easily; do not cross too smoothly to the **first-finger** B^b on the A string; the **third-finger** D on the A string speaks easily; do not cross too smoothly to the **second-finger** G on the E string.

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Typical accented string crossing exercise



Leading bow accents from the vibrato

Leading bow accents from the left hand, not the right hand, is one of the great keys to both technical and musical artistry. Vibrato accents are emotional by nature, and raise the playing onto an entirely new level of expression.

A vibrato accent is made by suddenly giving extra vibrato width or speed, or both at the same time, to a single note to make it stand out from the notes around it. You can also play a series of consecutive notes with an individual vibrato accent on each.

Vibrato accents have a similar feel to a bow accent. The bow pattern is fast-slow and heavy-light; the vibrato is fast-slow and wide-narrow.

Instead of making an accent with the bow, and giving that note vibrato, don't think so much about the bow. Make a vibrato accent, and let the bow 'look after itself'.

Of course you have to give different degrees of attack in the bow as well; but when you lead the bow accent from the vibrato you can have a sense of there being only one action, not two: instead of moving the bow, and at the same time vibrating, you can pretend that the vibrato is the trigger that sets off the bow, so that they feel like two sides of the same thing.

(1) In the first two bars the triplet quavers are played *spiccato* in the lower half. Lead each bow accent with a vibrato accent. In the second two bars play the up-beat quavers with very little bow, then make the accent with the vibrato.

(2) The crotchets are played along the string in the upper half, each with a slightly fast-slow and heavy-light stroke. Lead them from the left hand with a vibrato accent on each. In the second bar the notes are like a written-out appoggiatura, so the G is played with a 'lean' and a diminuendo to the F#. Instead of playing a heavy-light stroke coloured by vibrato, lead the stroke (and the expression) with a vibrato accent.

Playing accents in the air

To get more of the feeling of leading accents from the vibrato, practise by 'playing' a phrase with the bow in the air just above the string:

- Mime the bow strokes, with the same fast-slow bow speed for each accent, and at the same time make an exaggeratedly large vibrato accent in the left hand.
- Feel the 'trigger' for the movement of the right arm in the vibrato.

Make sure there is no feeling of doing two things at the same time, i.e. making a fast-slow movement in the air with your right arm, while at the same time making a sudden, violent vibrato movement in the other.

Instead, feel the two actions as one thing. Focus only on the vibrato and let the right arm 'look after itself'.

Afterwards, playing the passage normally, you will find a new feeling of freedom, co-ordination and expressiveness.