
BASICS

THINGS TO DO ON SOUNDPOINTS

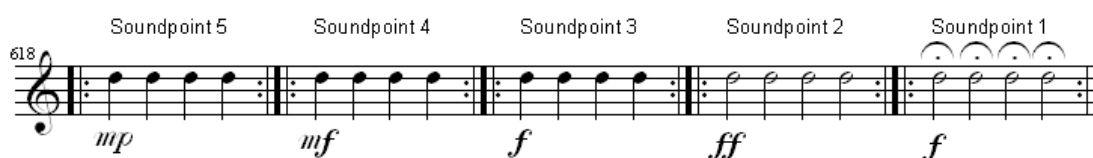
The most important thing is to be master of all the different resistances of the string in the playing area between the bridge and the fingerboard. Where the bow is, in relation to the bridge, is called the point-of-contact.

Divide the point-of-contact into five 'soundpoints': near the bridge is soundpoint 1, near the fingerboard is 5, the centre point is 3, with 2 and 4 centred between the others.

Near the fingerboard the bow speed will be faster, and the weight lighter; near the bridge, slower and heavier.

Exercise 1

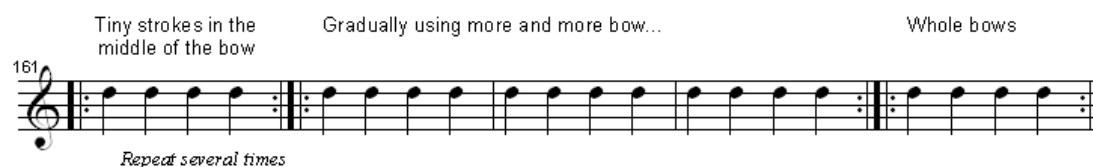
The first thing is to play whole bows on each soundpoint. Start on 5 without vibrato. Adjust the speed and weight until the string vibrates at its maximum. Then add vibrato. The tone should be free and resonant. Then move to soundpoint 4, without vibrato, and repeat.



Exercise 2

Whole bows are clearly more of a challenge to sustain evenly than shorter strokes. Applying this to Exercise 1, instead of beginning with long bows, play short, continuous strokes in the middle of the bow, sustaining evenly.

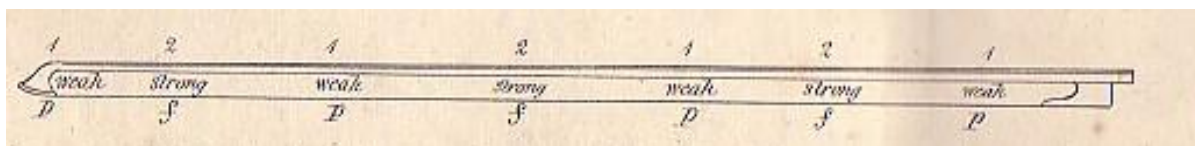
Then gradually add more bow, all the time concentrating on the evenness of the speed, pressure and soundpoint, until arriving at whole bows. Then gradually reduce the bow length until arriving back at the middle of the bow with short strokes.



Do this on each soundpoint as before.

Exercise 3

One of the best exercises for sound, taught by Leopold Mozart, Capet, Yankelevich, Casals, Dounis, Galamian and Dorothy DeLay, is simply to pulse the bow on long sustained notes. The same exercise was taught by Campagnoli, a famous player, composer and teacher at the end of the Eighteenth Century. This is how it is represented in the Campagnoli Violin School, circa 1800:



Begin with one strong-weak in a bow, then 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16, 20 and 24.

Applying this to soundpoint practice, you can do the entire pulsing exercise all on soundpoint 5 (very gently), then on 4, 3, 2 and 1.

Dorothy Delay called exercises like these 'sensitivity exercises'. After doing them, you will notice an extraordinary new sensitivity to the feeling of the hair of the bow in the string, the give of the wood of the bow, and the different feelings of contact of the fingers with the bow - and the results in the sound speak for themselves.

Next month's Basics looks at how to avoid playing constantly too near to the fingerboard.