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# BASICS

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## Left fourth finger

You can often see great violinists avoiding using the fourth finger whenever they get a better effect, or the right effect more easily, by using the third. It is the music that matters, not a display of one fingering over another.

Use the fourth wherever it feels comfortable and secure; use the third if it offers more, so long as doing so does not cause bad fingerings or intonation problems. This does not lead to the pitfall of 'if you don't use it, you lose it' if at the same time in the background you keep up a continual program of strengthening and development exercises for the fourth finger.

### See it as being strong

Before exercises, however, the first step is to see the fourth finger in your mind's eye as being strong. If it feels tight or weak, or if you cannot get the vibrato you want, many times a day picture the finger how you would like it to be.

The trick of mental visualization is to picture the ideal image with such clarity that it becomes more real than whatever the current fact may be. Mental visualization is based on knowledge, not on wishful thinking. The more information you have, the more detail and clarity you can work into the mental picture:

- Picture the finger completely free, strong, supple, and capable.
- Picture a cartoon version of your hand with an 'electric' fourth finger.
- Remember the feeling of strength in one of the other fingers, and then 'transpose' that feeling onto a picture of the fourth finger.
- Picture a warm, intense vibrato, the fourth finger effortlessly drawing the note out of the string.
- Picture the entire hand soft, free, relaxed, and not clenching together in any way.
- Picture the wrist free, the upper arm free, and so on.

Run these pictures through your mind as often as you can while you are playing, and whenever you imagine yourself playing. After the shortest period of doing this, you may be amazed at the results you find.

### Exercises

There is no limit to the number of ways you can develop the fourth finger to make it feel as strong and secure as the others. Practise vibrato exercises on the fourth finger, for example speeding up gradually with the metronome, playing four vibrato 'pings' on each beat. Practise single-finger scales and arpeggios using only the fourth finger. Practise trill exercises using the third and fourth fingers, and so on. Here are a few other approaches to take:

#### Dotted exercise

A useful image for fast lift-off in this exercise is of the string being red-hot:

♩ = 60-80

Touching a 'red-hot' string

Lift the fourth very fast

Drop very fast

Drop fast

Lift fast

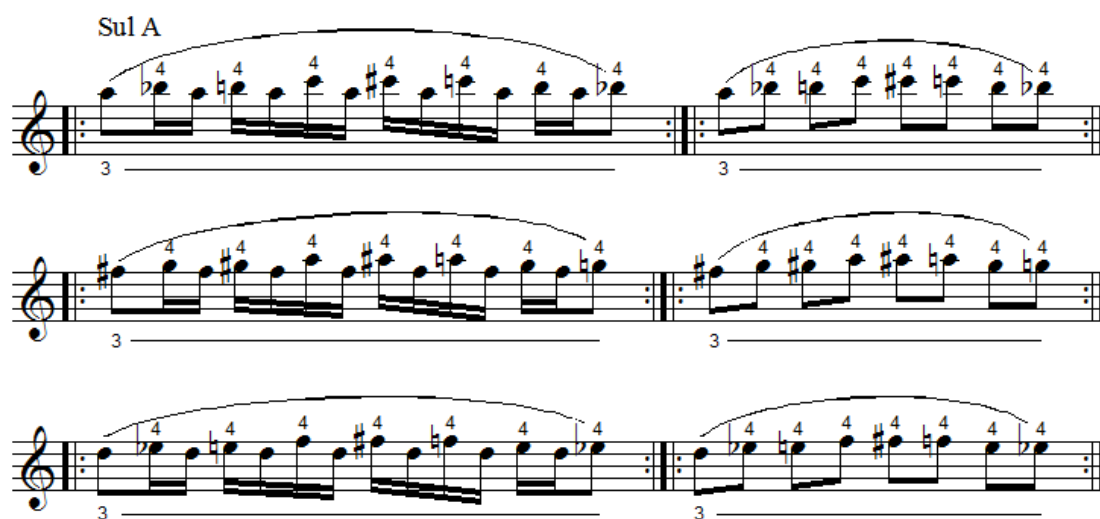
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## Sliding exercise

Sul A



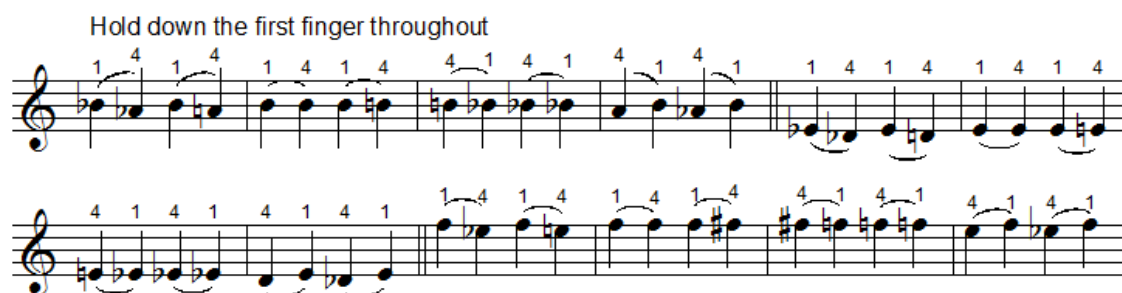
## Reaching-up exercise

Use this exercise as a quick warm-up before playing scales. Players with small hands often find that when playing the descending scale, it seems a long way to have to reach with the fourth finger (e.g. first-finger B<sup>b</sup> on the A string, to fourth-finger A on the D string). The ideal is for the hand to stay in one position, and for the fingers to find their notes within that setting. A common error is to get the fourth finger down on its note by means of a 'shift' from 1st position to 1st-position-and-a-bit, i.e. actually moving the hand a little higher up the neck after playing the first finger and before playing the fourth finger.

The notes that follow the fourth are then likely to be out of tune because the hand is now slightly out of position. Ideally, the first finger stays on the string momentarily at the beginning of playing the fourth finger. This is called overlapping ( momentarily having two fingers on the string during a string crossing), which is one of the keys to playing really smoothly and in tune.

- This exercise exaggerates the distance and makes it feel much easier for the fourth finger to reach the actual note it will play in the scale. It is good to practise whatever the size of your hand:

Hold down the first finger throughout



- Increase the reach of the fourth finger by opening the hand at the base joint. Be particularly careful not to squeeze the first and second fingers together.
- Keep the fourth finger curved throughout.
- Make sure that the entire hand remains soft, relaxed and free throughout.
- Repeat the same pattern on the other strings.

## Studies

- One of the best things to do to improve the fourth finger is simply to follow the advice of the old masters: practise all the fourth-finger trill studies in the Kreutzer Etudes and the Dont Caprices op. 35.