

SETTING UP THE LEFT HAND FOR STRENGTH AND COMFORT

Alignment

Keep your hand directly above your forearm; do not twist or cock the wrist. Imagine a line runs through your second finger, across the back of your hand and all the way down your forearm and into your elbow; keep that line straight. Remember that *the contact point on your index finger will change* from string to string – it is lowest (closest to the base knuckle) on the G string and highest on the E string. Paying strict attention to this will improve your intonation immediately.

Pronation

Relax the heel of your hand to bring the third and fourth fingers closer to the neck. Relax your index finger and thumb, allowing them to fall back; you will notice your radius rotating to the left. Your fingernails should face you as much as possible; do not turn the forearm at the ulna, as this will introduce tension. Lean on the left sides of your fingers; feel the springs, and notice how easy it is to feel the spaces between your fingers. Playing in this pronated position relaxes your thumb and the base knuckles.

Arch shape

Find the ideal arch shape (the “C”) for your fingers; the first joint should be below the second. You may find that you will need to play higher in the V made by your thumb and index finger in order to achieve this shape.

Footie

Loosen the first joint to broaden the point of contact to aid in the transfer of the weight from the arm in slow lyric playing. Do NOT flatten the entire finger or play lower in the V between your thumb and first finger; create the footie by playing slightly farther back on the pad of the finger and allowing the first joint to soften almost to the point of collapsing. If you slide each fingertip up one quarter step without moving the base joint you can easily find this shape. Flattening the first joint will also aid in high positions, while shifting, and in doublestops. Footies are particularly important for violinists with tapered fingertips. As you become more adept at using the footie you will find that:

- Your sound becomes warmer and richer.
- Your vibrato will be easier, because your first joint is looser.
- You will not squeeze into the thumb as much; there will be no feeling of pinch.
- Since your thumb is not counterpressing as much, your base knuckles will be more relaxed and springy, and your entire left hand will be more relaxed.
- Footies on *both notes* of doublestops, but especially on the bottom finger, will make them significantly easier.

Curved Fingers

Even when lifting, keep the fingers curved; they should feel a magnetism back toward the base knuckles of the hand. I call this magnetic attraction the Active C. When done in the air or on the string, the Active C will help you sense the all-important spacing grid between your fingers; on

the string, it also helps create the footie. Occasionally for a note requiring intense or wider vibrato you may find it helpful to release the Active C and allow other fingers to straighten, but before going to the next note, drop back into your curved formation!

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