

THE ABC OF SHIFTING

First Steps To The Higher Positions

A Teacher's Guide to Introducing the Higher Positions in the Full Ensemble Class (violin, viola, cello, bass)

INTRODUCTION:

Getting your students into the higher positions is easy if they meet certain prerequisites: *

- They play with independent fingers of the left hand. That is, no clusters of fingers to play a single pitch, and no fingers held down on the string longer than the correct rhythmic value of the pitch sounded.
- They locate their pitches by the way they sound, not by seeking a fixed, physical place on the fingerboards.

*See "The Beginning String Class," www.imslp.org, #414140

The secret to ear-guided mastery of the all positions lies in the observations of an 18th century composer. Giuseppe Tartini advises us, "*to play well, you must sing well!*" We will heed his words.

The most compelling musical force is the resolution of Dominant to Tonic. We will make use of this fact by employing the "ti-do" interval for our first shift in C major. We will use a half-step "slide-shift" from B to C on the A string. This shift is between steps 7 and 8 of C major, supported by the implied harmony of the accompaniment.**

Now, go to the subjoined music and give it a try!

Do the test tones (opening two measures) in first position. Remember: "Sing, then play!" It is essential that the keyboard provide harmonic support. Pizzicato or bow may be employed. In the lower grades, use pizz!

THE UP-SHIFT

The shift occurs in the third measure of Section A.

The up-shift is accomplished by keeping the first finger "B" on the string and sliding THE ENTIRE HAND (including the thumb, which is the finger that anchors

the position, and the forearm) up a half step. Note: It is NOT a physical distance travelled, it is a musical distance (a half-step)!

Advise the pupils that their ears will tell them when they have travelled the complete half step. You will not hear a *glissando* if the shift is made on the change of bow. In *pizz*, of course, it is obviated.

The violins, violas and cellos will find themselves in II (second) position. The basses will be in I and a half position (I.5).

Teachers must inspect the pupils and be certain that no pupil has left the thumb behind, a common error. If the shift has been correctly executed the left hand will look exactly as it did in first position only it is now a half step higher!

Drill Section A several times to build confidence in the pupils. Do not use a DOWN-SHIFT at this time. Just re-grip first position for the repetitions.

When the pupils are confident with the shift. Start at letter A and continue through letter B. This will get the pupils playing familiar notes with new fingering. Expect some giggling here!

REMEMBER: THE THUMB ANCHORS THE POSITION. It must not move as the other fingers are engaged. Be sure that the stopping fingers are not held down on the string longer than rhythmically required. Allow for the natural drop and rise as the music demands.

Play Section C. A French folk tune. In the new, higher position the pupils will need to adjust for shrinking inter-pitch distances. This fact prepares the pupils for the situation in even higher positions when their fingers actually share the same physical space on the string for adjacent pitches!

Challenge for cellos! In order for them to reach the E they will need to play in "extended" or open position (1 - x2 - x4) to get the *do-re-mi* in tune. Be absolutely certain that their thumbs do not slip out of position while the other fingers are engaging the string!

Play Section D. A range extension to F for violas in II pos.

Play Section E. Full octave in C major for violins.

** See, also "The Intermediate String Class," volume 2, chapter 9. www.imslp.org #286430.

THE DOWN-SHIFT

THE THUMB LEADS THE WAY!

At Section F, while sounding the second note (C), the thumb releases from the neck of the instrument and reaches back to first position and anchors there. The whole hand slides back to first position as first finger stays on the string sliding down to play the B. This action is similar to throwing out an anchor and pulling yourself down on it. It happens in an instant and will, with practice, be totally inaudible.

In fact down-shifts from any position will be done in this manner.

There is a lot of learning in this short exercise. Take the time to get it right. Your students and you will be rewarded in the days to come.

The A B C of Shifting!

The first steps for shifting to a higher position in the ensemble

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Test Notes: Sing, then play

A

Violin I pos
la ti do
Shift!

Viola I pos
la ti do
Shift!

Cello I pos
la ti do
Shift!

Double Bass I pos
la ti do
Shift!

Piano

B

Vln. II pos
1 2 1 3 2

Vla. II pos
1 2 1 3 2

Vc. II pos
1 3 1 x2 x4 x2

D.B. II pos
1 4 1 4 extended pos! 1 4

Pno. I.5 pos

The A B C of Shifting!

25

Vln. 4 1 3 1 pizz.

Vla. 3 1 2 1 pizz.

Vc. x2 x4 pizz.

D.B. pizz.

25

Pno.

F

Vln. 1 Shift! 1 2 I pos

Vla. 1 Shift! 1 2 I pos

Vc. 1 Shift! 1 2 I pos

D.B. 1 Shift! 1 2 I pos

30

Pno.