

Improving
the Tone Quality
of Your

ORCHESTRA

Dr. Michael Hopkins
University of Michigan

www.music.umich.edu/mused
mhopkins@umich.edu



GIA PUBLICATIONS, INC.
CHICAGO

Strategies for Improving the Tone Quality of Your Orchestra

Placing the refinement of tone quality as a high priority in rehearsal will greatly improve an orchestra's performance. This session will focus on the physical motions that lead to quality core tone in an orchestra. Common problems with posture, bow hold, bow arm motion, bow strokes, and ensemble will be addressed, along with solutions to address the causes of these problems. Throughout this presentation, I will show video and notational examples of the techniques I am describing. Many of these strategies can be used at all levels, from elementary to college level, as developmental or remedial strategies. Some will be more appropriate to use with younger students, some with older students.

Videos from this presentation and many additional pedagogical videos can be viewed at:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/stringtechnique/videos>

REMINDERS TO ADDRESS FUNDAMENTALS OF POSTURE AND INSTRUMENT POSITION

- Never stop addressing the foundations that tone is built upon. You are establishing habits of mind and body.

POSTURE AND INSTRUMENT POSITION

- Provide opportunities for students to improve their posture without resorting to negative feedback.
- Alternate standing and sitting.
- Adequate shoulder support as students grow.
- Nose, scroll, elbow, toe, all in a row
- Endpin length
- Relationship of cello and bass to the student's body
- Checking scroll direction of the inside and outside violins and violas.

BOW HOLD

- Moving from incorrect to correct helps them learn to feel and see the difference.
- Use cue word reminders – tap your pinky finger, bent thumb, thumb tip in the small cave, thin finger windows, fingers are friends, touch the magic silver button – whatever works for you and your students.
- Bow Hold Wall of Fame
- Form the bow hold on a straw or pencil.
- Mark an X on the corner of the thumb.
- Draw a contact point line across the fingers.
- Create a pinky house using Dr. Sholl.
- Form bow hold at the balance point.
- Teeter totter game to learn the roles of fingers in different parts of the bow.
- Helicopter with resistance game for added balance in the bow hold.
- Never give up!

PRINCIPLES OF BODY MOVEMENT WHEN BOWING

- Unilateral movements – body and bow move in the same direction.
- Bilateral movements – body moves in the opposite direction of the bow stroke.
- Daily bowing warm-ups to promote fluid motions, free from tension.
- Synchronize breathing to enhance tone quality precision and expression – inhale on up bow and exhale on down bow.

REFINEMENT OF BOW ARM MOTION

- Shadow bowing – introduce this to beginners. Can also be used as physical therapy with older students to help with fluidity and ease of motion, which are the most important things in achieving a good tone.

- Address common issues:
 - Raised shoulder (inflate and deflate the shoulder balloon)
 - Raised elbow (move the elbow magnet in the ceiling to the floor)
 - Flexion and extension of wrist
- Engage the back muscles.
- Isolate the right arm!

BOWING VARIABLES

- 1/16 rule
- Weight, Angle, Speed, Placement (WASP)
- Bowing lanes
- Alter one of the bowing variables while keeping the other two constant.
- Different strings require different WASP.
- Very important when left hand shifts to higher positions.

QUALITY TONE WHILE EXTENDING THE BOW STROKE

- Slurred staccato is useful for learning many techniques:
 - Extending bow stroke
 - Slurring
 - Improving sustained bow strokes
- Slurred staccato countdown
- Sustained bow countdown
- Crescendo on a down bow
- Diminuendo on an up bow
- Save the Bow

IMPROVING THE MARTELÉ BOW STROKE

- Use of collé – very short bow strokes initiated by flexing the fingers.
- Adding weight into the string before beginning the bow stroke while retaining flexibility in bow hand.
- Releasing pressure immediately after the attack.
- Slow practice – the bow must come to a complete stop before each note.

IMPROVING THE SPICCATO BOW STROKE

- Three approaches for improving:
 1. Holding the bow at the balance point
 2. Bow drops and lifts
 3. Starting with short strokes from the string
- Refinement using bow tilt
- Consistent contact point between hair and string

BOWING UNIFORMITY IN THE ORCHESTRA – WHAT TO WATCH FOR AS A CONDUCTOR

- Everyone is playing in the same part of the bow, with the same articulation, contact point, and amount of bow.
- Focus on uniform bow releases and recovery.
- Analyze score for uneven bowing rhythms and address the approach that will be used – this will depend on tempo, style, and interpretation.
- Staying low on the bow
- Length and space
- Being in the right part of the bow for what you are playing
- Being in the right part of the bow for what comes next
- Different styles of music require different approaches to tone production.
- More bow is not always the best solution!
- “Use as much bow as you need to make it sound good, but no more.”
—Stuart Sankey (1927-2000)
- The things we address in rehearsal tend to improve. The things we don’t address tend not to improve.

THE ART OF STRING TEACHING

MICHAEL HOPKINS

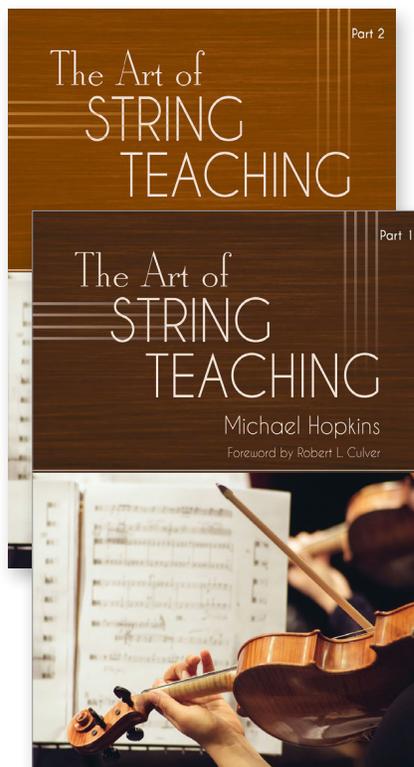
The Art of String Teaching—a hybrid of written text and high-quality online videos—is a comprehensive string pedagogy resource covering everything from the origins and history of the string family to advanced-level string techniques.

This one-of-a-kind resource has been divided into two spiral-bound parts. In Part 1, Michael Hopkins offers an orientation to string education, outlines his philosophical approach to string education, and provides four chapters on the foundational aspects of string playing for beginning string players.

Part 2 focuses on intermediate- and advanced-level instruction, touching on such topics as left-hand shifting, vibrato, bowing techniques, tuning skills, improvisation and composition, and music listening, among others. The two concluding chapters offer insight into the string rehearsal and how to run a successful orchestra program.

The appendices contain an abundance of practical and convenient teacher resources, including worksheets, flashcards, string repertoire, scales and arpeggios, a template for method book analysis, and sample assessments and rubrics. QR codes throughout the book link to online video demonstrations of string techniques, and the spiral binding is ideal for playing the included string repertoire from a music stand.

This book serves as a useful reference guide for professional orchestra conductors, teachers of group string classes, and private studio teachers. It also addresses the needs of students whose primary instrument is not strings and is suited for use in a string techniques or pedagogy course at the college level.



“Michael Hopkins brought this massive compendium of information into an organized setting useful for collegiate string methods, performance and pedagogy classes, in-service and convention settings, individuals in the field, and for the studio teacher. The American String Teachers Association and GIA Publications have been very strong in the development of these and other efforts and in promoting and supporting Dr. Hopkins and other experts in string pedagogy. This work will soon become required for the serious orchestral teachers within our schools.”

— Robert Culver, from the Foreword

Michael Hopkins is Associate Professor of Music Education at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In addition to serving as a guest conductor at string festivals across the country, he has given many presentations at state and national conferences on various topics related to string education and music technology. He has also published articles in a number of the most notable music and education journals.

G-9735 TWO SPIRAL-BOUND VOLUMES (360 PAGES, 314 PAGES). \$59.95

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN GRADUATE STUDY
AND SUMMER WORKSHOPS FOR TEACHERS

Michigan String Educators Workshop – June 20-22, 2019 – music.umich.edu/string-workshop
MM in Music Education Summer Program – 3 summers – application deadline: February 4
MM in Music Education Academic Year Program – application deadline: December 1
PhD in Music Education – application deadline: December 1



GIA PUBLICATIONS, INC.

7404 S. Mason Avenue • Chicago, IL 60638
www.giamusic.com

800-GIA-1358 • 708-496-3800 • fax: 708-496-3828 • e-mail: custserv@giamusic.com
Office hours from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (CST) • Monday – Friday