

VIOLIN GUIDE

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Learning a new instrument is exciting, rewarding and at times challenging for all beginners, however, we understand that there is pressure on the parent as well. Which is the right instrument to buy for home practice? What do they need for their lessons? What do you need to do to support this venture? This short guide has been written from our list of FAQs and will hopefully answer any questions you might have. If you need any more information, you can get in touch any time via e-mail or phone and we will be happy to help.

Books

Please discuss the recommended syllabus with your child's teacher before purchasing a book.

Choosing the Right Violin

Choosing your first violin can be a daunting task, especially for a child where it is likely that a smaller sized instrument will be needed. Here are our tips for making a good choice:

- Ask your teacher what size you need. They will measure an instrument against your arm reach and advise. They may be able to recommend a supplier.
- If possible, buy from a music shop where you can see and handle the instruments and talk to the shop owner.
- If you are buying online, try to buy from a seller who offers 'setup' of the instrument OR allow sufficient budget to take it to a luthier for setup after purchase. This can vary from a quick look-over to a full bridge and peg fitting.
- If you are buying online, buy a well-known make like Stentor, Hidersine or Primavera.
- There is a minimum price – our advice is not to buy at the cheapest point as these instruments are often not correctly proportioned and can be difficult to play and tune.

The way that a violin is set up is essential to the comfort and ease with which it can be played and also the sound that it makes. A good setup can result in an instrument that is easy to play and sounds good. Poor setup can make the violin uncomfortable to hold and play and sound less good. Some things that make a big difference are shown below.



For the best sound, when looked at from the side, the face of the bridge closest to the tail piece should be at right angles to the long edge of the instrument. The other side will look as though it is leaning back slightly.

Many cheaper instruments have bridges that lean towards the scroll, giving a weaker sound, and causing the bridge to lean further forward with tuning.

The height of the strings above the finger board: too high, and the strings will be difficult or uncomfortable to press down, too low, and the string may buzz against the fingerboard.

The shaping of the fingerboard is important. In order to achieve comfortably low string clearances, but to avoid buzzing, the fingerboard should conventionally be slightly concave (or “dished”) along its length. You can see this by looking from the scroll, along the fingerboard towards the bridge. On some cheaper and quickly made instruments, this is not the case, and some are even convex or can have lumps and bulges that make playing uncomfortable and cause buzzing.



The top of the bridge should be shaped into a nice curve. Too flat will make playing on only one string difficult. The bridge curvature should mirror the curve of the fingerboard, with the string clearance on the E string (the top string) being slightly lower than the G string (lowest string).

Top Nut: The height of the top nut above the fingerboard has a direct impact on the comfort of playing in the area where the first notes are learnt (first position). Too high, and pressing the strings down to the fingerboard will be uncomfortable. Too low, and the violin will make buzzing noises.



Tuning Pegs: The tuning pegs should turn easily and smoothly, and stay where they are put.

On many cheap instruments, the pegs are not properly round, making tuning difficult.

Strings: many entry level outfits are fitted with thin and low quality factory strings which do not enhance the playing experience. A big improvement in sound and playing comfort can usually be had by upgrading to a better quality set of strings.

Fine tuners: almost all student outfits come with fine tuners, but make sure that they work freely to make small adjustment to the pitch of the string.

Sound post: have a look inside the violin through the sound hole next to the highest string. You will see a small dowel of wood which is wedged between the front and the back, standing just behind the bridge. For the best sound quality and response, this should be upright, a good fit against the front and the back (you can only really see this with a mirror), and just behind the bridge foot.