

Red Hot Strings

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Orientation to Violin Lessons Frequently Asked Questions

Whenever a person begins learning a new skill, it takes a few lessons for the teacher to analyze a person's strengths and weaknesses along with his/her particular learning style. Similarly the student is getting used to the teacher's style.

What is the right age to start violin lessons for my child?

A child's age, level of maturity, past musical experiences and the type of learner he/she is, makes a huge difference in the way she may grasp ideas and skills on an instrument. In a strict Suzuki program children use pretend violins and gradually learn musical concepts from as young as three and a half years. These classes are not necessary but may benefit both the parent and child before a real violin is introduced. Usually young children are able to start lessons with their own violins as young as five but the learning may be slower than a child who is a year or two older.

What information is covered in the trial lesson?

If you are a beginner, here are some of the items you may expect to cover in the trial lesson.

1. Bow exercises to help one's coordination
2. Learn what a shoulder pad is, why we use it and how to apply it as well as make sure that the instrument size is appropriate for the student's body.
3. Learn some basic rhythmical and pitch analysis (the difference between high and low sounds.)
4. Listen to the sounds and learn the names of the open strings.
5. Learn what rest position is and then playing position.
6. Some of the parts of the violin and bow

If we get through all of this for the initial lesson then we've made some headway.

How often and how long should one practice?

At first your practices should include at least one 20 to 30 minute practice session per day, but preferably two 10 to 15 minute sessions on every day of the week. Then, continuously increase the length of each practice as you progress. Repeat each exercise as many times as your age in years. (If you are five years old then you repeat every item five times.) Once an individual gets into the good habit of practicing every day (and practicing correctly) you will be amazed at how much you improve!

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As a parent should I be concerned about how quickly my child progresses?

Parents please remember that your child is unique in the way he/she learns. As long as you and your child are making an effort to practice correctly, it is inappropriate to compare your child's progress to other children (especially in the early stages.) I like to encourage a positive attitude where musicians encourage and support one another rather than compete. Learning the violin is a very specialized skill using fine and large motor skills as well as many areas of the brain. No two people (especially young children younger than seven years) are alike in these ways. For this reason, when it comes to the violin, students are encouraged to take individual private lessons. Sometimes it seems very slow and frustrating. Those who persevere however, often suddenly 'get it' and they grow in leaps and bounds. Some schools offer *music for young children* courses, which can help prepare children in various facets of musical knowledge thus contributing to success when starting an instrument.

Is it important to be able to read music in the beginning?

Some children are visual learners and have no problem with the hand eye coordination needed to read and understand music on the written page. Although it is handy to be fast at learning to read music, it does not necessarily mean that the child is musically literate, for music is a language that is communicated by listening to, and creating specific sounds.

Often the aural skill of an individual suffers if a person relies on reading music too early.

The Suzuki Violin method, for example, discourages students from reading music too early. Instead, children (with the help of their parents) are expected to listen to examples of the music they are to learn in the future. They practice various aural and vocal exercises in order to ensure that the foundation of hearing and playing the sounds is developed before reading anything takes place. Some Suzuki music programs offer classes designed for very young children in which they spend the entire first year with pretend violins learning correct posture along with the aural and vocal skills needed to become a musician. Similarly with any language a person learns it by first hearing it, analyzing it, speaking it and then eventually reading and writing it. Although these programs are often very successful for some students, others get frustrated that it takes so long before they even get to play a note on their instrument.

When you start private lessons it is important to realize that the pace of learning often depends on the maturity of the individual as well as the amount of work the child and parent put into it. For the first several months you must be patient and realize that to learn correct technique it is better to take one's time rather than to rush into bad habits, which could in the long run take longer to break than doing everything correctly in the beginning.

When will I learn my first tune?

Adults often learn their first little tune by the first or second lesson. Young children getting started are more likely to learn their first little song by the third or fourth lesson. Of course everything depends upon the frequency and length of your lessons in addition to how much you practice!

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I'm an adult who has always wanted to learn the violin. Is it too late to start?

It is never too late to start. They say that learning a new musical instrument is one of the best ways to keep one's mind sharp. Usually adults are able to quickly grasp the concepts. Their biggest hurdle is finding the time to practice regularly. Most of my adult students have found that learning the violin/fiddle has been extremely rewarding. Although most may not become concert violinists, they have a creative hobby in which to express themselves. It is a skill that they can do on their own or share with others.

What does the teacher expect from the student and/or parent?

Please respect your lesson time and the teacher's time. Due to the fact that music teachers' available working hours are limited to after school, lessons are often scheduled back to back. If I'm not with another pupil before your lesson I may be practicing or preparing for another student or event.

If possible, get your violin out before I open the door to greet you. While you are waiting you can get your bow tightened and rosined as well as put your shoulder pad on your instrument. If you have not done this before your lesson, I expect you to have your violin and bow ready to go along with music on the stand within seconds of entering the music studio.

Once your lesson is over, try to exit the room as swiftly as possible in order to allow for a smooth transition for the next person.

Please try to address any questions that you have during the lesson, not after your allotted time is over. Although I'm generally happy to answer any questions you have if I'm able to, I cannot run into the next person's lesson to address your questions. Often your questions will be answered naturally as your lessons continue.

Feel free to email me or call me to ask anything and I'll do my best to help you.

What should I bring to my lessons?

Bring all of your current materials to your lessons including: your instrument and shoulder pad, rosin, three ring binder (to keep track of any loose sheets I give to you) equipped with some note-writing paper and musical staff paper, your current music books. As a person advances it is impossible to get through everything in one lesson. Please bring all of your books so that you are prepared for whatever I ask you to play during your lesson. Remember that you should continue to practice all of your current material even if we did not go over it in your most recent lesson.

Practice every day and more than once a day if you are able to. A student will retain more knowledge from a lesson and develop skills more quickly if the information is reviewed many times over the week rather than only one longer practice session right before a lesson. Once you start to practice regularly you will feel good about it as you measure your progress

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What is the role of the parent during the lesson?

Parents who are attending a child's lesson should take notes during the lesson in order to retain the information more clearly. In the Suzuki violin method, parents also learn the violin along with the child. Usually in such cases the lesson focuses on the parent more than the child so that the parents leave with the correct understanding of technical skills. At home they can help their child learn the ideas correctly.

I am not strictly a Suzuki violin teacher and implement the ideas of several music teaching methodologies. It is virtually impossible to predict exactly what information must be conveyed and how a lesson will progress due to the unique circumstances of every learner. My hands are often alternating between demonstrating ideas on my own violin to helping the student as well as playing the piano. It takes more time out of a person's lesson if I'm to write down all the particulars of a learning concept. Therefore it is helpful if the parent can write down some ideas as we go.

I believe that generally it is important for a parent to attend a student's lessons, especially in the early stages of a child's music lessons. Occasionally, very young children test their parents by misbehaving, causing a disruption to any learning. For this reason I may request that a parent leave the lesson and listen outside the room should they desire. Usually a child learns to respect what her teacher asks of her.

Is it okay to use photocopies of music?

All printed material such as music books are considered to be intellectual property. You must get permission from a composer and/or publisher to photocopy material. Just because photocopying of publishers and composers work is widespread does not mean it's okay to do it. Musicians and writers spend lots of time to work out their material. You should support musicians by legally purchasing their compositions both written and recorded. Occasionally I may give you handouts with information pertaining to our lessons. Please do not lose the handouts I give to you. I suggest that you keep track of any loose sheets by putting them in a binder. I try to hand out my own arrangements of material. Please respect copyright laws and do not photocopy material from publishers without permission (and please do not ask me to do it for you either.)