



The 3 B's: Beautiful Bow Arms for Beginners:
Setting the right tone from the beginning.

Bob Phillips

BETTER BOW HANDS START WITH BASICS

Fingers Count-Finger Function

Table with 2 columns: Finger function description and corresponding action. Rows include: The finger down under-the thumb, Sticking together-the thumb/second finger, Going along for the ride-the third finger, Lean on me-the first finger, Point/counterpoint-the fourth finger.

Where's the Rabbit-Setting up the Bow

Refers to photos from String Explorer Book One, Page 4 By Phillips, Dabczynski, Meyer

Table with 2 columns: Action and reference. Rows include: Making a rabbit, The Rabbit finds the Frog, Rabbit check points: Thumb, Second, Third, First, Fourth Fingers.

Picking up the Bow-the Forgotten Step

Table with 2 columns: Action and instruction. Rows include: Two hands-one bow, One hand-one bow-Point/counterpoint, One hand and a stand, Putting the bow on the string, Balancing the hand.

Mathematics of the Bow-Angles Count

Table with 2 columns: Action and instruction. Rows include: Row, Row, Row Your Bow-tracking your success, Coming in for a landing-where does the elbow go.

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BETTER BOW ARMS CAN BE BUILT FROM THE BEGINNING

Finding the Edge-Putting Weight into the Bow

Finding the weight	Hold the student's elbow and ask them to give you the weight of their arm
10 to 1 Scale	Put 10 lbs. of weight in bow and work down to 0
Starting the note	Start with differing amounts of weight 2,4,6,8
Vary the attack and the stroke	Start with 8 and release to 4 through the stroke
Vary the attack point	Start the attack in different parts of the bow

Tiré/Poussé-Pull/Push-Down/Up

Preparing the hand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use your hand like paint brush on a flat surface. Notice the curving and straightening of the fingers With a partner-pull an up and down bow with your partner providing resistance both ways
Preparing the bow arm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pull the bow down without the 1st finger on Push the bow up without the 4th finger on Have a partner hold the bow in position while the player moves their hand up and down the bow Pull a short down bow on the D. Stop and lower hand almost to A, then play up bow in a circle motion

Bow Geometry-Triangle, Square, Point

Square	Near the middle, form a right angle with your right arm
Point	Go to the point of bow (Only as far as your arm will allow)
Triangle	Near the frog form a triangle with your right arm

Changing Directions

Connecting up and down bows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play a D down, stop and drop the hand until the bow touches the A string, then play up. Play a D down, stop and drop the hand until the bow <i>almost</i> touches the A string, then play up. Play down/up on the D string with a circle motion With an imaginary sail on your hand blow a gentle breeze to keep the hand moving down and up. Practice parking the bow (non-accented stop) Close your eyes and listen for the bow change
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Speed, Weight, Placement

Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish soundpoints 1-5 (1bridge-5 fingerboard) Sound points drive weight and speed
Weight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of weight allowed to transfer into the string Playing at 1-5, vary the weight Play at 1-5 with consistent weight and vary the speed
Speed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How fast the bow travels- 0 to 65 mph Play at 1-5 with varying speeds Play at 1-5 with consistent speed and vary the weight

Tone

Resonance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pluck the string and listen to the ring then play a détaché stroke • Pull the bow at the frog and lift quickly and listen for the ring • Keep the width of the vibrating string the same throughout the bow. • Pull the string back without letting it vibrate • Pull the string until it clicks and stops • Pull the string until it clicks over and over.
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String Crossings

The seven levels of the bow	Find the following levels: G, GD, D, DA, A, AE, E
Changing to a higher string	Lead with hand
Changing to a lower string	Lead with arm

Attack Strokes

Détaché	The paintbrush stroke. Speed and weight is even throughout the stroke.
Martelé (slow)	Accented at the beginning of the stroke
Martelé (fast)	Accented at the beginning of the stroke with a hard stop
Collé	A stroke initiated by straightening the fingers to go down and curving the fingers to go up.
Spiccato	A natural bouncing of the bow hair. Lift the weight out of the détaché stroke. The bounce is more length than height.
Sautillé	The stick bounces, not the hair. Use circle string crossings then play circles on one string and let go.

BETTER BOW ARMS NEED BETTER BOWS

Better bows will increase student progress and create better sounds	
What is a better bow – graphite, wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The connection between cost and playability • The relationship between bow and instrument cost

QUOTES:

Valborg Leland, The Dounis Principles of Violin Playing, p. 13-14.

1. The Balanced Hold

(a) First in importance is to find the central feeling of balance. This lies in the “centre of the hold” The centre of the hold must be between the thumb and the middle finger. They work together and are opposite each other on the bow. The two weaker fingers (third and fourth) at one side of the centre hold furnish a balance with the strong first finger on the other side (two against one). They must be strong, flexible, and always on the bow.

(b) Second in importance is to find the exact spot on the middle finger and thumb which contacts the bow. The right side of the thumb cushion holds the upper edge of the frog and should feel as though it is anchored there. The middle finger holds the stick somewhere near the tip cushion and never beyond the first joint.

2. The position of the other fingers on the bow.

(a) After you have found the centre hold, let the other three fingers drop on the stick wherever they fall naturally.

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(b) Then tilt the hand in the direction of the tip of the bow until a firm contact of the first finger on the bow is established. This slanting position is the fundamental position for all bowing. It is your “normal hold” from which all other hand positions on the bow are derived.

3. Developing the clinging feeling of the fingers on the stick.

The fingers must cling firmly to the stick at their points of contact with it. The finger must feel rooted to the bow as though they are part of the stick. The clinging hold is an important requisite for a sonorous tone. The grip of the fingers on the bow is always a clinging one, firm but not tense.

Simon Fischer, Basics, p. 1-2.

Thumb counter pressure is sometimes very little, and at other times much more, depending on the amount of pressure into the string, and which part of the bow is used. . . . The thumb and second finger are the centre of the bow hold. The second finger needs to sit very slightly to the left of the thumb. . . . A bow hold with the thumb between the second and third fingers can cause tension in the base of the thumb.

Ivan Galamian, Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching, p.45-46.

The basic grip as given here permits the flexibility of the hand to develop rather quickly, because it is a *natural* position of the hand. This manner of holding the bow is designed chiefly to release the springs of the hand and fingers so that the bow can settle deeper into the strings. It is the best grip for the achievement of fullness and roundness of sound.

To set this basic position, take the bow in the left hand, pointing it vertically upward with the hair facing the player. With the right hand, form a circle by placing the tip of the thumb against the second finger. . . . Bring this circle over to the bow, not directly at right angles but from slightly above. . . . Open the circle a little and insert the bow-stick so that the thumb contacts the stick and the frog. . . . In doing all of this, the thumb should retain the same position in relation to the second finger that it had in the forming of the initial circle. This means that, above all, it has to retain its easy, natural, outward curve and has to keep the inner edge of its tip turned toward the second finger. . .

The second finger will be curved over the stick opposite the thumb and will contact the stick at the joint nearest the nail. The third finger reaches over the frog. . . .

The fourth finger is placed on the stick rather close to the third finger. The section of the stick immediately above the frog is always of octagonal construction, even when the stick itself is round. In placing the fourth finger, its tip rests not directly on top of the stick but instead on the inner side of the octagon, contacting the flat surface just next to the top. . . . The first finger is placed at a slight distance from the second finger and contacts the stick of the bow a little on the nail side of the middle joint. . . .

The *correct* bow grip must be a comfortable one: all fingers are curved in a natural, relaxed way: no single joint (knuckle) is stiffened; and the correctly resulting flexibility must allow all of the natural springs in the fingers and the hand to function easily and well.

Julie Lyonn Lieberman, You Are Your Instrument, p. 35.

When we learn to play an instrument our teachers show us the “correct” way to hold it as well as how to stand or sit. There is an overwhelming tendency to try to maintain that correct position at all times. This restricts sensory awareness, feedback from the muscles, and oxygen intake. The strenuous demands of playing the music well, in combination with a static posture, do not support a quality experience, the optimum use of the body, or the creation of beautifully fluid music.

REFERENCES

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