

## The Importance of Proper Posture for Beginner Violinists

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### ABSTRACT

Proper posture has always been one of the key factors in violin pedagogy. This research will describe the development of a teaching method, based on personal experience, whereby the manners presented hereinbelow provide approaches aimed at supporting good hand posture and bowing techniques for beginner violinists. Moreover, the research will attempt to introduce some information regarding the foundational steps in obtaining basic skills in violin performance. This will be done by borrowing basic knowledge from the existing body of methodological literature, which will be supplemented by personal teaching background. The purpose of the study is to examine both comparatively and independently the main pedagogic principles, which provide the best approaches toward proper posture. The research focuses on certain aspects of right and left hands' posture, which has been found to be of great importance during the course of a long teaching career. Correct posture is fundamental for both young initiates, as well as those who begin practicing at a later stage in their lives (which is the case of many violin students at the University of Jordan). It would not be an understatement to say that the future of every musician, both in terms of technique and musical aptitude, is built on a good understanding of proper posture.

**Keywords:** Violin, bow, posture, hand position, teaching, changing positions, beginner violinists, fingering.

### Introduction

Violin education in Jordan began in 1981 at the Yarmouk University, Fine Arts Department, which was later transformed into the College of Fine Arts in 2001, and in 1986 at the National Music Conservatory under the patronage of Queen Noor Al Hussein Foundation. The Jordan Academy of Music was then founded in 1989 under the patronage of the Catholic Church. Thereafter, higher level of music education reached its peak with the establishment of the Music Department at the School of Arts and Design at the University of Jordan in 2004. Prior to the establishment of those teaching institutions, an amateur scene of violin teaching, education, and performance existed; it could not be compared to an actual systematic or academic approach. The upsurge in musical education within the Jordanian Kingdom seems to be influenced by many Iraqi musicians who migrated to Jordan seeking refuge after the first Iraqi war in the 1990s. Moreover, during the same time period, many ex-Soviet teachers came to Jordan after the collapse of the USSR. The mentioned influential music educators include: Fikri Bashir (Iraq), Ahmad Jawadi (Iraq), Mohammad Fadel (Palestine), Hassan Hamad (Iraq), Mohammad Abbas (Iraq), Timur Ibrahimov (Azerbaijan), who was based in the National Music Conservatory in Amman, Emad Abedo (Palestine), who was based in the Jordan Academy of Music, Tareq Ismail (Iraq), Faridallah Wardi (Iraq), and Kamal Al Raady (Egypt), who was based in Yarmouk University. By virtue of the hard work and knowledge of the listed musicians, the formation of violin pedagogy in Jordan has flourished. Therefore, musical education (especially in the case of violin performance) within the music institutions in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has seen a dramatic improvement within the past few decades. However, many issues still exist in terms of how students are taught to hold the violin, the posture of the right and left hands, holding the bow, shifting from one position to another, and playing with unrestrained hands and torso. This paper will focus on these problems and will describe the development of the proper way for teaching correct posture

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and bowing technique to beginner violin students. The goal is to target violin teachers and support them with a detailed study, which will propose a methodological approach towards violin teaching.

These last centuries have seen a growth in the available literature regarding posture while playing the violin. Numerous paradigms have been created, and various schools of violin performance have come into prominence. The methodologies developed by this boost in violin performance research have focused on sound, intonation, articulation, vibrato, teacher-student relations, nuances of teaching younger and older students, and more. Unfortunately, many of the pedagogues in Jordan are unaware of these important methodologies, as it is the case in many other countries. Mirsha commented, "Many teachers are unaware of the string education research that has been conducted and the direct implication of this research on everyday teaching" (Mishra, 2013, 1). Therefore, the aggregation and summarization of various teaching paradigms and schools of violin performance is necessary for the further development of academic-level violin pedagogy in Jordan, and beyond. The main sources for teaching beginners are still the same three fundamental theses of Leopold Mozart's, *A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing* (1756); Carl Flesch's, *The Art of Violin Playing* (1923); and Ivan Galamian's, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (1962). The suggested books, alongside with the plethora of theoretical and pedagogical literature (which appeared later), provide valuable information for the development of a worthy generation of violin teachers. It is firmly believed that the methodology of violin performance pedagogy has actually transformed in parallel with the evolution of the violin as an instrument. For example, throughout the *Baroque* period, the head of the performer was placed on the right side of the tailpiece, and the violin was held in a heavy downward lean. Accordingly, the instrument would be held in a mode whereby it would be fastened onto the performer's chest under the collarbone. Moreover, the bow itself has passed through a number of alterations. To explain this, during its evolutionary period, the bow was significantly shorter. Its standard model has been introduced in 1780 by the French bow maker F. Tourte. In addition to that, the neck of the violin was lengthened and made slimmer, in order to assist in achieving nimbleness in performing high positions. The bridge was more curved "to accommodate greater bow pressure" (Druce, 2002, 51). In the first half of the nineteenth century, the shoulder pad had become more prominent and was placed between the shoulder and the violin (an innovation provided by the French violinist and composer P. Baillot). The chin rest has also become part of the violin and was introduced by the German violinist and composer L. Spohr. In the beginning of the twentieth century, another novelty was added to the instrument, the shoulder rest. Currently, one can find a wide variety of shoulder rests and chin rests. Therefore, it has helped beginners in finding the appropriate chin rests which makes them feel comfortable while performing. Currently, one may find a myriad of researches concerning the use of chin rests and shoulder rests, but one of them provides a fundamental statement because it was created from "one of the greatest teachers of our time" (Schwarz, Campbell M., 2014), named Carl Flesch. He stated that "the chin rest is a necessary evil" and advised "[the] upper left jaw should not exert pressure on the instrument, and be placed in parallel to the floor" (Flesch, 2000, 4). Contemporary teaching practices show that beginner violinists must use a shoulder rest, as it helps relieve muscle and shoulder tension. "Contemporary teaching methodology dictates that the use of a chin rest, shoulder pad, and shoulder rest ensures the most comfortable conditions for violin practice, as they can be modified to best fit the individual's own physique. Without these rests, the performer may suffer from elevated shoulders, tension in the left hand, and tension in the corpus" (Gregoryev, 2006, 238). Subsequent to the developments in crafting the instrument itself, the performance and teaching have evolved correspondingly. "The historical changes of holding violin and bow lead to the development of the art of violin, which lead to the changing of styles and aesthetics of the concepts of violin performance. The whole art of performance the violin was and is always in the process of evolution" (Sherinsky, 1983, 14). Unquestionably, the development of the instrument was a result of the musician's attempts to obtain better sound quality and technical abilities, which will enable them to express their ideas, emotions, and artistic demands.

### The First Step: How to Hold the Violin

The general consensus concerning the holistic posture of the violin performer's body; is that it must be in its natural, yet rigid position. "Legs and feet should be shoulder width apart "(Flesch, 2000, 2). The weight of the body must be spread out evenly between both legs.



The violin is usually placed on the shoulder, with a slight left-wards shift of roughly 30 degrees, whereas the left side of the violin and the shoulder rest are leveled onto the highest part of the shoulder. In this way, the instrument, or more precisely, the shoulder rest lays perfectly on the collarbone and the upper chest simultaneously. Concerning former violin performance schools, it was debated whether the placement of the violin should be on the shoulder or the collarbone. On the other hand, in modernity, this query has become extinct due to the development of various adjustable shoulder rests. The violin is fastened to the shoulder through the pressure implemented by the left side of the chin, whereas the head is slightly turned to the left so that the performer may see the strings. Initially, it is recommended that the violin is held by the left hand. This matter is one of the first challenges in opening lessons. It is advised that the student should practice holding the violin with the hand, then leaning their hand downward leaving the violin held only by the chin, and then moving the hand upward in support of the instrument. Whereby in both positions, the head, the shoulder, and the violin remain in the same place, thusly the student may feel maximum freedom in the muscles. It is also useful to ask the student to walk around the room while holding the violin, so they may feel total freedom while moving. The main aim in these exercises is for the student to always experience the same muscle relaxation in the shoulders, head, and torso, regardless of whether the hand is holding the violin or not. These exercises are made much easier when the proper chin rest is chosen (one that is fit according to the individual's body form). This is important because the chin rest permit the student to comfortably hold the violin parallel to the floor, with a minor decline of the right side of the instrument, which makes playing the G string much easier. Everything mentioned at this point is applicable to the first lessons in violin education. In later stages, the grip of the violin and the general position of the torso depend on the string upon which the bow is placed, the position of the hand, and the performance practice of the piece. This also affects the way the violin is held; thus, it can be slightly inclined or declined. It should be stated that at the introductory stage of learning the instrument, exceptions should be avoided, and only basic and fundamental rules of holding the instrument should be learned and firmly stabilized. Correct initial placement of the violin, an unrestrained stance and posture, and a natural fastening of the violin to the body ensures future proper development of the student's technical capabilities. "There is no other such instrument in which initial attention and accuracy with regard to basics is so essential, as it is the case with the violin. Therefore, the method of holding the violin comes before any other development in the student's skill set" (Auer, 1965, 41). In his research, Galamian asserts that each teacher should stick to the basic rules while synchronically approaching

each student individually, hence helping amateurs to understand the process and rules in an intellectual way. “What counts is not the strength of the muscles, but their responsiveness to the mental directive” (Galamian, 1962, 5 and 6). Galamian elaborates further by stating that every student is a different character and a different body, whereas a good pedagogue should treat each student as an individual. (Ibid, 105).

In the early stages of violin education, each student develops a wide range of physical, cognitive, psychological, and intellectual skills. This process is long and slow. In a research conducted by Konczak and Jaeger, the authors concluded that the period focused on establishing basic posture skills for violinist spans over 700 hours (Konczak, and Jaeger, 2009). Achieving proper stance and posture, which is the guarantee for further development of motor skills, comes along with other skills, such as tuning the violin.

Tuning in the initial phase of learning is one of the vital elements that should be taken into consideration. Tuning a string instrument requires both aural and physical abilities, whereas “teachers vary considerably in activities and amounts of instruction they provide to their students, that lead to tuning independents” (Hopkins, 2013, 110). Violin pedagogy shows various approaches regarding when one should start tuning practice. Most of the literature available today is focused on some aspects of tuning in an early stage such as; when should a student start learning this skill, whether it should be assisted by piano or not, and if it should be done using an electronic tuner (Alexander, 2008; Gaulty, 2010). Most researchers affirm that oral-based tuning should be seen as the core foundation. (Alexander, 2008; Cole, 2005; Simmons, 2007; Shrader, 2009). Tuning is considered as “one of [the] most fundamental, most important, most serious skills, string players must master” (Fischbach, 2003, 33). Undoubtedly, a beginner violin student should learn how to listen and control the sound, as well as how to adjust the tuning of strings properly. At the same time, it is common knowledge that in the first year (or two), the students are unable to master these necessary skills by themselves and therefore should be instructed by their teacher. On the other hand, the question of whether using the finger placement markers assist the accuracy of intonation or not has been debated since the time of Giuseppe Tartini and Leopold Mozart. In the twentieth century, studies regarding the use of finger placement markers came to prominence once again, whereas violin teachers (such as Anderson and Frost, 1986; Kohut, 1973; Matesky and Rusch, 1963; Starr, 1976) emphasized the necessity of these markers for the formation of intonational accuracy. Meanwhile, others (such as Colwell, 1969 and, Gordon, 1988) warned that markers masked a lack of oral development. Most of the violin teachers, including Mozart and Flesch, derived from their personal experience, shared an analogous opinion; that the use of finger placement markers is not helpful, but is rather a distraction which may even lead to improper oral development. Serious research on this topic was conducted by Smith, who reported that better intonational accuracy is achieved by the students who do not use finger placement markers (Smith, 1987).

### **The Left Hand Posture**



There are many schools of violin performance that strive towards the development of standard left hand position. There is a myriad of literature and illustrations of proper and improper posture provided by each of these schools. General principles, which transcend teaching paradigms, can be found, and each pedagogue must implement them during the process of teaching and in accordance to each student's individual abilities. Whereas, the aim is to find the most comfortable and unrestraint posture of the left hand and its fingers, in order to reach the necessary technical and performance goals. "The conclusion is that with regards to positioning there is a lack of general norms, and it does not need specific rules which may lead to hindrances in the teaching process. There do exist however some general principles regarding hand's posture, and they are based upon objective anatomical and physiological knowledge" (Yankelevich, 1993, 6). It should be mentioned that the students change their initial posture over the years, some would go through minor changes, while others have to readjust their posture which leads to drastic changes, and that is absolutely normal. Nevertheless, stable posture is essential for improving future skills. When starting to practice the left hand posture, it is advised to start with exercises performed without the violin, in which the student must note the natural position of their hand and fingers while their arm is relaxed limply down, and then lift the hand to the chin-level while imagining holding the violin without changing the position of the wrist or the fingers. This process must be repeated multiple times. After that exercise, the violin must be placed on the shoulder and held solely by the chin, without the aid of the hand, then raise the left hand as its natural position and grasp the neck of the violin. Special attention must be given to the natural hand posture and fingers, whereas the position of the hand and fingers must be unchanged when holding the violin and while at rest. The student must feel the hand as a continuation of the forearm, while the wrist must not be twisted, and the fingers must be slightly curved with minor space between each of the fingers. Galamian advice that the wrist is situated in a straight line in relation to the forearm (Galamian, 1962, 15). The root of the index finger must be on the same level as the fingerboard and must be next to the nut. Moreover, the hand must not move towards the head of the violin, while it is simultaneously not far from nut to the side of the bridge. The thumb must be relaxed and placed across the index finger or middle finger (according to the individual structure of the hand) and must be slightly curved in a natural state. Through this positioning, the fingerboard will be at the middle of the top thumb's phalanx, and a hole will form between the neck of the violin and the palm. Proper positioning of the thumb is extremely important with regards to the future of shifting between positions.



In parallel to the placement of the left hand, the student must become acquainted with the numbering of the fingers while playing the violin. Namely, index finger (1), middle finger (2), ring finger (3), pinky (4). Note that the thumb is not numbered, as it is not used when playing the violin, but rather helps hold the violin, and change between positions. "The thumb of left-hand supports holding the violin yet helps the left jaw and shoulder in supporting the instrument" (Flesch, 2000, 4). Galamian from his side, suggests that players with longer thumbs ought to elevate the fingers of their

left hand slightly above the fingerboard. Whereas people with shorter thumbs, ought to lower it slightly towards the neck of the violin (Galamian, Ibid, 19). In addition to that, it is to be noted that playing on an open string (without fingers on the string) in notation, is shown by the number (0).

Left hand tutoring should continue with a presentation, displaying that the palm of the left hand must not be too open, and must not be placed tightly onto the fingerboard. Thus, the optimal placement of the palm is slightly concave shaped when all fingers are raised up, and the pinky is found above the E string. The position of the elbow must not be given too much thought, since if there is no tension in the muscles and the hand posture is correct, then the elbow fits into its natural position. Galamian in discussing the posture of the elbow observed that “students with long arms should place the elbow skewed the left side, while others with short arms should keep their elbow skewed to the right” (Galamian, 1962, 14). Naturally, in later stages, the elbow plays the role of an engine, rolling the hand, contingent on which strings the fingers are placed upon. So, if the fingers are on the G string, the elbow moves to the right under the violin. But if the fingers are on the E string the elbow moves left away from the violin. What is important is that the interrelation between the forearm and the hand remains unchanged. It should be noted that the teacher’s duty during this stage of violin education is to correct the student’s posture by setting them into the correct form by touch. Contemporary research is rather critical of such *modus operandi*, stating that “this method is discouraged as it may make them [the students] uncomfortable” (Van der Linden, Schooderaldt, Bird, 2009, 82). In the past years, various studies were performed, using the IGS 190M Mobile Motion Capture System (MMCS) from *Animazoo*, as well as *Maestro project*, which uses Optical Motion Capture Systems in an attempt to avoid the touch of the teacher and to use reflective marker stickers attached to the violin, hands, and arms of the student to provide data projected on the screen, trying to help the student to correct their posture. The reason behind those experiments is that the player should observe their own motion and correct their own posture. Thus, the researchers discovered that the beginners “faced a difficulty in perceiving the image while playing”. In other words, this form of multi-tasking may pose to be a hindrance to the teaching process (Maestra, Bonada, Parez, Gueaus, 2007). Nevertheless, the old, traditional method of correcting the student by touch from the teacher is believed to be not only the winning one but also has been proven time and again as a suitable way in establishing an emotional connection between the student and the teacher.

It is recommended that the initial placement of the fingers on the fingerboard occurs without the use of the bow while performing *pizzicato* with the right hand on the A or D string. Accumulated violinists’ experience shows that when students feel ease in their muscles, they can begin playing with all four fingers within the first lesson. Hereinbelow, the reader may find some advice regarding the placement of the fingers on the violin. For instance, it is appropriate that the first position is performed as follows: middle finger placed on C-sharp on the A string or F-sharp on the D string because in this way, the hand and fingers are in a very natural position.



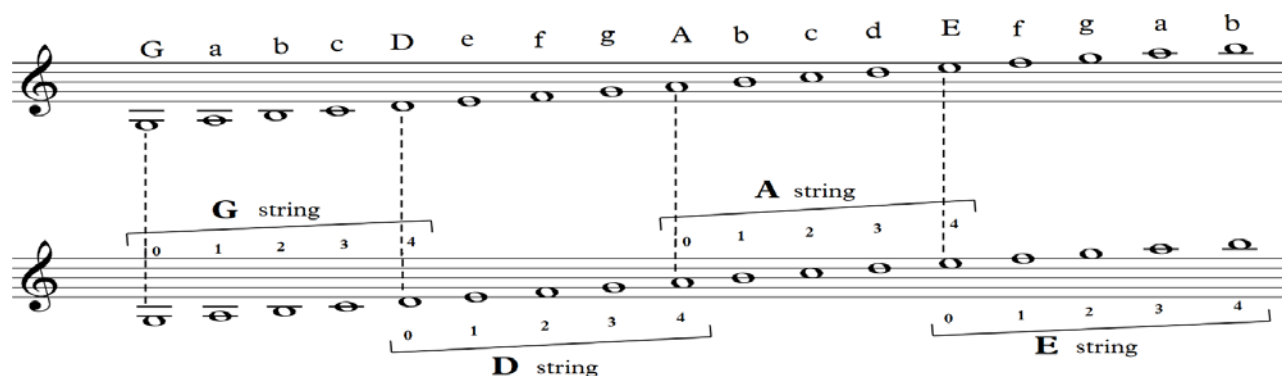
“Students with long fingers should curve their fingers and their pinky. Whereas, the ones with shorter fingers must keep their pinky almost flat on the string” (Flesch, 2000, 4). There appear to be some differences in opinion between Flesch and Galamian, concerning the position of the fingers on the fingerboard. Flesch instructs that left hand fingers should form an interval of fourth between index finger and pinky, meanwhile, Galamian instructs to position the index finger on one string and the pinky to rest on the next higher string, forming an octave. The student must begin with the simplest exercises, in attempt to place the fingers alternately and to be moved in the following sequence (0-1-2-3-4-3-2-1-0) in ascending and descending order. Mozart instructs that the left hand’s fingers are best to be situated closer to the strings, hence assuring “purity and velocity” (Mozart, 2010, 6). It is also important that the student does not press hard onto the string or the fingerboard, as that would lead to tension in the hand. Instead, the student may lightly press the string, and then briskly return to the initial position. In the last several decades, research was conducted concerning the kinetic force of the fingers, and bowing, and their influence upon the musical performance itself (Wiesendanger, Baader, Kazzennikov, 2006; Baader, Milani, Wesendanger, 1999). The mentioned studies could be informative, but unfortunately, misleading, as they shift the attention from the artistic, creative process involving emotions and imagination toward a more mechanical and rather shallow arena. The musical process cannot be measured and computed completely accurately, as it contains variance that is hard to be systematically categorized. The same can be said about the amount of pressure exerted from fingers onto the strings, in the attempt to generate the required quality sound. “One of the greatest issues facing left hand position in the violin, upon which is based not only technical proficiency but also lightness of technique and beauty of the sound, is namely the force applied by the left hand fingers on the string. Many studies advise that the fingers must be firm on the string and that their strength must be developed so as they feel like hammers on an anvil. David Oistrakh and Abram Yampolsky believed that this advice is totally incorrect, whereas they state that minimal pressure must be applied on the strings, which would ensure quality sound and freedom of movement onto the fingerboard” (Gregoryev, 2006, 66). Special attention must be given to the pinky, which must be slightly bent. When raised from the string, the pinky must not stray too far from the fingerboard, but immediately back to its initial position.



When using fingers (1, 2, 3), the fourth must not bend but should stay securely in its natural position. After gaining expertise in the moving of the left hand fingers, the work can begin on bow technique, in parallel with introducing music theory, sight-reading, as well as teaching simple pieces using two, three or four fingers. “As is well-known among many, the initial stages of violin education are based on the attainment of proper posture, which is usually tiresome and exhausting for young beginners. For this reason, the pedagogue must work on the development of various musical habits, such as singing, oral implementation of melodies on the piano, and sight-reading, while teaching posture during the course of the first lessons” (Pogojeva, 1965, 23). It is interesting that when reading notes students begin to loosen their posture and concentrate solely on properly playing the notes and not on maintaining posture.



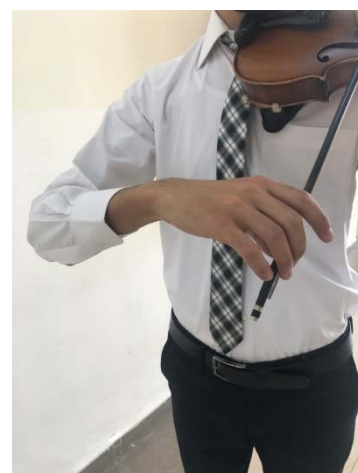
Therefore, it is the role of the pedagogue to constantly remind the student of proper posture and amend any mistakes detected. “A teacher who limit himself to pointing out the mistakes and does not show a proper way to overcome them fails in the important mission of teaching” (Galamian, 1962, 126). A similar issue arises when the student starts playing simple pieces. Beginners pause whilst playing and wonder about the note that should be played next, and where it is placed, which breaks the melodic and rhythmic continuum of the pieces. Below are some illustrations which may help beginner violinists to learn notes, as well as fingering, particularly in the first position.



In the course of several lessons, the student and teacher need to start working on the required speed of pressing and releasing fingers on the strings. The pedagogue must focus on making incremental changes in speed activity rather than rapidity. This process should not lead to increased muscle tension. “It is common knowledge that one of the biggest obstacles in the formation and development of muscle memory in beginner violinists is namely the muscular rigidity which comes with the first sets of movements” (Berlyanchik, 2000, 148). A teacher should explain that only the fingers must move, without any additional movements from the wrist, thumb, or palm. Shifts from the elbow are allowed only when the string position is altered. Understanding this basic principle, the teacher must constantly remind the student that each unnecessary movement leads to a degradation of technique and sound quality.

### The Right Hand Posture

The right use of the bow is a fundamental skill in order to fulfill good sound and technique. Bowing includes the physical motion of the right hand and the freedom in the shoulder, elbow, and wrist, and is one of the first performative imperatives in the violin teaching process. Right hand posture is often considered to be the most difficult step in violin education, because the beauty of the sound, dynamic, timbre, articulation, and the character of the performed pieces depend on the right hand technique. “Bow movement is fundamental for each artistic goal, due to the fact that any dynamic and tempo varieties with which the violinist can affect the listener (crescendo, diminuendo, agitato, accelerando and ritardando) are all performed with the right hand” (Küchler, 1974, 12). There exist several methods for holding the bow. Firstly, the old German method (L. Spohr, J. Dont, J. Joachim) where the bow is held with the tip of the fingers, and the elbow is relaxed and with a slight downward tilted. Secondly, the Franco-Belgian method (C. Beriot, H. Vieuxtemps, E. Ysaye) where the fingers hold the bow deeper, characterized by a larger spacing between the index and middle fingers, and the stick of the bow is tilted toward the fingerboard. The third is the Russian method (L. Auer) where the fingers hold the bow even deeper than in the Franco-Belgian method, whereas the index finger encompasses the stick, touching the stick with the tip of the index finger. In this way, the stick is not tilted at all. During the mid-twentieth century, a new Russian method had been developed which has not been discussed in contemporary methodological researches. This





approach is characterized by having the fingers laid on the stick naturally. The creators of this method are three Professors from Moscow Conservatory: A. Yampolsky, D. Oistrakh, Y. Yankelevich. This research follows the main principles regarding posture in this school.

Carl Flesch, in his book, describes the first three types of bow grips mentioned herein. He explained them as follows: the German method, the oldest one, where the stick of the bow rests directly under the index finger, near the tip, and the thumb rests across the middle finger; the Franco-Belgian method, where the index finger touches the stick near the middle joint of the finger, and the thumb is resting across the middle finger, forming a gap between the index and other fingers; and the Russian method, the newest one, characterized by the index finger resting onto the stick in sideway position, contacting it to the middle joint of the finger and wrapped around the stick, while the pinky is placed on the bow in case of using the bow in the lower half near to the frog (Flesch, 35). In his methodology, Flesch advises teachers to always keep the bow perpendicular to the stings, with the bow hair lying flat upon the stings (Ibid, 34), and claims that the Russian method of holding bow is the best in achieving better sound (Ibid, 35).

When discussing the left hand posture, this research recommends exercises with and without the violin. In both cases, the hand, wrist, fingers, and body are to be relaxed. Similar exercises must be used to cultivate the proper right hand posture. Training can begin without the violin, in which the bow is held by the left hand, and the right hand is slowly dropped on the stick in the natural hand position. Whereas the tip of the thumb is positioned from the lower side of the stick next to the frog and the thumb is slightly bent. The index finger should lay on the stick with the middle phalanx, and the pinky's fingertip to be fastened perpendicularly to the stick in a slightly bent position. Then the right hand leaves the bow. In practicing this exercise, the teacher and student must focus on learning how to grasp the stick gently from above, and not from the side. When playing the violin, the feeling of holding the stick from the top is a fundamental rule. There must be a slight distance between the thumb, which is slightly bent, and the bow hair. The general posture of the hand on the stick is dictated by the lightly bent pinky, which is on the stick slightly above the middle of the frog or near the end of the frog, but not over the screw of the bow. In this case, the thumb automatically lays against the middle finger. There is no necessity to focus on the positioning of each of the fingers, but only a proper natural grip of the bow must be taken into consideration.



The process of playing begins by utilizing the middle part of the bow. Only the hand and the forearm are used for this movement, and therefore the amplitude of playing with the bow is incrementally increased. Research in teaching short and long bow strokes shows that those students who started performing with short bow strokes showed better tone quality in later stages (Lowe, 1973). After a couple of lessons, the whole bow can be employed, with additional assistance from the hand, forearm, and the upper arm, incrementally included in the motion. The bow must always move perpendicularly to the strings, and the stick must be slightly tilted away from the bridge, toward the fingerboard. Attention must be given to the wrist, and more specifically when close to the frog, as it should be slightly raised in

relation to the hand and elbow. When playing with the tip of the bow the wrist must not be bent excessively, because it may hinder the return to the initial position.



One of the most difficult movements when playing the violin is changing from up-bow to down-bow positioning. In this motion, the wrist's position is shifted upwards, especially near the frog. Thereafter, this motion is transferred to the fingers which are slightly bent while transferring the position of the bow. When changing the position of the fingers, the wrist returns to its former position, which is a slightly higher one than that of the hand and the elbow. Players ought to take into consideration that during the described movement, the upper arm also plays an important role. When playing with the whole bow, specifically during an upward movement of the bow, many students tend to raise up their shoulder, which must be corrected. In any case, the shoulder must always be free and in its natural position. The placement of the fingers onto the bow is not static. For instance, the thumb is slightly bent when placed upon the frog. However, when reaching the tip of the bow, the thumb is straight and slightly arched. This position of the thumb is due to its flexibility, it being in constant motion, and the fact that its placement is responsible for the freedom of the right hand. According to Flesch, the thumb of the right hand acts as a counterweight against the other four fingers (Flesch, 37), while the pinky is responsible for balance, and to prevent the harsh sounds (Ibid, 37). Galamian instructs that the thumb should be placed on the opposite side of the bow, and the middle finger should take a curved position. The middle finger should hover over the stick, producing a contact closer to the fingernail of the thumb. The ring finger should be situated over the frog, and the pinky rested upon the stick (Galamian, 46). Serious research done by Jenson was dedicated to the bow grip. The research was pivoted towards Suzuki's method, which instructs that the grip of the bow ought to be performed by placing the thumb under the frog, rather than bending it between the frog and the stick. Throughout his study, Jenson compared both methods, Suzuki (thumb under the frog) and the traditional technique (bow held at balance point, close to the frog). The researcher finally concluded that in the case of beginners, the traditional method showed better overall progress (Jenson, 1990).

It should be mentioned that whenever playing close to the lowest part of the bow, the placement of the pinky is paramount in its role of supporting the bow. The closer it is to the frog, the higher the pressure from the pinky onto the stick is. Nevertheless, when playing at the upper-half of the bow, the pressure of the pinky is reduced, which can cause it to raise up as the pressure on the stick lays onto the index finger. "The ring finger and the pinky are often raised up the bow whenever the bow reaches a certain point in its downward-swing (except in some cases when it is removed from the string). Normally, when the bow moves upward and reaches its lower half, the ring finger and the pinky retake their balancing function" (Menuhin, 2009, 81). Mozart, in his treatises, discusses the index finger and advises that it must not be stretched far over the bow, but should be rested closest to the middle finger, which would improve the general balance (Mozart, 60). In this way, we can understand that the pressure of the fingers on the stick is dissimilar, depending on the various parts of the bow being used. For example, near the frog, most pressure on the stick is exerted

by the pinky and the ring finger, while during the motion of the bow, the fingers exchange roles, and in the upper half of the bow, the pressure is exerted by the index and middle fingers.



“In the end of the bow additional force on the stick is required, whereas when we reach the frog, we need to support its weight” (Flesch, 1964, 68). Of course, there are no standardized rules for right hand positioning. Hence, the teaching process must be done taking into consideration the body form of each individual. Many great violinists have radically different posture of right hand, for example, J. Joachim held the bow with his three last fingers without the use of the index finger, E. Ysaye held the bow with the first three fingers while raising the pinky, P. Sarasate held the bow with all fingers, which did not hinder him in any way at becoming one of the most eminent violinists of his time. When working with students, especially with beginners, one must take into consideration the general principles of hand posture, also avoiding any exceptions, especially in the initial stages of education. Providing beginners with freedom in terms of posture and allowing them to experiment, may, in fact, lead to tension in hand and arm musculature.

The tilt of the bow towards the fingerboard depends on the character of the performed piece, its dynamic, timber, and phrasing. This is mainly regulated by the fingers of the right hand. A larger tilt is used to create mild, soft and warm sound, whereas when the dynamic is strong mannered, the stick is not as tilted, and is held straight over the hair. The amount of pressure applied onto the strings and their vibration, known as Helmholtz motion (*vis-à-vis* coordination between bow velocity and the sound) are the major factors at play whilst achieving variety in dynamic. The students often ask their teachers why the stick must be tilted toward the fingerboard. It is easiest to explain this rule by asking the student to replay the same phrase with and without the tilt. Playing accordingly, the student will immediately notice the change of sound, and that when the stick is tilted the sound is significantly more mild and warm. Taking into consideration the character of the piece or the phrase, the tilt of the stick may be changed accordingly. With regards to sound production, Galamian named three modes of bow strokes; first is a triangle, when the bow is on the string near the frog, thus the hand with the forearm, upper arm, and violin form a triangle; second is a square, whereas the middle of the bow is on the strings, and the arm and violin form a square; and third is a point, when the tip of the bow is set on the string, and the bow becomes a straight angle between the arm and violin (Galamian, 52).

When playing the violin, switching between strings is of great importance. The transmission of the bow from one string to another must be seamless. Special attention must be given to the performance on G and E strings, as they are usually the most difficult to play correctly. When playing on the G string, the bow must not be elevated too much, and the bow hair must be proximate to the D string without touching it. The same can be said about the bow's position on the E string, in which the position of the hand must not be overly lax, and the bow must be proximate to the A string. The best transmission between strings is performed by the subtle movement of the hand and forearm. In order to perfect this movement, the student is advised to exercise, whereby they play pairs of strings simultaneously, and

afterward opening at the first, then passing through both and ending on the second. “When time comes for transition between strings, one must strive for the process to be fluid, preferably without impetus from the hand. For clarity in performing this transition correctly, it is recommended to put the bow on two open strings at the same time, and then slowly perform legato over both strings. This is best to be done multiple times. This exercise is aimed at showing the student the importance of careful crossing the bow between strings” (Pogojeva, 1965, 60). It is desirable that when playing the instrument, the bow, hand, forearm, and upper arm remain at the same plane, so as the wrist would not bend and twist upward or downward, whereas the elbow is neither raised nor dropped. Total freedom of movement when playing the violin, as well as all other musical instruments, is nearly impossible. “Fundamentally, violin technique (of any sort) does not match the natural movements of the body. Instead, it is the result of certain ways of disciplining the body, i.e. stylization of the body movement” (Johansson, 2014, 130). Every musician must toil their own physical effort in order to achieve a fine sound. The major task of performers is to minimize the need for such physical exertion up to the degree of insignificant tension in the muscles, which guarantees excellence in technique and sound extraction. “Every activity, including violin performance, carries with it a certain degree of physical impetus (otherwise the minimal force needed to attain the requisite artistic expression)” (Yankelevich, 1993, 12).

### **Changing Positions**

Left hand’s shifting to whole tones and semitones began in the seventeenth century, and its methodology was crystallized in the later part of the eighteenth century (M. Corrette). The proper changing position is one of the basic techniques for good violin performance. “Transitioning from one position to another is one of the most difficult technical skills. Generally speaking, this ‘position switch’ is the most difficult left hand technique to master” (Flesch, 1964, 34). “Left hand movement on the fingerboard is related to the shifting position, which is a difficult task that requires much practice. The earlier practice of such movements begins, the sooner the student reaches freedom, plasticity, and beautiful sound and performance. The role of the pedagogue is to closely observe the student regarding the perfection of their left hand’s movement” (Zeldis, 1982, 8). When switching between first, second, and third positions, left hand posture must remain unchanged, whereas only the forearm moves.

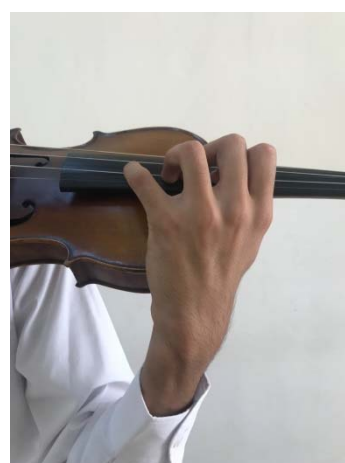


Galamian rightly mentioned that changing positions is done by the left forearm, hand, fingers, and thumb, and shifting from lower to higher position should proceed with simultaneous movement of the hand and thumb (Galamian, 25). The teacher must pay closer attention to the thumb’s position during the transition between first to second or third positions. Meanwhile, the thumb must retain its placement with respect to the other fingers and the palm. When making this movement it is often the case that the thumb lags. The reason for this is usually due to the pressure applied by the left hand onto the neck, and the incorrect holding of the violin. When changing positions anywhere higher than

the third position, the hand gradually bends, whereas the outer part of the palm is raised, and the thumb moves under the neck of the violin. It is imperative that when making this movement, the general positioning of the hand remains unchanged (fingers and palm), but the elbow moves slightly under the violin and the wrist bends outward in a natural manner.



Returning from higher positions to the first position is mirrored from what was said above. Confidence and proper violin holding make switching between positions easier, as it relieves the arm from unnecessary muscle tension.



When changing positions, the student and pedagogue must strive to remove all unnecessary motion in the wrist and thumb when moving the hand from a high position to the third, and then back to the first. From an artistic perspective, there are multiple models of shifting between different positions, namely the Classical, Romantic, Glissando, and the Jump. Transitions can be performed by using open strings, as well as from any finger to any other finger. For the beginner student, it is best to start with the classical model in which the thumb moves naturally with the hand through the length of the neck upwards or downwards, and the touch applied on the string getting lighter, barely brushing it. In the last moment, the finger is placed onto the required position, as any unnecessary sound is avoided. “When moving from one position to another, the student must exert maximum effort so that transition is done soundless. This is the first and most important rule” (Auer, 1965, 59).

Often, when changing position a semi-tone, for example from third to second position, or from fourth to third, it is enough for the index finger to move slightly, and then the whole hand moves back to its correct placement. Sometimes, even when changing position a semi-tone, it is necessary to move the whole hand. Therefore, students often ask why in some cases they play differently than others. The explanation for this is not simple, as it depends on a number of different

factors; such as tempo, dynamic, bowing, and style. A good pedagogue must be able to explain the reason as to why the various requirements exist, so the student may analytically comprehend the main principles. "One must not avoid the questions which target the major principles. At this point the pedagogue can provide their student with guidance in an accessible and convincing form. This in itself is an artform which must be grasped and mastered as it guarantees the productivity of the pedagogue's effort" (Mostras, 1956, 23). When the pedagogue shows the student how the various elements of technique impact sound and dynamic by playing, this leads to maximum educational effect.

## Conclusion

Playing the violin requires achieving specific motor skills (finger, hand, arm, wrist, elbow movements, and coordination), which are dedicated to reaching the ultimate goal, namely auditory perception of music performance. The technique, as a fundamental aspect thereof, serves to illuminate a musical and artistic context. This is the main structure, therefore, the posture of both hands is the foundation upon which all further artistic developments are built. Of course, posture is not the end-point in itself, as it is merely a tool which leads to true musical interpretation and artistic creativity. Musical performance is not separate from the technical process and is related to the genuine possibility of how the instrument may sound and how it responds to the player's mental projections. Musical ideas should be projected in the space and this process should be materialized by the performance itself. In this manner, proper posture serves as the cornerstone for beginner violinists and should be the main concern of a violin teacher. Concerning the topic of the research, diverse opinions were asserted by prominent musicians and pedagogues, who were representatives of different schools of music. These insights were further supplemented by personal expertise, all of which was done aiding the goal to assist violin teachers in finding their ways during the early stages of the tutoring process. However, the research does not provide an ultimate answer and strategy regarding early steps about violin posture, yet it does present various information and data which can be utilized by violin teachers. The article outlines a detailed method of holding the instrument, the right and left hand posture, bow holding, and shifting between positions. These are grounded upon long teaching experience, which proves to achieve an exceptional and distinctive sound, as well as technique perfection, and an excellent stylistic expression. The research also underlines the interaction between the instrument and performer, performer and teacher, and provides a reflective perspective of the initial process of violin education. But more holistically, it explains that obtaining the right posture is not a free choice, but is rather the byproduct of knowledge formation, and a personal projection of teaching methods. Respectfully, the research displays a useful prism within the landscape worth of many centuries of debates which have discussed the most proper and useful posture for beginner violin students. From this point of view, the study is practically an orientated revision of multiple methodologies, presenting a personal method of teaching violin for the initial stages, which can assist teachers in Jordanian Universities, and all other Schools of Music in the Middle East.

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## أهمية اتخاذ الوضعية الصحيحة عند عازفي الكمان المبتدئين

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### ملخص

تعتبر وضعية حمل الآلة الصحيحة واحدة من العوامل الرئيسية في تعليم الآلة بحسب علم أصول التدريس الكمان، ويصف هذا البحث بناء على تجربة الباحث الشخصية، مقاربات تهدف إلى دعم تقنيات الأداء، ووضعية اليدين لعازفين الكمان المبتدئين. ويقدم البحث بعض المعلومات المتعلقة بالخطوات الأساسية في الحصول على المهارات الأساسية في أداء الكمان، وذلك بالرجوع إلى الأدب الموسيقي، والمنشورات المنهجية، وبدعم من تجربة الباحث الشخصية في التدريس، والغرض من هذه الدراسة هو دراسة المبادئ التربوية الأساسية بشكل مستقل لتوفر أفضل الطرق نحو الوضعية الصحيحة، ويركز البحث على جوانب تعنى بوضعية اليد اليمنى و اليد اليسرى التي وجد أنها ذات أهمية كبيرة خلال مسار الباحث التعليمي الطويل، ويعتبر الوضع الصحيح أمرًا أساسيًا لكل من المبتدئين الشباب، وكذلك أولئك الذين يمارسون الأداء في مرحلة لاحقة من حياتهم (كما هو الحال عند الغالبية العظمى من طلاب تخصص آلة الكمان في الجامعة الأردنية). ويعد مستقبل كل موسيقي مبني على فهم جيد للوضعية الصحيحة، سواء من حيث التقنية أو الموهبة الموسيقية.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الكمان، القوس، الوضعية، وضع اليد، تدريس، تغير الوضعية، عازفو الكمان المبتدئين، التصبيغ.

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