



12 SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

**to the Most Common
String Playing Problems**

**SOLUTIONS EVERY STRING
TEACHER SHOULD KNOW!**

GRACE LAW



Fix common string-playing problems with ease....

Diagnosing and fixing problems with string technique can be a struggle, and takes up a lot of your time and effort. You may even have tried every trick up your sleeve to no avail. Correcting technique is a big part of teaching, but chances are, no one ever trained you to become effective at troubleshooting.

Why has fixing technique been so elusive for most teachers? Because most of the time we are misled into trying to fix symptoms instead of their underlying causes. If you know what to look for, diagnosing and fixing common problems can be quite simple.

I want your string program to succeed, and I don't want these little problems to hold back the success of your students. So, I decided to write this book and make available to you the very simple solutions that I teach to the participants in my teacher training courses.

Helping teachers achieve more in less time is what I am passionate about.

Enjoy these solutions!

Grace Lau



Table of Contents

Click on title to jump to the page. Click on the page number to get back.

Bow Arm

- 1** Thumb bent incorrectly **p. 6**
- 2** Bow hold too high **pg. 7**
- 3** Straight or stiff pinky **pg. 8**
- 4** Cello/Bass - Angled fingers **pg. 9**
- 5** Violin/Viola - Low elbow **pg. 10**

Cello & Bass Left Hand

- 6** Angled fingers **pg. 14**
- 7** Low elbow **pg. 15**
- 8** Bent wrist **pg. 16**

Violin & Viola Left Hand

- 9** Fingernails facing sideways **pg. 18**
- 10** Flat fingers **pg. 19**
- 11** Bent wrist **pg. 20**
- 12** 4th finger problems **pg. 21**

A New Pedagogy for the String Classroom....

I believe a pedagogy for the heterogeneous string classroom needs strategies that are:

1. Simple, Quick & Effective

Strategies should be simple, effective and quick to deliver so you don't lose your students' attention and you keep them engaged.

2. Promote Student Independence

Resources should help your students understand the fundamentals of what they are doing so they can think independently, helping you accelerate their progress.

3. Introduce More Advanced Skills Sooner

There is no reason to wait to introduce skills such as finger patterns, shifting, two octaves scales and even vibrato. Advanced skills can be easy to teach and your students can enjoy more music sooner.

Achieve more in less time.

Register for a Smart String Teacher course today!



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Bow Hold & Bow Arm





Problem #1 ———

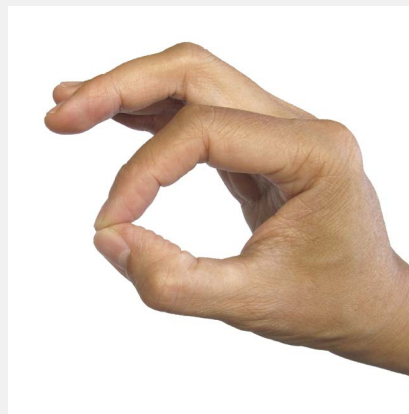
Thumb Bent Incorrectly

Misconceptions or things to avoid

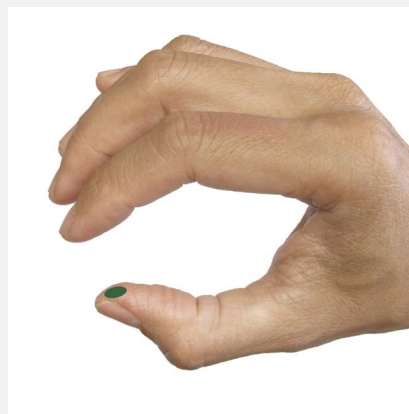
Do not focus on the bending of the thumb, as this is a symptom of the actual problem.

What is actually causing the problem

Incorrect contact point of thumb.
Thumbprint is making contact with the bow.



Touch corner of thumb by making a circle



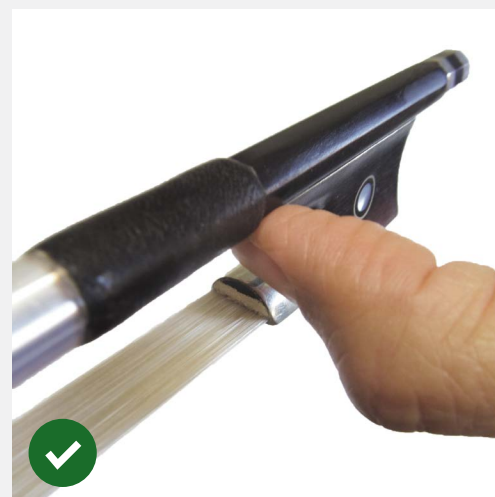
Corner of thumb

What to check first

Check which part of the thumb is in contact with the bow.

Solution

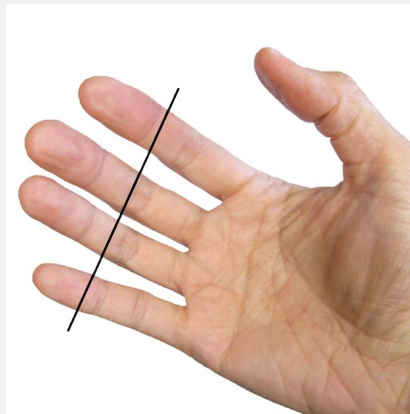
1. Touch the index finger to the thumb to make a circle.
2. This will naturally make contact with the corner of the thumb.
3. The corner of the thumb should be the only point of contact on the stick.
4. The correct point of contact will naturally cause the thumb to bend correctly.



Corner of thumb in contact with thumb area of bow

Problem #2

Bow Hold Too High



Contact line
under fingers

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Avoid trying to fix this problem from above. The problems are underneath.

What is actually causing the problem

Fingerprints are in contact with the bow stick.



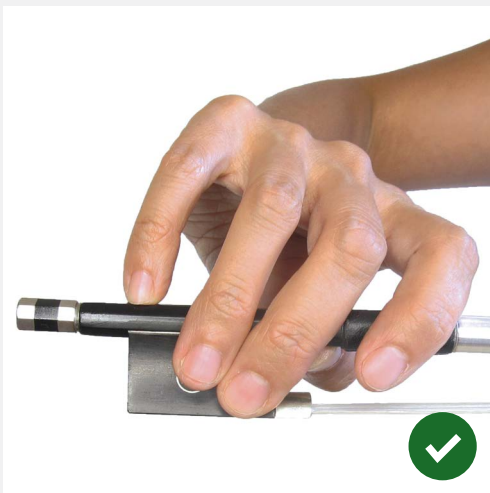
Bow stick on
contact line,
avoiding
fingerprints.

What to check first

Check underneath the bow for the position of the bow stick.

Solution

1. Look underneath the bow hand by turning the bow hand over.
2. Show the line of contact to the student. This is where they should feel the stick pressing into the back of their fingers.
3. Place the stick of the bow on the contact line.
4. Tell the student to make sure their fingerprints don't touch the stick.



Correct
contact of
fingerprints
on frog



Problem #3 —

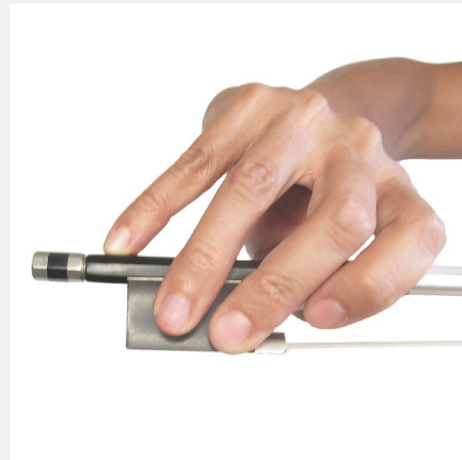
Straight or Stiff Pinky

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Avoid telling the student to bend their pinky.

What is actually causing the problem

The student feels insecure with the weight of the bow and reaches out too far with the pinky to balance it.



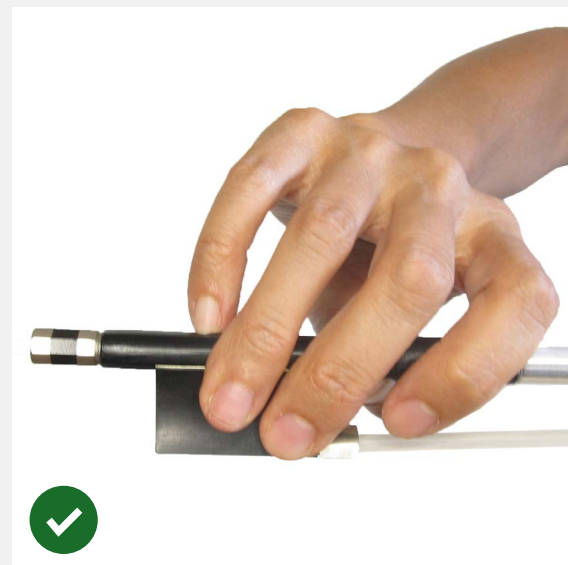
Pinky too far away

What to check first

Check to see how far the pinky is from the rest of the fingers.

Solution

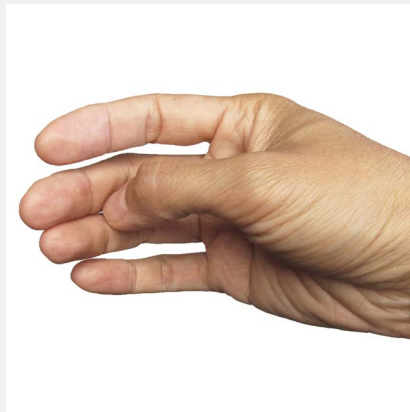
1. Tell the student to bring the pinky closer to the other fingers. The pinky will naturally bend and cannot be straight if it is close enough.
2. Do pinky taps to loosen it up.
3. Be sure to do this with the bow on the string to avoid weight issues.



Pinky closer to other fingers

Problem #4

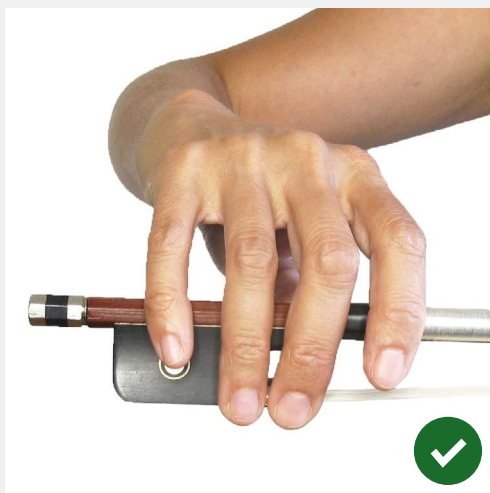
Cello/Bass - Angled Fingers



Thumb position
between two
middle fingers



Check
underneath
the bow



Square
bow hold

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Avoid focussing from above and trying to fix the angle of the fingers. The problem is underneath.

What is actually causing the problem

Incorrect position of the thumb. The thumb is across from the 2nd finger.

What to check first

Check underneath the bow hold for the position of the thumb.

Solution

1. Look underneath the bow hold.
2. Make sure the two middle fingers are directly across from the thumb. This will square up the fingers naturally.



Problem #5 ———

Violin & Viola - Low Elbow

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Asking students to raise their arms higher is ineffective as the low elbow can be a symptom of multiple problems.

What is actually causing the problem

Incorrect bow hold.

Reaching for lower strings without taking the elbow.

Incorrect angle of the bow stick.

What to check first

1. Check the bow hold.
2. Check the arm level in relation to the string.
3. Check the angle of the bow stick.

Solution

1. Correct any bow hold problems.
2. Make sure the student takes their whole arm as they change string levels. The relationship of the arm to the bow should always stay constant.
3. Make sure the student angles the stick of the bow very slightly away from them, towards the fingerboard. This will naturally lift the elbow.

Violin & Viola - Low Elbow - cont'd



1. Incorrect bow hold lowers the elbow.



Correct bow hold raises the elbow.



2. Reaching for lower strings incorrectly.



Take whole arm when changing strings.



3. Bow stick straight or tilted backwards.



Bow tilted slightly forward, away from face.



Side view: Bow stick straight with hair flat.



Bow stick is tilted slightly forward.

**If you are armed with the
right strategies you can**

*Achieve more...
...in less time.*

"Grace's methodology is unique in the way it presents technique clearly, getting straight to the point yet remaining easy to use for the teacher and the students. " - Giovanni Bobisse, Italy

Make a difference.

Invest in your career and make a difference for your students now. Register for SST pedagogy courses today.

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Cello & Bass Left Hand





Problem #6 ———

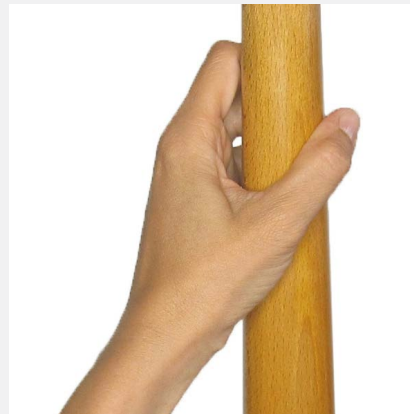
Angled Fingers

Misconceptions or things to avoid

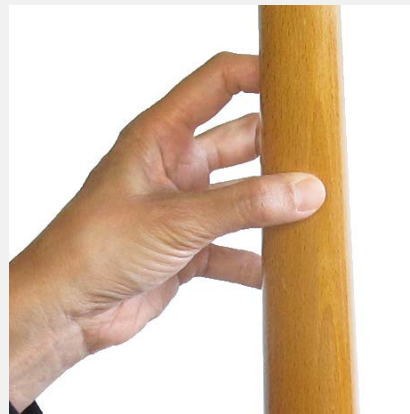
Avoid focussing on the angle of the fingers as this does not address the cause.

What is actually causing the problem

Incorrect position of the thumb. The thumb is wrapped around the neck or pointing up.



*Incorrect
thumb position*



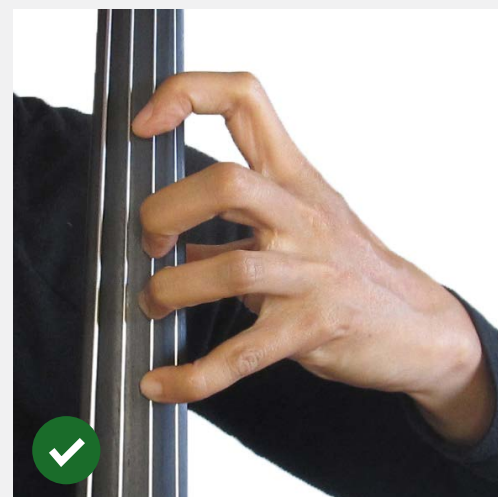
*Correct
thumb position*

What to check first

Check the position of the thumb.

Solution

Place the thumb behind the neck, across from the 2nd finger. This will naturally square up the fingers.



*Square
fingers*

Problem #7

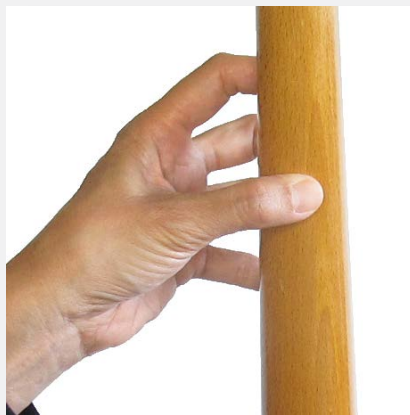
Low Elbow



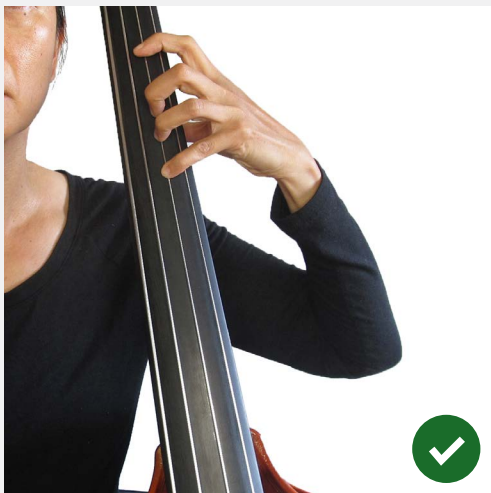
*Incorrect
thumb position*



*Correct
thumb position*



*Elbow is
raised*



Misconceptions or things to avoid

Avoid focussing on lifting the elbow as this does not address the cause.

What is actually causing the problem

Incorrect position of the thumb. The thumb is wrapped around the neck or pointing up.

What to check first

Check the position of the thumb.

Solution

Place the thumb behind the neck, across from the 2nd finger. This will naturally straighten the arm and lift it.



Problem #8 ———

Bent Wrist

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Avoid asking the student to straighten their arm as they won't be able to.

What is actually causing the problem

The student is trying to look at their fingers and has moved the fingerboard away from their face.



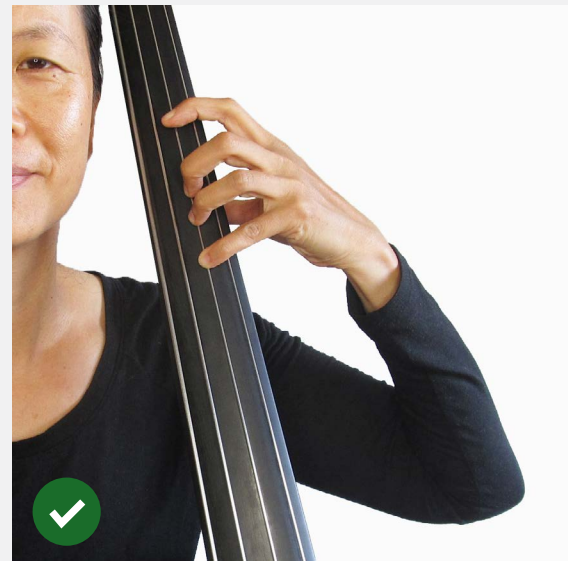
Fingerboard too far from face

What to check first

Check the distance of the fingerboard from the student's face.

Solution

Bring the fingerboard next to the face, like holding a phone to talk. This will naturally straighten the left arm.



Fingerboard next to face

Violin & Viola Left Hand





Problem #9 ———

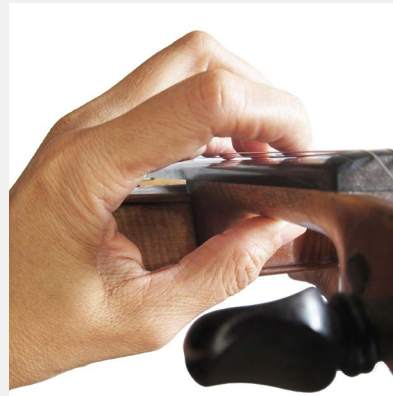
Fingernails Facing Sideways

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Asking the student to turn their fingernails may only partially fix the problem, but not get at the cause.

What is actually causing the problem

Instrument has no contact with the 'shelf'.



Instrument not in contact with 'shelf'

What to check first

Check the 'shelf'.

Solution

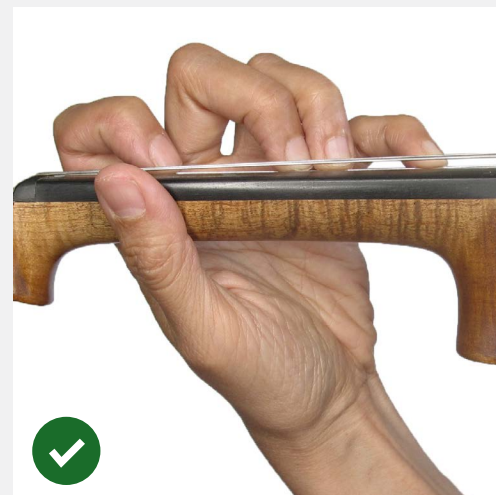
Hold up the instrument by the shelf and close the thumb. This will naturally force the fingernails to face forward.



'Shelf'



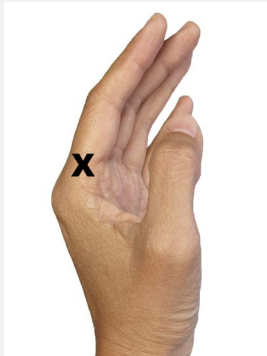
Place instrument, close thumb



Fingernails will face forward

Problem #10

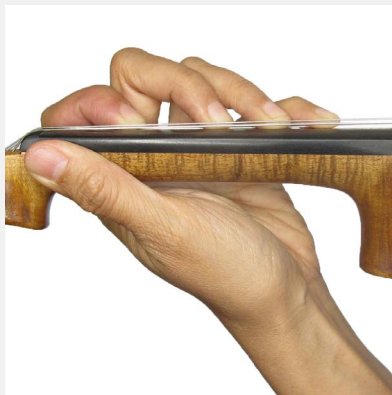
Flat Fingers



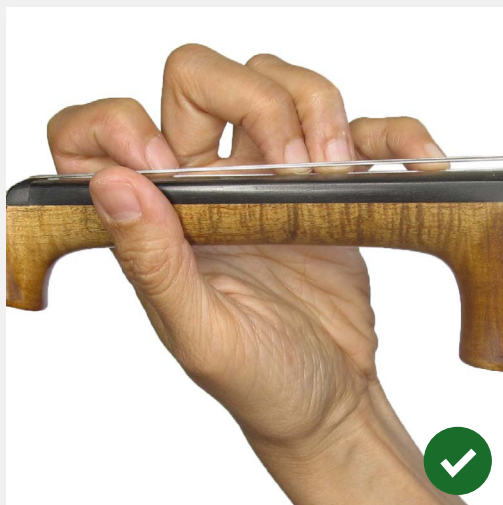
'Shelf'



Place instrument, close thumb



Raise 'sleepy' thumb



Tips of fingers on string

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Asking the student to 'square up' their fingers or to play with their fingertips may only partially fix the problem but not the cause.

What is actually causing the problem

Instrument is not sitting on the 'shelf'. Thumb is 'sleeping'.

What to check first

Check the 'shelf' & thumb.

Solution

Hold up the instrument by the shelf and make sure the thumb is raised. This will naturally make it easy to use the tips of the fingers.



Problem #11 ———

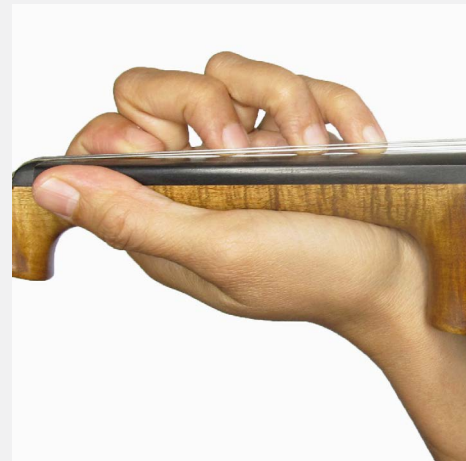
Bent Wrist

Misconceptions or things to avoid

Asking the student to straighten their wrist does not get at the cause and does not help them solve the problem.

What is actually causing the problem

Thumb is 'sleeping'.



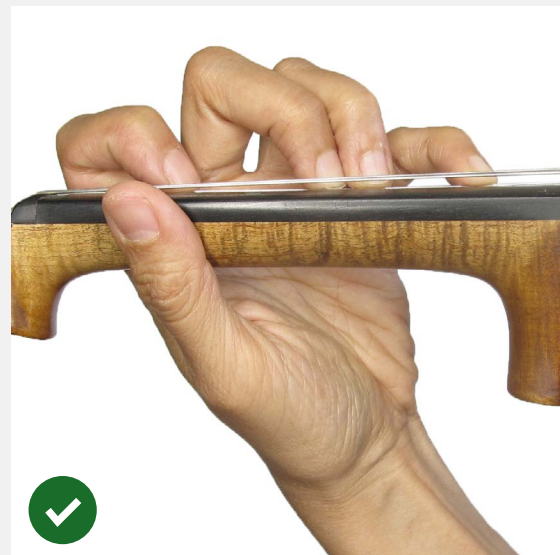
'Sleepy' thumb

What to check first

Check the thumb.

Solution

Raise the thumb. This will naturally straighten the wrist.



Thumb raised

Problem #12

4th Finger Problems



Misconceptions or things to avoid

Not necessarily an issue of pinky length or weakness.

What is actually causing the problem

Top of the palm is positioned below the fingerboard.

Top of palm is below the fingerboard



What to check first

Check the position of the top of the palm.

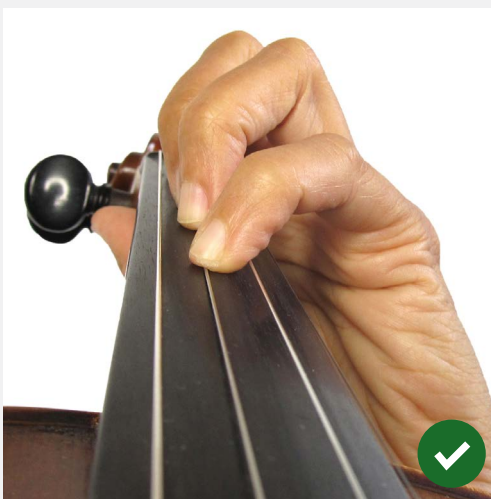
Solution

1. Raise the position of the hand so that the entire top of the palm is above the fingerboard.
2. This will naturally raise the pinky so it can maintain a square shape.
3. This will also turn the arm so that the elbow swings right, further under the instrument.
4. The pinky is now at the same height and angle as the other fingers, thereby making it possible to work as the other fingers do. It also distributes the weight evenly over all the fingers.

Top of palm is over the fingerboard



All fingers equally arched



Solutions every string teacher should know.

Now that you understand the real causes of these string playing problems, I know you can't wait to start applying these time-saving simple solutions in your classroom. I am so happy to have been able to share these string teacher secrets with you so you can immediately start making a difference for your students' success.

Teaching should be easy.

However, chances are many of the solutions in this book were new to you and you began your string teaching career without this essential knowledge. This should not be. Every string teacher should be armed with valuable information like this so they can start their career teaching with ease and confidence.

Take my courses.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of the many simple strategies that you can learn through my teacher training courses. Imagine what you and your students could accomplish if you had more knowledge like this and could achieve more in less time. With the right training, you can learn to teach strings with skill and expertise.

Make a difference.

Register for a course today!
smartstringteacher.com

Teachers who decided to make a difference.

“Grace’s methodology is an organized and clear system that makes sense. I absolutely recommend Grace’s courses to other string teachers. It is the best investment I’ve ever made for my career.” - Julia Sullivan, United States

“As a non-string player I feel more confident in my ability to demonstrate playing techniques for students and to provide meaningful feedback. I am excited to see how it impacts the bow grips and hand positions of this year’s beginners! ” - Michael Jameer, Canada

“Before I took your class, I was terrified at the thought of starting beginners from scratch. The scope and sequence you developed and shared with us has given me MUCH more confidence.” - Gregory Tarbox, United States

“Your course has given me valuable tips on how to correct student mistakes. I feel more confident now that I will be able to help my students’ technique improve.” - Melanie Johnston, United States

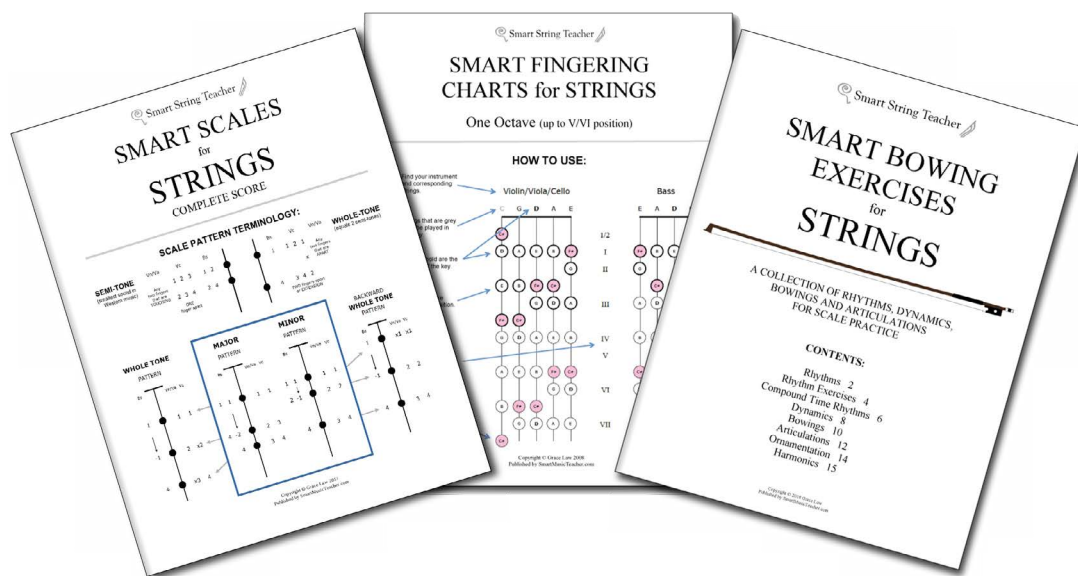
“After only ten classes, I feel confident diving into teaching a group of beginning string students. Each class covered so much more than my string pedagogy class in college!” - Maureen Isbister, United States

“Grace’s course is very hands-on and the practical elements are immediately applicable in a classroom. It helped me to sort out the complicated process of playing a tricky instrument. ” - Lindsey Wen, Canada



Achieve more in less time.

My books will help you build your students' independence, allowing you to progress further more quickly.



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confidence.

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