



## TEACHING

# *Sustained Tone* to Young Students

by Elise Winters

Young beginners (and sometimes older ones!) do not always have the patience to extract value from practicing long tones. Done correctly, this work — e.g. the Tonalizations throughout the Suzuki books — has the potential to unlock the warm, resonant sound of the violin. But the intent listening required may seem inaccessible to younger players.

After devoting valuable lesson time to tonalization only to discover students quickly breezing through it in their home practice, I lost my faith in tone work with beginning students, and began saving it until later in students' study.

Recently, though, I discovered that sustained tones can be incredibly exciting for relative beginners, *as long as the work is prepared correctly*. The trick? Open-string work with a metronome.

Boring, right? Maybe — if it were not so challenging! It may be boring to an adult musician, but for a young player it's darn hard. Students are intrigued by the difficulty, and it also provides their first experience of an inner pulse *within* a very long note. Upon discovering this, their sense of time expands.

It is as though they had always assumed each note was just a colorful gumdrop, and now they realize that each one also has a majestic castle inside! The inverted sense of time slows their pacing and makes it possible for them to do the focused listening required for tone development.

Another opportunity for tone development is balancing the body weight for full-bow playing. Advanced musicians do this instinctively: the body's center of mass balances on the left foot when playing at the frog, and on both feet at the middle and tip. For novices, unlocking this subtle side-to-side shift takes mental effort but becomes intuitive as they discover the ease it creates in their playing.

Another exciting enhancement is bending the knees when playing the tip. When the legs are bent the body naturally tilts forward at the waist, bringing the upper body slightly above the bow arm. With the arm suspended rather than supported, the full strength of the arm is redirected into greater torque into the point of the bow.

(The mechanics may be a bit heady, but your students don't need to know these. They'll hear the difference right away!)

I hope these exercises open up a whole world of tone for your students.

*Elise*

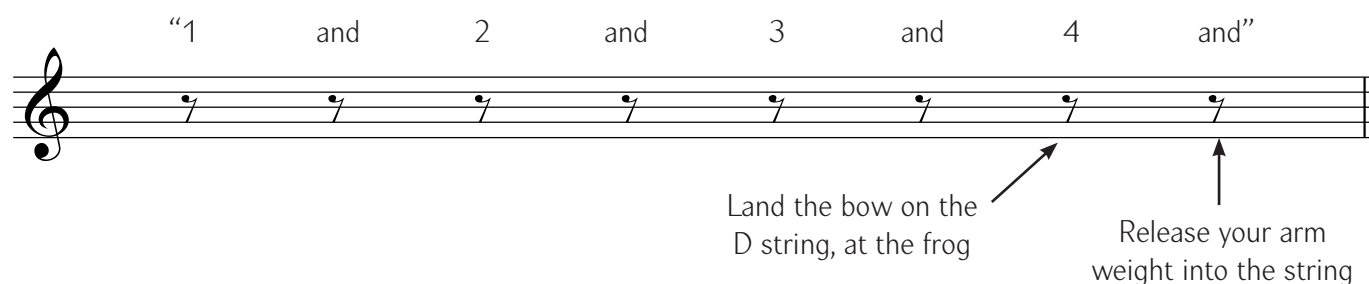
P.S. Please feel free to email me with any questions. You can find me at [elise@discoverviolin.org](mailto:elise@discoverviolin.org). It may take me a little while to respond, but I answer every email.

# Crossing the Ocean & Ysaye Warm-up

## The Initial Count

The count-up seems simple but there are quite a few steps to remember. Review this a few times each practice.

- Start with the bow arm at a right angle, slightly separated from the ribcage.
- Count the subdivisions out loud: “One, and, two, and, three, and, four, and.”
- Speak in a rhythmic, staccato way, at approximately ♩ = 60 (don’t actually use the metronome, though).
- The bow arm stays at rest for three and a half beats.
- On “four” it crosses the body and lands on the D string, at the frog.
- On the final “and,” the bow arm relaxes into the string.



## Matching the Metronome

Playing long tones with the metronome seems easy but will take some time to master.

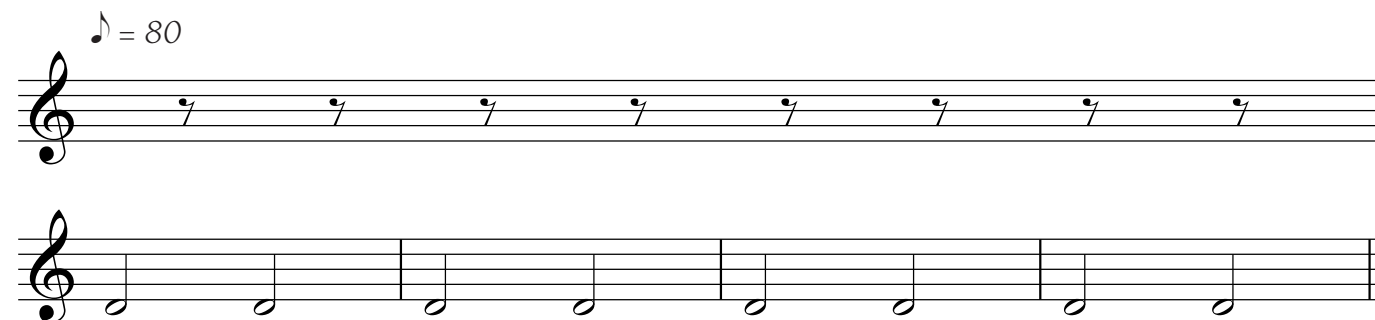
- Count up in the same way you did on the previous exercise. This time you’ll actually use the metronome.
- Sustain four clicks per note. The ideal tempo for you will depend on your level of control and the length of your bow (the tempo below is for a fractional size bow).
- Make sure your bow arm is relaxed and hanging from the bow. Feel the weight on your index finger.
- As the bow leans into the string, the violin should “lean upward” into the bow.
- Play the exercise on each string. You’ll be leaning into the string at a different angle for each one.



## Weight Shifting

Now you are ready for the next concept: weight shifting.

- Begin with your weight centered on both feet.
- During the initial count-up, as you bring your bow across your body to land at the frog, allow your weight to transfer onto your left foot. Keep your upper body tall.
- As you draw the bow to the tip, gradually shift your weight back to center.
- Continue in this vein, with each  $\square$  beginning on the left foot and finishing with the weight centered.



A few additional tips, once you've tried the exercise a few times:

- The shift of the body should be slower than the speed of the bow, since it's not going as far.
- Try not to react immediately to the change in bow direction. It may feel as though your body pauses for a moment as the bow turns around.

## Crossing Strings

Now the shifting of weight will be combined with string crossings.

As you reach the end of the count for each string, begin raising or lowering your arm in preparation for the next note. Make sure all of the bows connect — especially the ones when you are moving to a new string.

When playing on the G string, point the tip of the bow slightly downward. This will give you much more sound.



## Using Gravity at the Tip

When playing at the point of the bow, you can get a larger sound with less effort by bending your knees.

The knees should begin bending midway through each  $\square$ . They'll reach their lowest point as you reach the tip.

At the same time as you bend your knees, gradually rotate your arm weight into the tip of the bow.

$\text{♩} = 80$

The exercise consists of three staves of music. The first staff contains eight eighth rests. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: two eighth notes (G4, A4), followed by two quarter notes (B4, C5), and then two half notes (D5, E5). The third staff contains a sequence of notes: two half notes (G4, A4), followed by two quarter notes (B4, C5), and then two eighth notes (D5, E5) at the end.

## Crossing the Ocean

This exercise is the same as the previous ones, except you'll now play each string only once. You'll now have string crossings at the tip as well as the frog.

Play "Crossing the Ocean" with the metronome, remembering to use all the concepts you have already learned — weight shifting, prepared string crossings, and using gravity at the tip.

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The exercise consists of three staves of music. The first staff contains eight eighth rests. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: two eighth notes (G4, A4), followed by two quarter notes (B4, C5), and then two half notes (D5, E5). The third staff contains a sequence of notes: two half notes (G4, A4), followed by two quarter notes (B4, C5), and then two eighth notes (D5, E5) at the end.

## Ysaye Warm-up

Use the previous exercises to warm up your full-body technique and tone. Continue thinking about these elements as you play the exercise below, which adds fingered note on each string.

This exercise was used by the Belgian violin virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931) and his students, and has been used by generations since. It builds awareness of string crossings and using weight, balance and relaxation to produce resonance.



Once you have practiced the above version for a few weeks, you may enjoy finishing the sequence with 4-note slurs. Strive for a consistent, rich tone, smooth string crossings, and rhythmic note changes.

