

How to Develop Killer Vibrato

According to Laura Smith

So you want to learn vibrato? Awesome! Here's how.

For best results: Every time you practice, start with step #1 and practice all the steps you've learned in order.

Plan to spend a week or so mastering each step before adding another.

1. Shake an egg shaker. Notice how the easiest way to shake it is by pivoting from your wrist. Pay attention to what the movement feels like.
2. Hold fiddle. Brace lower edge of palm on fiddle's upper bout. Move hand in exactly the same way you did with the egg shaker. Pivot from wrist.
3. Same as 2., but add thumb as a pivot point by placing thumb on the L side of the fiddle neck. DO NOT touch the neck on the R side with the side of your palm. If you find yourself doing this, go back to steps 1. and 2.

If you learn vibrato correctly your hand will never touch the R side of the neck while vibrating.

4. Same as 2., but tap your fingers gently on the strings/fingerboard.

~ very important to master steps 1 through 4 before going on ~

5. With wrist and thumb pivot points in contact with fiddle, put one finger on a string. Roll the tip of your finger away from you - toward the scroll - and then back toward you, pivoting only from the wrist. If you've taken enough time with the previous steps this should be easy.

6. Add bow! Try to do four finger rolls per bow. It will sound like big, slow vibrato. Don't try to speed it up yet.
Remember to start from the top of the list every time you practice.

7. Repeat 4., 5., and 6. with each finger.

As you practice, your vibrato will speed up naturally. Don't try to rush it. If it's irregular or goes in spurts you're going too fast. Slow down - it's worth the wait to have beautiful regular vibrato that you can control.

Don't play in first position yet.

8. Practice the following vibrato variations with each finger:

- a. Wide vibrato
- b. Narrow vibrato
- c. Slow vibrato
- d. Fast vibrato
- e. Wide, slow vibrato
- f. Fast, narrow vibrato
- g. Slow, narrow vibrato
- h. Fast, wide vibrato

What do you like best?

Try playing a note that starts with narrow vibrato and ends with wide vibrato. Experiment! Have fun!

Remember to vibrate away, rather than towards yourself – you want your finger to dip below the pitch you started with, not rise above it. If you vibrate toward yourself rather than away you'll sound out of tune.

If you're able to experiment and have played all these different vibratos for a week while pivoting from the wrist, and without touching the R side of the neck, you're ready to play vibrato in first position.

9. Slide your hand down to first position. Your only contact points will be your thumb and whatever finger you're using to press down a string. You won't have a contact point for your wrist. If it's hard to pivot from your wrist, or if you're touching the right side of the neck with your hand, you need to practice steps 1. through 8. for another week.

Don't try adding vibrato to all your songs yet. Stick with a simple scale. Have fun playing around with how different vibratos sound in first position.

Note: Pinky vibrato is hard. If your vibrato works great with all the other fingers, but falls apart when you try to use the pinky, just play in 1st pos. with the other fingers and stick to exercises 1. through 8. for the pinky.

10. Pick out an easy old song that you know well and has half notes or longer. Add vibrato to the half notes!

11. Listen to vibrato on records. What kind of vibrato do you want to emulate? Stephan Grapelli? Stewart Duncan? Hillary Hahn? Darol Anger?

12. Free rein. Add vibrato wherever you want. Be careful. Don't kill anybody.