

# Teaching Cello in the Orchestra Classroom (Like a Cellist!)

Margaret Selby

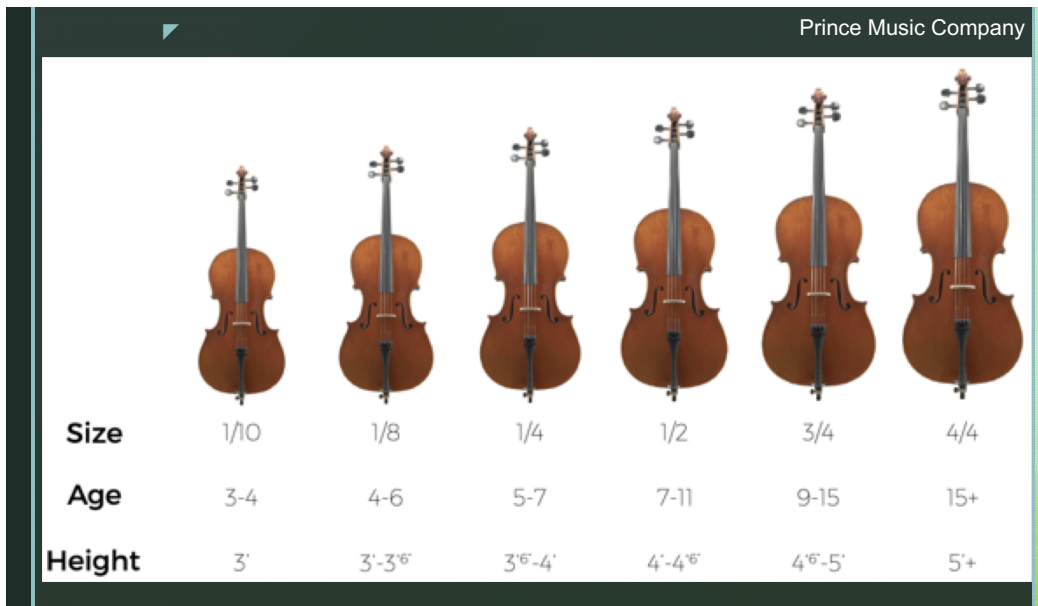
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## Overview:

- Set Up
- Left Hand
- Right Hand
- Extensions
- Vibrato
- Shifting/Positions
- Thumb Position
- Tenor Clef and Treble Clef

## Set Up:

### Sizing Chart



	1/10	1/8	1/4	1/2	3/4	4/4
<b>Size</b>	1/10	1/8	1/4	1/2	3/4	4/4
<b>Age</b>	3-4	4-6	5-7	7-11	9-15	15+
<b>Height</b>	3'	3'-3 <sup>6</sup> ''	3 <sup>6</sup> ''-4'	4'-4 <sup>6</sup> ''	4 <sup>6</sup> ''-5'	5'+

### Instrument Placement Guidelines:

1. Feet flat on the floor
2. C Bout Points at or above the knee
3. Heart (resting comfortably on the chest) Hug!
4. Neck near your neck
5. Ear tickle (C peg behind the ear)

### Left Hand Position:

1. Finger Tapes
2. "C is for Cello"
3. Thumb under the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger, under the D string
4. Check your wing! (Be "average", knuckle knocks)

### Common Left Hand Position Problems and Solutions:

- Collapsing knuckles, double jointed fingers

- Check elbow height, thumb curved/pointing down, use finger tips, “Curly knuckles”
- Do strengthening exercises (isometric)
- Upward bent wrist (“I’m looking at my hand” syndrome)
  - Neck closer to the neck
  - Sly fox eyes, paper between cello neck and eyes to block view
- Downward bent wrist
  - Check endpin height/cello angle or find correct elbow placement or thumb under D string
- Not using weight of left arm, squeezing with thumb
  - Coat hanger trick.....play without thumb....find correct elbow placement
- For many problems, the solution is the thumb (curved under the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> finger, under the D or A string OR the left elbow placement)

### Right Hand Position:

- Flop, Hang from the monkey bars
- 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on the ferrule

### Common Right Hand Position Problems and Solutions:

- The A string twist: Turning the shoulders to the left in order to reach the A string with the bow. In orchestra class, much of the music can be on the A and D strings, so some students will turn their body.
  - Make sure the bridge is facing straight ahead or slightly to the left if needed
  - Check for relaxed shoulders, especially when changing to lower strings
  - Play on the G and C strings!
- Hand collapsing toward pinky
  - Feel weight on “front” of the hand (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers)
  - Put pinky on top of the stick
  - Check the right elbow height (too low), raise elbow as they move down bow
- Hand too rotated toward first finger
  - Make sure the first finger isn’t too far over the stick, contact the grip close to the first knuckle on the first finger
  - Feel the “back” of the hand more (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> fingers)
  - Check elbow height (too high), drop elbow as they move up bow
- Slipping thumb
  - Try moving thumb contact higher on stick
  - Surgical tubing

### Extensions:

- The extension happens between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> finger (whole step)
- **Step the thumb forward** with the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger
- It’s okay to touch on a different part of the 1<sup>st</sup> finger (more on the side)

How do you teach extensions in orchestra class?

#### Strategies:

- Tetrachord etude (String Warm Ups from C. Selby, stringeducation.org or in the Habits of a Successful String Musician and Middle Level books)

- Method book exercises: if possible, choose to teach the backward extensions before the forward extensions.
- Practice the motion of an extension on the arm, the bow or a dowel
- Do exercises during whole class “echo” time:
  - GG-EE-GG-EbEb, G-A-Bb-A-G, G(4)-E-G(x3)-E, G-E-G#(x4)-E, B-A-G#(x4)-A-B
- \*\*Constantly remind students to step the thumb with the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger

### Vibrato:

- Polishing and Turning
- Introduction Order: 2<sup>nd</sup> finger, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> finger, 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> finger, 1<sup>st</sup> finger

### Common Vibrato Problems and Solutions:

- Too fast or narrow!
  - Too tense, go back to polishing with or without cello or bow
  - Try vibrato/polishing with just the thumb touching the neck and fingers hovered
- Thumb flies away
  - Check elbow placement (maybe lower)
  - Vibrato motion with just the thumb touching neck and fingers hovering
- Tucking fingers
  - Relax and hover fingers
- **Cello secret**--try moving the thumb under the finger(s) you are vibrating

### Cello Positions:

- Cello positions are different than upper string instruments due to much larger fingerboard creating the need to be more specific.
- Cello positions are determined by the placement of the first finger on the fingerboard. ½ position through 7th position.
- The only positions without “halves” are 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> position.
- Any neck position (1/2-5<sup>th</sup>) can be extended.
- 5<sup>th</sup> extended-7th positions generally use 3<sup>rd</sup> finger instead of 4<sup>th</sup> finger.
- Everything after VII is thumb position.

1 <sup>st</sup> Finger (A String)	Position
Bb	½
B	I
C	II
C#	II ½
D	III
Eb	III ½
E	IV
F	V
F#	V ½
G	VI
G#	VI ½
A	VII

Why think this way about positions?

- More exact and clear.
- Know exactly where you are on the fingerboard and what notes you are able to play in that position.

### Shifting:

- Start teaching your cellists to shift when the upper strings are learning 4<sup>th</sup> fingers. They can go to 4<sup>th</sup> finger A, too!
- Many easy tunes in method books will work as beginning position/shifting exercises: Ode to Joy (start on 1<sup>st</sup> finger F#)
- Tool: Tetrachord Etude (same as above under Extensions)

### The Steps to Shifting:

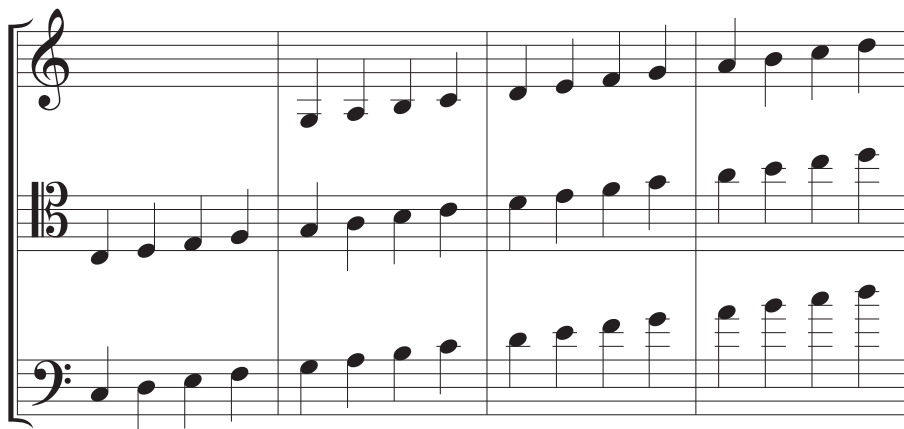
1. Release (the left hand weight)
2. Prepare with the elbow (it moves first: clockwise, counterclockwise)
3. Slide

### Thumb Position

How do I teach thumb position?

1. Find the correct elbow height and relaxed shoulders by doing knuckle knocks, Look at your watch!
  2. Start by using the “half way” harmonic on the A and D string, thumb on two strings, “iny and outy” thumb knuckles, “look at your watch”
  3. Play one octave scales/arp., major and minor
  4. Play old beginning tunes:
    - Twinkle, Can Can, French Folk Song
- \*Tip: In general, the thumb is either a whole or half step away from the 1<sup>st</sup> finger.

### Tenor and Treble Clef



How do I teach tenor and treble clef?

- It doesn't have to be scary. Show kids how the clefs relate to each other.
- Most young cellists start reading tenor clef by thinking up a string. Have them try transposing bass clef music into tenor clef.
- Treble clef—the bottom line is first finger E in 4<sup>th</sup> position
- Try reading an easy grade 1 violin piece (One octave D scale notes)



Margaret Selby is the orchestra director and 2020-21 Teacher of the Year at Laing Middle School in Charleston, SC where she grew the program from 42 to over 200 students in five years. She was the 2022 Featured Clinician for the Orchestra Division of the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) and is a contributing author of *Rehearsing the Middle School Orchestra*, published by Meredith Music and distributed by GIA. She has conducted the West Virginia Junior All-State Orchestra and multiple regional orchestras across the southeast, and has adjudicated orchestras in Las Vegas and South Carolina. Mrs. Selby has presented sessions for the Texas Orchestra Directors Association (TODA), the South Carolina Music Educators Association (SCMEA), co-presented at the ASTA National Conference (2012, 2020, 2021) and was a panelist at the 2019 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago. She served as the President for the SCMEA Orchestra Division and is currently the SCMEA Orchestra Division Region 4 Representative. Mrs. Selby is the 2017-18 String Educator of the Year awarded by Southern String Supply. She earned degrees in Music Education and Cello Performance from the University of South Carolina, studying under Dr. Robert Jesselson. She has performed with the South Carolina Philharmonic, the Charleston Symphony, and regularly as a freelance cellist. She is also a registered Suzuki cello teacher. Mrs. Selby lives in Mt. Pleasant, SC with her husband and their two crazy teenagers. She enjoys running and sampling Charleston's many amazing restaurants.