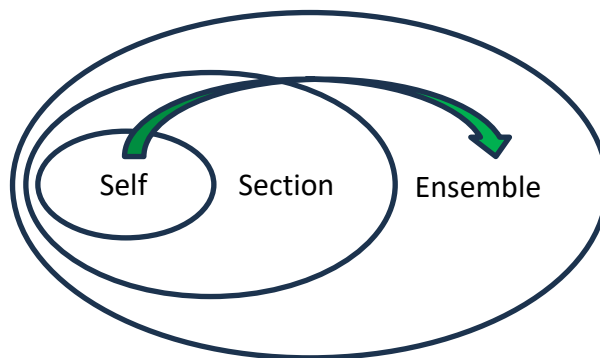


# Rhythm, Rushing and The Right Hand

Christopher R. Selby

In this session, attendees will learn

- A method for teaching students to count—especially through long notes and rests—to help them accurately perform the rhythms they encounter in orchestra music
- Strategies for teaching good bow hand technique from the beginning, and how to review it with older students
- Exercises and activities for teaching good tone production and a variety of articulation skills
- How the language we use may contribute to rushing and ensemble problems, and how teaching students to listen across the ensemble may be the best way to control rushing



## Part 1. Teaching Students to Count, Read and Perform Rhythms

The goal of teaching rhythm is to develop independent string musicians who can decipher, recall and perform written rhythms without the help of a teacher. Students will ask, “How does this go?,” and if we are not careful, teachers can unintentionally create students that become rhythmically dependent upon the teacher or other players.

Rhythm has two components: the pulse and the rhythm that goes over the pulse. To better understand and perform rhythms, students should count the pulse and perform the rhythm with their right hand while counting. There can be a pulse without a rhythm, but there is no such thing as good rhythm without a pulse.

213a. and b.



For additional practice with ties, dotted quarter notes and eighth rest patterns, go to Part VIII Sight Reading Exercises 270–283.

221a. and b.



### Additional Sight Reading Exercises

266.



286.



**Use a Series of Rhythm Exercises that is sequenced in increasing difficulty.** Also, practice musical sight-reading exercises that gradually challenge students to play harder rhythms, in more advanced keys, and in higher positions and alternate clefs.

## Getting Started

1. **Counting the pulse.** After the teacher demonstrates how students should count, the students are to count the pulse (not the rhythm of the music) out loud. Then, they perform the rhythm of the music with their bow hand while continuing to count *out loud*. Count using the smallest denomination used in the music; for example:
  - a. If the example is mostly quarters and half notes, count quarter notes (1, 2, 3, 4.)
  - b. If the example has dotted quarters and eighth-notes, count the pulse and division (1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &)
  - c. Dotted eighths and sixteenth-notes: 1 e & a, 2 e & a, 3 e & a, 4 e & a
2. **Performing the rhythm.** While counting out loud, students perform the rhythm exercises with their bow hand using some or all of the following strategies:
  - a. **Air bow** to give students a preliminary *feel* of the rhythm as they count the pulse out loud. Longer notes should be bowed with a slow, sustained motion. The **teacher should watch the students, not the notes**, to make sure students are counting and watch the bows to assess who is struggling with the rhythm.
  - b. **Bow the rhythm on an open string.** Watch students' lips to make sure they count as they play; those who don't count will not know when to come in after long notes and rests.
  - c. **Mentally practice the B-line for 30 seconds** to give the non-readers with good ears a chance to practice reading before the class plays together. Remind students to look at the time and key signatures.
  - d. **Perform the B-line.** If they seem to need it, students may take the intermediate step of counting and playing pizzicato before playing the notes arco.

## Counting Out Loud

To really understand a rhythm pattern, students must count a consistent pulse. The biggest benefit is that students learn to count through long or dotted notes and rests, which is the most important time to count. Students will beg their teachers to let them "count in their head," but don't let them, because in truth, they temporarily stop counting during the long notes and rests when counting is most necessary.

**Modeling is encouraged, but avoid teaching rhythm through repetition.** Hammering a rhythm over and over may clean up rhythmic inaccuracies, but the students are only learning to copy the teacher, and not learning to count and independently perform the rhythm. Each time a rhythm or exercise is repeated, the students with good ears and poor reading ability have less need to read. So, avoid repetition, and remember that the best time to teach rhythmic literacy is every time students are learning new exercises or music.

## PART 2. The Right Hand and Tone Production

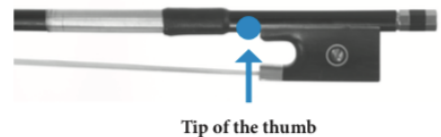
A picture is worth 1000 words. Use great pictures to help you teach.



### Bow Hand Mantra: “Flop, Drop, Tuck, Tap”

1. Hold the bow with your left hand at the balance point.
2. Gently shake the tension out of your right hand and follow the steps:

- STEP 1: FLOP the middle fingers over the bow.
- STEP 2: Lean and DROP the curved pointer finger.
- STEP 3: TUCK the thumb between the frog and grip.
- STEP 4: TAP the pinky.



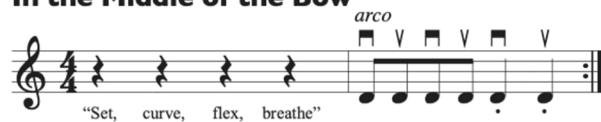
### Bow Set Mantra: “Set, Curve, Flex, Breathe”

The Bow Set Mantra has been a game changer for the beginners in my wife, Margaret’s classroom. Most of the tension we see in young bow hands is created as the student carries the bow to the string. The Bow Set Mantra makes a habit of setting the bow on the string and then relaxing and breathing before playing.

#### Bow Set Mantra

1. **SET** your bow down on the string.
2. **CURVE** your fingers and your thumb.
3. **FLEX** your soft and squishy knuckles.
4. **BREATHE** before you move your bow.

#### 40. In the Middle of the Bow



#### 41. Different String, Different Elbow Position



**Review Bow Hand technique often—*Every day is bow hand day.***

1. **Rest Position.** Let the bow rest in the hand with the hair up. Guide students to check the curvature and placement of their thumb and fingers.
2. **“Go Fishing”** to feel the weight of the bow in a relaxed and fluid right hand.
3. Practice taking the bow to the string without the pinky. This technique is especially important for students with pinky problems.

**Golden Rule: The bow is held up by the *string*, and it is held *down* by the bow hand.**

**Use Michael Allen Warm-Ups or Habits Bowing Variations to teach rhythm patterns separately.**

# Bowing Variations

**7. Introduction (teacher)**      **Theme (student)**

**Basic Bow Strokes**

7a.      7b.      7c.      7d. Middle to upper half

7e.      7f.      7g.

Use the following sequence to efficiently and effectively teach tone, articulation, and rhythm combinations:

1. Select a rhythm or bowing that the students need to learn or review, possibly from the menu of options below, or make up your own.
2. Establish a tempo from a concert piece with the rhythms the students are playing.
3. Use the introduction to model the rhythms or articulations students are to learn.
4. Students play the Theme immediately after the teacher, demonstrating the rhythm or articulation just modeled by the teacher or student leader.
5. Practice with and without the classroom metronome.

## Spiccato and Sautillé

**When teaching spiccato, start from the string to promote better control and tone.** Remember to review right hand technique before teaching spiccato, because spiccato always makes a bad bow hand worse. Here is the sequence I use to teach spiccato.

### 10. Spiccato Exercises

Keep thumb and pinky curved

10a. 10b. 10c. 10d. 10e. 10f. 10g. 10h. 10i.

The exercises are written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Exercises 10a, 10b, 10c, 10d, 10e, 10f, 10g, 10h, and 10i are all in 4/4 time. Exercise 10d is in 12/8 time. The exercises consist of various rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accents, and some with slurs. Exercise 10a is a simple eighth-note pattern. Exercise 10b is a sixteenth-note pattern. Exercise 10c is a quarter-note pattern. Exercise 10d is a sixteenth-note pattern. Exercise 10e is a quarter-note pattern. Exercise 10f is a quarter-note pattern. Exercise 10g is a quarter-note pattern. Exercise 10h is a quarter-note pattern. Exercise 10i is a quarter-note pattern.

### 11. Spiccato Etude and Variations

The etude is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accents, and some with slurs. The etude is divided into four measures, each with a different rhythmic pattern.

### 13. Triple Bowing Etude

The etude is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 12/8 time signature. It consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accents, and some with slurs. The etude is divided into four measures, each with a different rhythmic pattern.

**When teaching sautillé, start with groups of four and two before teaching singles.** Students have an easier time coordinating their left and right hands when they lead with the left hand, and the right hand follows.

### 14. Sautillé Bow Stroke

The etude is written on two staves in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accents, and some with slurs. The etude is divided into four measures, each with a different rhythmic pattern.

## PART 3. Rushing: The Causes and Solutions

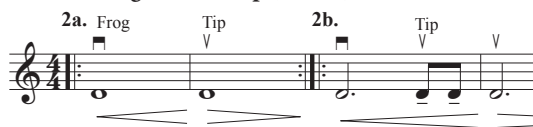
### Where do students tend to rush? What strategies help best?

There are several bowing issues that lead string players to rush, and the solution depends on each specific bowing issue.

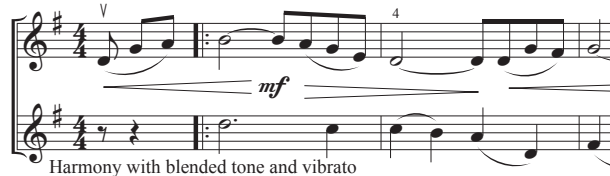
### Bow Management and Fortes

When young string students play loudly, they often reach the end of their bow before the end of the note.....so, they change the note when they run out of bow. Use exercises (like the ones below) to teach students how to play closer to the bridge, so that they can save their bow on long forte notes.

#### 2. More Weight at the Tip (♩ = 60)



#### 4. The Water Is Wide (Melody with full tone and vibrato ♩ = 68)



Uneven rhythms also require bow management practice or they will also rush.



Use rhythmic scales with bowing variations and a metronome to teach students to use a faster bow on shorter notes.

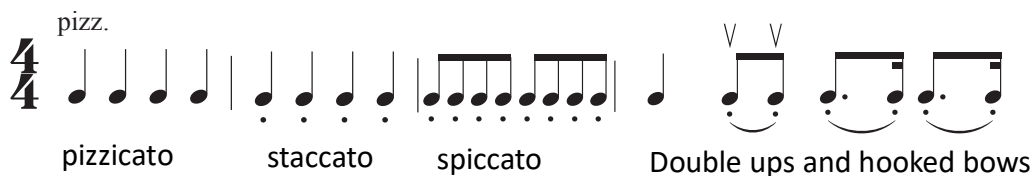
### Use Slurred 16<sup>th</sup> Notes to teach Bow Management

Slurred 16ths are good tool for teaching students to manage their bow speed. Students must pay attention to contact point, bow weight and speed to produce a good tone from the first note to the last.



### Staccato Articulations Naturally Tend to Rush (Don't we know it.)

Students rush staccato articulations because they do not leave enough time/space between the notes.



## Strategies for Teaching Tempo Control with Staccato Articulations

### #1. Isolate a staccato excerpt where the students rush, and play it at different tempos.

Playing a piece at the same tempo every day does not help students learn to control their tempo; in fact, it may be causing student ensemble awareness to atrophy. To correct this:

1. Play with a metronome at different tempos
2. Play with a conductor at different tempos
3. Play without a conductor at different tempos

### #2. Teach students to play on the “back” of the beat, or “behind the beat.”

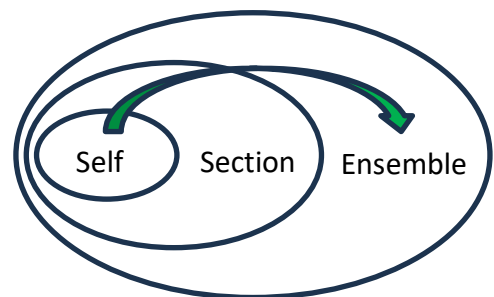
- Can you slow down through this section?
  - Teach students to slow down, *ritardando*, through passages that tend to rush.
- Can you play behind the conductor?
  - Teach students to control their tempo by playing after the conductor’s beat. “Play as late as you can without being late.” If they can’t do this arco first, try pizzicato.
  - For Advanced HS groups performing fast Mendelssohn or Mozart, the faster it is, the more players should aim for the back of the beat.
- Can you play behind another player? Another section?
  - Find a student with a strong sense of tempo, and have students play behind that leader.
  - Select a section (violas, cellos) who are solid and not rushing, and tell other students to play behind them.

### #3. Teach students to breathe during rests and between phrases.

- Take a breath here. Now, put a breath mark there.
- Create slightly extra space during rests, and between phrases

### Teaching Ensemble Awareness to Reduce Rushing

Could we (teachers) be contributing to the problem of rushing? How does listening outside of the section impact rushing differently than listening to others within your section? **For our students to learn how to control their tempo and not to rush, they must learn how to listen to musicians in the other sections of the orchestra.**





## Have sections play different combinations of rhythms

Start with the easier combinations (left below). The harder combinations (right below) challenge students more, and force them to listen and match each other at higher levels.

### Easy—Common denominator



### Harder (but better for developing skills)



## The Three Stages of Ensemble Awareness

**Stage 1.** Young students tend to listen only to themselves; they do not automatically pay attention to the players in the other sections. They also tend to rush by playing chronically on the front of the beat, and in extreme cases, cutting long notes and rests short.

**Stage 2.** Once students learn to listen and wait for the other sections to play their parts, they will likely start to slow down the tempo and drag. They must be reminded and encouraged to play on the beat, and not behind it. They will tend to be a little late when coming in after a long note or rest and need to learn how to get going again after taking time at the end of the phrase. They will also tend to drag when there are multiple rests or syncopated rhythms.

**Stage 3.** At the highest levels, musicians have the musical maturity to hold their own tempo, and the ability to follow the conductor when he/she conducts faster, slower, or simply maintains a steady tempo. In large ensembles, they have the ability and awareness to look forward and listen backward to keep the group together.

### 9. Rhythm Canon in 4 Parts (♩=70–90) An Articulation and Ensemble

1. Only observe the fermatas when ending the canon.

2. *f*

3.

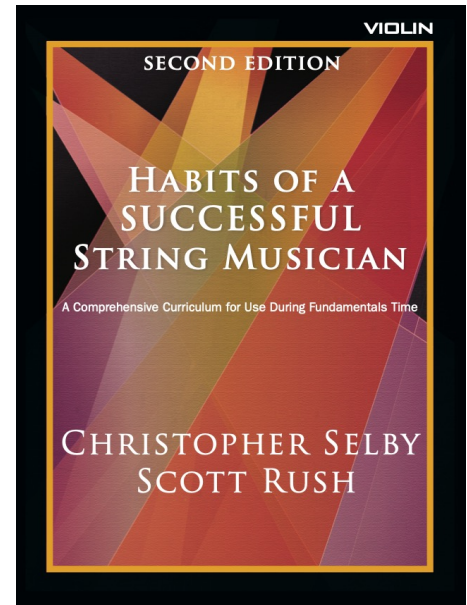
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**NEW:** *Habits of a Successful String Musician, Second Edition* is a complete method of over 400 musical exercises for teaching upper-level string students the technical skills needed to play advanced orchestral music.

### What's NEW in the Second Edition?

- **Part I. Tone and Articulation:** New melodic exercises for developing tone, blend, vibrato, spiccato, and sautillé, and a rhythm canon for combining various articulations.
- **Part II. Left Hand Patterns, Positions, and Shifting:** Left-hand exercises are now organized into a sequence of musical exercises and etudes that review middle level skills, extend up to the highest registers, and teach alternate clefs and thumb position.
- **Part III. Scales, Arpeggios, and Thirds:** The much-loved tuning canons and chords, dominant arpeggios, and thirds, as well as one-, two-, and three-octave scales and arpeggios in all twelve major and minor keys now include improved cello and bass fingerings and bass scales with C-extensions.
- **Part IV. Chorales:** There are now 50 percent more chorales in a greater variety of keys and from more diverse cultural backgrounds.
- **Parts V. Rhythm Study in a Musical Context and VI. Sight-Reading:** 185 completely new rhythm charts and sight-reading exercises with tempo markings for each exercise.
- **Part VII. Orchestral Excerpts:** Three pages of excerpts from frequently performed school and all-state repertoire. Sequenced from moderately difficult to expert, these excerpts are the perfect culmination of skills taught in this method and are ideal for auditions or final exams.
- **Additional Sectional Pages** in each student book focus on technique and alternate clef lessons unique to each instrument.



**Dr. Christopher Selby** is the author of *Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director*, *Music Theory for the Successful String Musician*, and the lead string author of the *Habits of a Successful String Musician* method book series published by GIA. He is an active clinician and conductor, and has presented sessions at numerous Midwest Clinics, American String Teacher Association (ASTA) National Conferences, and state conferences across America. Dr. Selby currently directs the high school orchestras at the School of the Arts in Charleston, SC. His orchestras have performed at the Midwest Clinic and have twice won the top award of Grand Champion at ASTA's National Orchestra Festival. Dr. Selby guest conducts Regional and All-State Orchestras across America. He earned a music education degree from the Hartt School of Music, and a Masters and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in Orchestral Conducting from the University of South Carolina.

**NEW:** *Habits of a Successful Young String Musician* is a field-tested and musical collection of 220 sequenced exercises for the beginning string student. The companion website ([www.habitsstrings.com](http://www.habitsstrings.com)) features supplemental resources including accompaniment tracks, start-up clinic videos, and full performance videos for each exercise in the book. These cutting-edge online components are on MusicFirst (PracticeFirst) and MakeMusic Cloud (SmartMusic).

### **What makes *Habits of a Successful Young String Musician* unique?**

**Tone** is at the heart of this method.

- Students begin using the bow earlier than other resources.
- The familiar melodies allow students to use their ears to develop good pitch and tone.
- Online videos allow students to see and hear professional string players modeling good tone and technique for each exercise.

**Tonal literacy** is a key focus of this book.

- All four open strings are introduced early.
- New notes are introduced with clear fingerboard diagrams and pictures next to the staff.
- New keys are taught by highlighting notes affected by the new key signature.

**Rhythmic literacy** exercises will have your students counting and reading independently.

- Long notes and rests are introduced early so students learn to count and subdivide.
- Melodies in  $\frac{3}{4}$  appear early and often.
- Nine pages of sight-reading exercises develop stronger tonal and rhythmic literacy skills

### **Quality content**

- High-quality photos of excellent hand positions help students develop great technique.
- Diverse repertoire of classical and folk melodies from around the world.
- Warm up pages in the back of the book include scales, arpeggios, thirds, tuning canons, and bowing variations great tools for introducing, teaching and reinforcing skills.

**Online resources** ([www.habitsstrings.com](http://www.habitsstrings.com)) include instructional videos by professional string coaches to reinforce instrument position, left-hand set-up, bow hand technique, hooked bows, slurs, developing good tone, as well as shifting and positions in the lower strings.

### **Author Team**

- **Sarah Ball** is the Director of Orchestras at North Gwinnett Middle School in Sugar Hill, GA.
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