

Unit 3: Bowing: Ideas

Lesson 1: Bowing Skills:

Of all viola skills, bowing is perhaps the most difficult to describe and teach. This Unit does not seek to teach such important skills as how to take care of the bow, how to hold the bow, how to use the proper physical motions for a particular bow stroke, or how to find the best bowing stroke and style when playing a composition. It is recommended that the student learn these skills from a teacher. Once they learn a given skill they must learn to practice it for a long time, so that they do not have to constantly direct a large amount of attention to bowing motions when or practicing or performing. What we do present in this Unit is a glossary of bowing terms – explanations of how what it means to play in particular bowing style of manner.

Learning Routine for Bowing Skills

To work with these bowing skills it is helpful to use the following learning routine – not just for these exercises, but also for any of the exercises in *Viola Skills*. For this reason we recommend that students and teachers refer to this Learning Routine (adapted to the subject matter) when needed in other Unit of Viola Skills .

1. Work in pairs – two students or a student and teacher. One acts as guide, the other acts as a performer. The guide begins by playing 3 or 4 short rhythmic passages on open strings using a different bowing style for each passage and giving the names of each bowing style. Then the guide selects one particular style and plays one short passage in one of the bowing styles previously introduced
2. The performer repeats this rhythmic passage as correctly as possible, and announces the name of the bowing style.
3. The guide indicates if the performer was correct this time. If correct the performer goes on to a new bowing. If incorrect the guide has the performer repeat the exercise one more time. If this is still incorrect the

guide chooses or invents a new exercise that is similar to the first but shorter and/or easier.

Throughout the procedure the guide is careful to be encouraging, but not condescending.

Lesson 2: Bowing Terms:

After students have gained at least some basic technique in bowing, it is a good idea to introduce them to some basic bowing terms like *Legato* and *Staccato* so the students can get at least a brief understanding of this important knowledge. Once the violist has learned a number of these terms they or their teachers may apply them to exercises or to examples in other Units, and especially to works of viola literature that they are working on. Most of the definitions given here appeared originally in the **Journal of the American Viola Society**. Some of the explanations have been slightly altered or expanded. All readers – teachers and students and interested listeners – are encouraged to get a free online enrollment in the **American Viola Society** and receive the **Journal**.

Here are the terms and definitions.

Arpeggio (arpeggiando, arpeggiato): Playing each note of a chord separately. Frequently on string instruments this means to play each note of a chord on a different string with slurred bowing or with a bouncing stroke. From Italian arpeggiare “to play on a harp”

Bariolage: Alternating between two strings, one string sounding a repeated note (often an open string) and the other sounding the notes of a pattern or melody. From French Bariolage “strange medley of color

Collé: Playing notes beginning with the bow resting briefly rather heavily on the string and then moving with finger motion to the basic sound of the note. From French collé “glued or stuck”

Col legno: Playing with the wood of the bow instead the hair of the bow, usually with a bouncing stroke. From Italian col legno. Indicated in French with Avec le bois or (rarely) in German Mit dem Holz

Détaché: General term meaning to play notes separately, or not “slurred”. From French détaché “detached”

-issimo: Ending used indicated the highest degree of some characteristic, for example *Legatissimo* means extremely smoothly connected. See **Legato**

Jeté: see **Ricochet**

Legato: General term meaning to play notes smoothly connected. From Italian **Legato** “tied together”

Louré A slow bow stroke with lightly separated notes. From French louré

Martele: A strongly accented bow stroke, creating. From French martelé “hammered”

Ponticello or **Sul Ponticello:** Notes or passages played very close to the viola bridge producing a somewhat nasal sound

Portato: Notes played in one bow with each note gently rearticulated. From Italian “carried”

Ricochet: Several separated bouncing notes played on a single bow stroke in which the bow is dropped on the string and allowed to rebound several times. From French ricochet “bounce”

Sautillé: Rapid bouncing bow strokes with alternating up bow and down bow in the middle of the bow. Similar to spiccato but played somewhat faster. From French sauter “to jump”

Son filé sustained sound. From French filé thread.

Spiccato: Similar to **Sautillé** but played somewhat slower. Beyond the usual alternation of downbow and upbow it is also possible to have all upbow spiccato and all downbow spiccato. Upbow spiccato is somewhat more difficult than the alternation of downbow and upbow. Downbow spiccato is generally regarded as the most difficult form. From Italian Spiccare: to separate.

Staccato: Indicated by dot above notes with down stems, by dot below notes with up stems. Notes played with shorter duration so there is a short pause between the notes. From Italian staccare “to shorten

Staccatissimo: Like staccato, but even shorter.

Sul Ponticello: Playing near the bridge to produce an unusual sound with emphasis on the higher overtones to produce a grating sound. From Italian: Ponticello: bridge.

Sul Tasto: Playing near the end of the fingerboard to produce a very soft, mysterious sound. From Italian Sul Tasto over the fingerboard

Tremolo: Playing very rapid repeated notes at the tip of the bow to produce an agitated sound.
