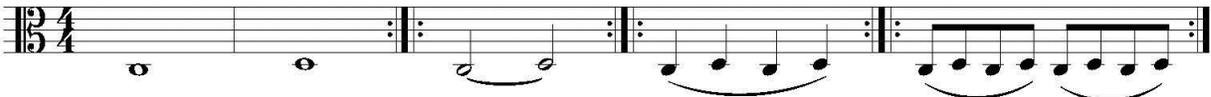


## Intonation-led Left Hand Position

Mastering the first finger's placement on the instrument is the key to playing in tune at any time in any position. Each subsequent finger's placement is informed by the previous finger's placement, and a strong and precise hand frame is achieved by playing a total of two perfect whole steps and one half step from first to fourth finger, in these examples a whole-half-whole finger pattern. The incremental addition of fingers to the frame, maintaining a supple thumb, wrist, and elbow, helps the student adapt his or her particular physiology to the viola, accomplishing an intonation-led flexible and strong left hand position. The student should be able to play any finger at any time in tune from this frame, without ever feeling the left hand is rigid.

Playing First Finger in Tune: the first step to excellent intonation

Ex.1 

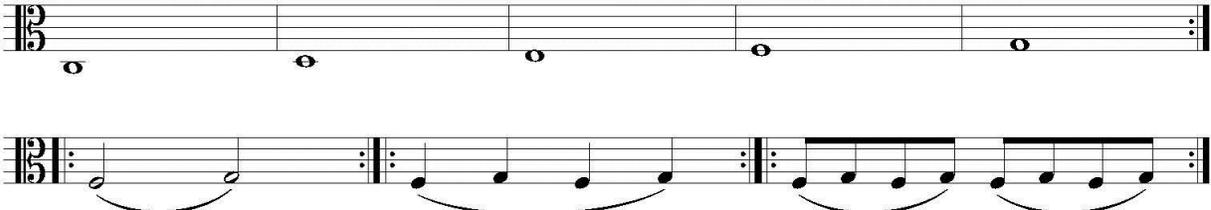
Playing Second Finger in Tune: using first finger to play second finger in tune

Ex.2 

Playing Third Finger in Tune: listening for a perfect half step

Ex.3 

Playing Fourth Finger in Tune: the final step to having a relaxed, strong, and precise hand frame

Ex.4 

Each exercise is intended to be replicated on all four strings; however Playing First Finger in Tune should be repeated on all four strings with accuracy and precision before the student moves on to Playing Second Finger in Tune. This sometimes takes a few weeks. Ultimately, in addition to being played on all four strings, the exercises should be practiced with a variety of finger patterns, once the whole-half-whole frame is in place.

The **first objective** is to listen to the open string, imagine the sound of the perfect whole step, place the first finger, and evaluate whether the pitch is exactly in tune or not. If the first finger creates a perfect whole step then the student attempts to repeat the motion that led to correct intonation; if it is not a perfect whole step then the student must determine how to move the first finger to play the perfect whole step and begin the exercise again. Once the student has found exactly where to place the first finger it is time to move to the **second objective**: repeating the motion. This is when the student begins the first exercise, now in a tempo. The motion should feel relaxed, strong, and predictable, without ever gripping the neck of the viola, and the repeats should be taken as many times as necessary until the motion feels relaxed, strong, and predictable. Each day of practice is a new opportunity to engage these two objectives and develop a fine ear for intonation and a habit of physical repetition.

*N.B.* As with any strengthening of large or small muscles the exercises should only be repeated until the hand is slightly tired, not sore, and then the hand should be allowed time to relax and recover, and the exercise should be repeated one more time immediately upon recovery, again only to feeling tired, never sore.

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*Kathryn Sievers began violin lessons in her mother's Suzuki studio in the Marshall Islands and added viola to her musical studies while a senior in high school in Massachusetts. She earned a B.A. in English from Yale, where she was a violin student of Erick Friedman, and an M.M. from Juilliard as a viola student of Heidi Castleman and Misha Amory. Further viola studies with Robert Vernon at the Cleveland Institute of Music led to an active freelance career performing and touring internationally with the Detroit Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Currently she works with the Boston Symphony as a frequent substitute violist, is a member of the Portland Symphony Orchestra, and maintains an active private studio at New England Conservatory Preparatory School, where she also coaches chamber music and orchestra sectionals.*