How to hold and move the bow

As with holding and positioning the violin, sometimes students can develop some bad habits when it comes to holding the bow, and moving it across the strings. There are different ways to approach the bow grip, but here is what I teach:

1. The thumb should be bent at almost a 90 degree angle, with the right corner of the thumb tip placed in the gap between the end of the frog and the leather part of the bow grip. The thumb should NEVER be inserted into the notch of the frog. When the thumb is properly placed, the thumb nail will touch the metal clip that holds the horsehair, and the thumb will slightly touch the hair underneath the base of the nail. This happens naturally, and is ok.

2. The middle finger should drape over the stick, with the first knuckle joint touching the leather part of the bow grip, the fleshy part of the finger touching the thumbnail, and the tip of the finger touching the metal clip.

3. The ring finger should drape over the stick at the first knuckle joint, with the tip covering the center (dot) of the frog.

4. The pinky should be curved, with the tip resting on the top of the bow grip.
5. The index finger should drape over the metal winding of the bow grip at the second knuckle joint. Wrap the entire finger around the bow stick, so that the tip contacts the end of the leather part of the grip. This is where most of your “power” comes from – do not straighten out your index finger while you play!

6. The fingers should be spaced fairly equally, with perhaps just a bit more between the index finger and the middle finger.

7. Grip the bow firmly, but not “tightly”. You do not want tension in your right hand, because it can impair bow control, and believe it or not, transfer that tension to the left hand! With the proper bow grip, move the bow around in the air in various ways to get the feel of relaxed control – a very important concept.

8. Place the middle of the bow on the A or D string. The stick should be parallel to the bridge and the end of the fingerboard, with the hair contacting the string just over the circular part of the f hole (about halfway between the bridge and the fingerboard). At this area of the bow, your wrist and elbow should be level, and THEY SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE LEVEL AS YOU APPROACH THE FROG ON THE UP BOW (I put this in all caps because it’s one of my big “things”. I do not like overly high or low elbows. A low elbow does not make use of that good upper arm weight, and a high elbow produces tension).

9. As you move the bow, the stick (and hair) should lean slightly toward the scroll, and always move parallel to the bridge. Keep the contact point halfway between the bridge and the fingerboard. If you find yourself gravitating too close to the fingerboard (a VERY common problem), playing behind a couple of drinking straws inserted into the f holes is an inexpensive way to work on this!

10. Keep your wrist flexible and your right arm relaxed.

11. Remember that the UPPER arm adjusts the string level, and the FOREARM moves the bow.

--- Adapted from Donald Zimmer, UT-Chattanooga

ORCHESTRA
First Year Orchestra:
5:10-6pm, Instrumental Rehearsal Room, SMC

Second Year Orchestra:
5:10-6pm, Choral Rehearsal Room, SMC

Remember that orchestra is held in a different building from weekly class.

Come for the class, stay for the fun!

Don’t Forget!
Trim your nails regularly! Long nails not only make it hard to play, but can cut your strings and make them break!