

String Proficiency Guide

Dear Young Artists, Families, and Educators,

These guidelines are meant to help our young musicians find the ensemble that fits them best, by establishing clear (and encouraging!) expectations regarding the different techniques needed to excel in each of our ensembles. We created these guidelines so that each and every one of our young musicians will feel empowered, challenged, and able to express themselves artistically.



We do not expect mastery or perfection of the abilities listed below! Instead, we would like our young musicians to have a **basic facility** with the listed techniques for a given ensemble as a prerequisite to participate in that group. Our goal is then to grow their abilities through repertoire selections so that they have a **comfortable facility** with said techniques after the season is complete.

These guidelines present a non-exhaustive list of abilities and concepts. Because different teachers prioritize and conceptualize string techniques differently, we hope this document will facilitate helpful dialogue through which we can build relationships with our students' school orchestra directors and their private teachers. This engagement will allow us to articulate useful technical expectations while empowering pedagogical independence.

Thank you for reading through this document. Please reach out with any questions you may have.

Gabriel Lefkowitz

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gabriel Lefkowitz', is located below the printed name.

Music Director, Louisville Youth Orchestra

Serenade Orchestra: Learning to play as an ensemble.

The Serenade Orchestra is an entry-level string orchestra with student musicians who are eager to learn diverse repertoire at a wide range of beginning levels. Serenade Orchestra performs grade 2-3 concert music which generally aligns with the first 2 books of the Suzuki method.

Focus: listening, playing well with others, and building musical confidence re: notes, rhythms, and dynamics.

Right Hand/Bow

1. Play with full bow for half and whole notes (Bow speed)
2. Play quarter-notes and 8th-notes in upper, middle, and lower portions of the bow (Bow division)
3. Play simple dynamics, including forte and piano (Bow weight)
4. Play martelé bow stroke to facilitate clean staccato articulations (Strokes) (You may know this stroke by a different name!)

Left Hand

1. Violin/Viola utilize “high” 2 vs. “low” 2
2. Cello utilize 3 vs. 2
3. Bass utilize 4 vs. 2
4. Minimal shifting in Cello/Bass; no shifting for Violin/Viola

Coordination

1. Play 8th notes at a tempo of quarter = 86
2. Slur 2 to a bow

Time and Key Signatures

1. Read and understand time signatures, including 4/4, 3/4, 2/4. Work towards 2/2, 3/8.
2. Recognize and understand key signatures for D Maj, G Maj, C Maj, F Maj

Musicianship (Ensemble Playing and Independence of Decision-making)

1. Beginning ability to watch the conductor for tempo, beat pattern, dynamics
2. Demonstrate beginning listening/adjustment ability (tempo and dynamics)

Concert Orchestra: Developing ensemble skills through increased exposure to techniques.

Concert Orchestra is a string orchestra focused on developing student musicians who are eager to learn a diverse repertoire of intermediate levels.

Focus: listening, playing well with others, occasional leading and following, and development of confidence amidst increasingly challenging and varying musical elements (notes, rhythms, dynamics and articulations.)

Right Hand/Bow:

1. Incorporate 16th notes in the upper and middle parts of the bow
2. Use of collé stroke in order to develop off-the-string playing/beginning spiccato (You may know this stroke by a different name!)
3. Play with a full range of dynamics from *p* to *f*

Left Hand

1. Violin/Viola utilizing “high” 3, “low 1”, and 4th finger; shifting to 3rd position
2. Cello utilizing extensions; shifting up through 4th position
3. Bass play up to a D on G string (3rd position)

Coordination

1. Play 16th notes at a tempo of quarter = 86
2. Slur 3 or more to a bow
3. Play dotted rhythms (ideally hooked bowing and separate bows)

Time and Key Signatures

1. Read and understand 2/2, 5/4, 6/8, simple meter changes
2. Recognize and perform in key signatures up to 3 sharps/2 flats
3. Cello *begin* to read Tenor Clef

Musicianship (Ensemble Playing and Independence of Decision-making)

1. Continue to understand how to watch the conductor for tempo, beat patterns, dynamics, with less instruction.
2. Begin to make independent technical decisions re: bow usage as a response to musical impulses (tempo, dynamics)
3. Development of ability to adjust playing to ensemble (especially other sections)

Philharmonic Orchestra: Developing intermediate-advanced ensemble skills through exposure to a vast array of techniques and musical styles within a full orchestra.

Philharmonic Orchestra is a full orchestra with strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. It includes student musicians who are prepared and eager to perform a diverse repertoire of intermediate to advanced levels.

Focus: high level full orchestral training, a necessary primer/preparation for Symphony. This is the ensemble in which all instrument families come together to begin the journey into “performance” repertoire, i.e. music created primarily for audiences, not the students performing it.

Right Hand/Bow

1. Basic spiccato, ability to play off-the-string stroke including repeated notes (fast) and non-repeated notes (not so fast)
2. Differentiate spiccato/off the string vs. staccato/martelé

Left Hand

1. Violin shifting up to 7th position
2. Viola shifting up to 5th position
3. Cello shifting up to 5th position, begin to play in Thumb position at the octave harmonic
4. Bass play up to G harmonic on G string

Coordination

1. Play non-repeating 16th notes at a tempo of quarter = 120
2. Slur many notes on a bow, play runs

Time and Key Signatures

1. Read and understand all common time signatures, mixed meter, and polyrhythms
2. Recognize and perform in key signatures up to 5 sharps/4 flats
3. Viola begin to read Treble Clef
4. Cello read Tenor Clef, begin to read Treble Clef

Musicianship (Ensemble Playing and Independence of Decision-making)

1. Develop ability to watch conductor for articulation, phrasing, interpretive tempo changes (e.g. rubato, accelerando, ritardando)
2. More advanced independent technical decision-making re: bow usage as a response to musical impulses (tempo, dynamics, phrasing, articulation)
3. Develop increasingly instinctive self-adjustment to ensemble
4. Principal players begin to develop leadership qualities (physical leadership, decision making, inter- and intra-sectional communication)

Symphony Orchestra: The Greatest Repertoire, Exceptional Artistry, Unmissable Opportunities

Symphony Orchestra is LYO's flagship ensemble, comprising the most advanced young orchestral musicians in the region performing the greatest music ever written at as high a level as possible. The young artists receive premiere orchestral training under the baton of Gabriel Lefkowitz, concertmaster and resident conductor of the Louisville Orchestra, and are coached by a network of the region's finest educators and professional orchestral musicians.

Ability to incorporate all aforementioned techniques and abilities with increasing independence of decision-making. Conductor supports growth through increased difficulty level of repertoire, encouragement of artistic confidence and self-expression, and advanced teaching re: how style and context inform musical decisions at the highest level (e.g. strokes, articulation, bow usage, fingerings, vibrato, effects, rubato, ornamentation, phrasing, etc.)