

Fast fingers

'Fast fingers' is one of the most important elements of technique. It refers to the speed of dropping or raising fingers, not the speed of the passage. You can use fast fingers in slow passages.

The faster the finger drops onto the string or raises from it, the *later* the dropping or raising must begin.

The later the finger drops or raises, the *longer* the time between each finger action.

The longer the time between each action, the *slower* the passage feels.

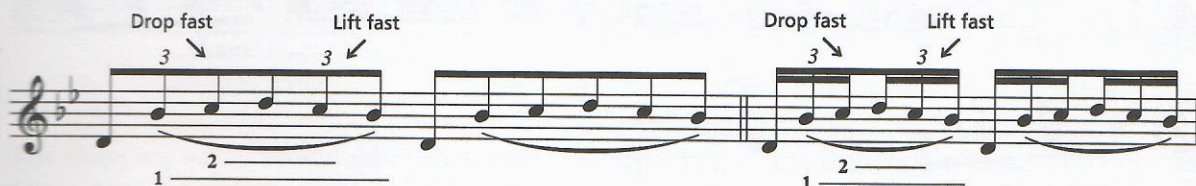
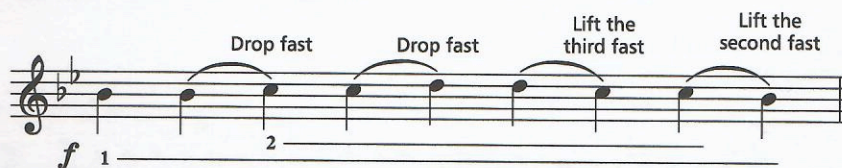
- Play through any moderate-to-fast phrase, passage or section at a very slow tempo, while dropping and lifting the fingers very fast.
- Wait until the last possible moment before moving each finger – keep the finger still for so long that waiting just another instant would cause the note to be late; then lift or drop extremely fast.

Example 1

Vivaldi: Concerto in G minor, op. 12 no. 1, mov. 1, b. 41



- Play very slowly, sustaining the tone *f* so that the string vibrates widely. The wider the string swings from side to side, the faster the finger must drop and lift.
- Listen to the 'ping' as the fingers drop onto, or lift from, the string.¹



¹ Producing a 'ping' with the left fingers, while not used in *dolce* or legato passages, is also one of the keys to clarity, articulation and precision.

There are two things necessary to produce a ping:

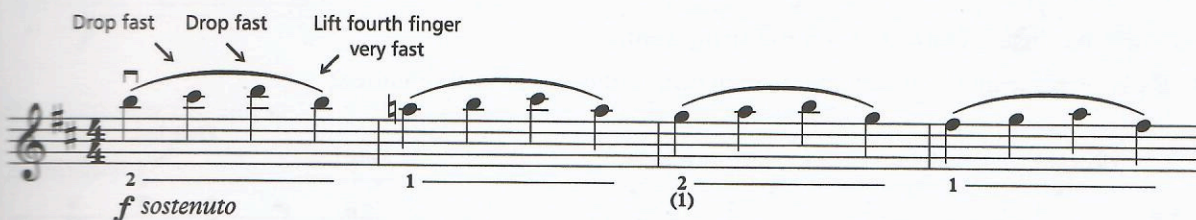
- 1 Play with a ringing tone (*mp* to *ff*), the string vibrating widely and evenly.
- 2 Lift and drop the fingers very fast. They need to be fast (rather than heavy) so that the string changes from one length to another as quickly as possible. See *Placing fingers gently*, page 240.

Example 2

Mozart: Concerto no. 4 in D, K218, mov. 1, b. 47



- Practise as in Example 1:



- Use fast *spiccato* or *sautillé* as a further practice method to gain the feeling of moving the fingers fast, at the last possible moment. The fingers have to lift and drop very fast to co-ordinate with the bow:



Example 3

Mendelssohn: Concerto in E minor, op. 64, mov. 1, b. 14

When practising 'slow tempo fast fingers' place prepared fingers on the string as normal, without undue speed or impact. Fingers played with separate bows should be 'placed' fast rather than 'dropped' fast.¹

¹ See *Placing fingers gently*, page 240

- Play very slowly, sustaining the tone *f*.
- Lift and drop the fingers with exaggerated speed, listening to the 'ping' with each drop and lift-off when playing slurred notes. Begin the movement towards or away from the string at the last possible moment, a fraction of a second before the bow moves.
- Raise, drop or place all the other fingers very fast.

- Fast *spiccato* or *sautillé*:

Example 4

Handel: Sonata in D, op. 1 no. 13, mov. 2, b. 30

- Place the fingers marked '+' on the string gently.
- Raise or place all the other fingers very fast, at the last possible moment.

- Fast *spiccato* or *sautillé*:

etc.

Example 5

Chausson: Poème, op. 25, b. 177

- Fast *spiccato* or *sautillé*:

Example 6

Wieniawski: Polonaise brillante, op. 21, b. 155

The dropping action should generally be fast (unless playing a specific *dolce*), but because the lift-off action is pulling against a resistance it should feel *faster* to equalize the two actions of lifting and dropping.

- While pausing on each lower note, touch the string and lift off again as quickly as if touching something very hot:

Drop and lift the fourth finger very fast

- Then play the passage as written, feeling the same fast drop and lift-off.

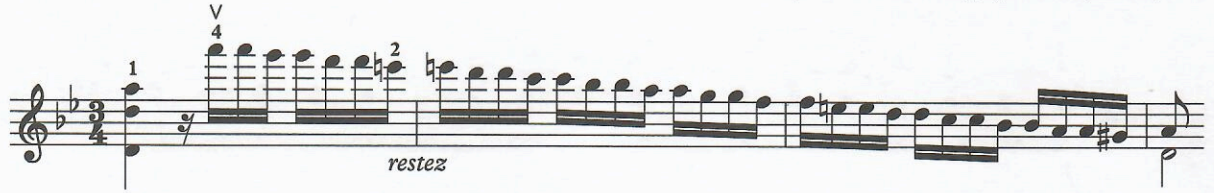
Example 7

Sarasate: Zigeunerweisen, op. 20 no. 1, b. 7

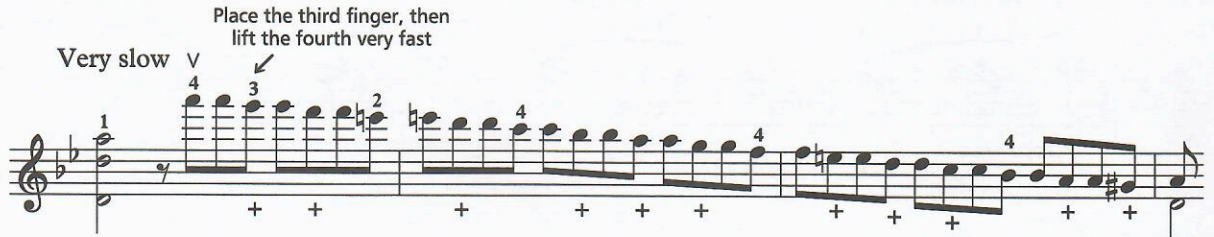
Drop and lift the fourth finger very fast

Example 8

Vivaldi: Summer (The Four Seasons), op. 8 no. 2, *mov. 3, b. 48*



Fast lift-off, at the last possible moment, is often helpful in building good co-ordination:

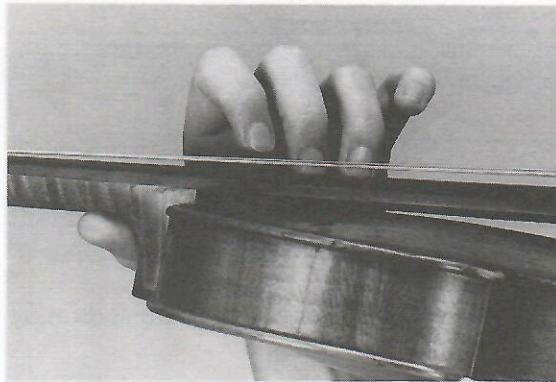


- Play at a very slow tempo. At each '+' lift the preceding finger off the string with exaggerated speed, at the last possible moment before the bow moves.

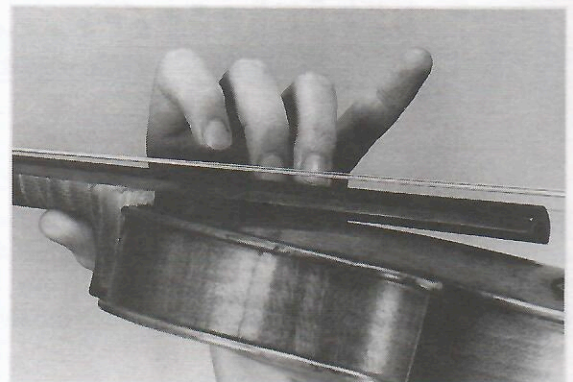
Pull the finger back from the base joint so quickly that you almost cannot see it move – one moment the finger is on the string, the next moment it is exaggeratedly far away from the string.

Move each finger 'back', i.e. a movement to the right, rather than 'up'. Keep the shape of the finger the same when lifted from the string as it was when on the string. See Figs. 3a and 3b.

Fig. 3



(a) The finger exaggeratedly pulled back for practice purposes



(b) Do not allow the finger to straighten like this as it lifts off the string

Example 9

Fauré: Sonata in A, op. 13, *mov. 3, b. 4*



It is often most helpful to practise separate-bow passages first with slurs.

- Play at a very slow tempo with fast fingers, listening to the 'ping' with every lift-off:

