

- **Cello Forum: 315 Years of Wisdom**
- **Viola Forum: The Eclectic Violist**
- **Why the Order of Finger Introduction Matters**
- **Improvisation: Teaching Greater Expressivity and Musicality**



At the ASTA 2015 National Conference, a session entitled, "Jazz Improvisation for Middle School Strings: A Step-by-Step Approach" helped to erase the fear of the unknown of introducing jazz to young musicians. The session was presented by Jeremy Woolstenhulme.



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Using iPads in Teaching and Practice

As string teachers we are keenly aware of the importance of quality, goal-oriented practice, but we often struggle to motivate our students to develop this focus in their own work. Practicing between the lessons requires consistent and truthful self-assessment, and that's where iPads and other recording devices can be useful if they are integrated into student assignments. I have never once recorded myself and thought, "Yup, that's pretty much how I thought I sounded!" If that is true for a player in her 40s, that will most certainly be true of younger players. Frankly, we can all stand to hear and see ourselves better – as my teacher used to say, "Eighty percent of practicing is hearing what is actually coming out of your instrument." What I love about video, as opposed to audio, is that you can actually see why things are sounding the way they are, and not just hear it. My favorite recording device is the iPad. It has instant playback with both decent audio and video quality—no cords, no uploading, and no technology hurdles.

When I first started using recording assignments in my studio at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), I tended to make rather vague assignments, such as, "record yourself one time this week and write down some new goals for your piece." What I learned—the hard way—is that rather than empowering students, recording overwhelmed and depressed them (or they didn't do it!). They often came back with general, negative impressions, like, "It's bad," or "I'm terrible." Incorporating recording regularly into the lessons themselves and making bite-sized, structured assignments has helped them get used to the process. Once they get used to it, they can see the full power of the tool. I have found that small snippets of recording are better than large ones, both psychologically and practically. The end goals of the recording process for students are to develop critical listening skills and to fuel their burning desire to become better . . . all the time. If you are not currently using video in your studio teaching, here are some ideas for getting started, both within the lessons and during the practice week.

In the lesson:

1. **Record a phrase or section of the student's performance.** Watch the video with them and ask them only to comment on one aspect of their playing at a time, such as posture, intonation, bow grip, musicality etc. Ask them to be specific, such as, "mark the exact notes that are out of tune on the page with an x." Guide them through fixing things and record the passage again. This last step is crucial, because it

is only through the power of seeing the improvement that students will feel positive about the process. One recorded phrase each week in a lesson can go a long way, since the end goal is for them to start doing it regularly, without your prompting.

2. **Use video as a "delayed mirror" to do side-by-side observations between student and teacher.** For example, video-record your student's left hand in a passage, and then ask them to video-record your hand playing that same passage and ask them to note any differences. Guide them through improvements, and re-record their hand afterward to see the progress.
3. **Record a part of the lesson (short!) and email them the file.** Ask them to notice something in their playing that you did not talk about, but would like to improve. Ask them to write down what they noticed, and how they went about improving what they saw. This exercise helps build their independent power of discernment, which is crucial for their musical maturity.

In between lessons, at home assignment:

- **Track improvements.** Ask students to record themselves for half a page and review. Students should spend about 10 minutes making practicing improvements, then record again. Ask them to blog on your website, write in their lesson notebook, or share observations with you verbally.
- **Selective Inattention.** Ask students to record the same excerpt three times and concentrate both in their performance and their analysis on three different variables, such as intonation, character, rhythm, etc. Ask them to blog about it in their assignment book, i.e. write just a short bit about what they learned and changed in their playing.
- **First takes.** Have students record first-takes on three different sections (or pieces). Rather than re-recording when they falter, they must analyze their first-takes and discover what these have in common.
- **Progress.** Ask students to record themselves once a week before their lessons and not listen to them until they have a month's worth of recordings. Review with them what has changed and what has stayed the same in those four weeks.
- **Process recording.** Ask students to record themselves practicing for 15 minutes and blog/write about what they notice in their practicing. Give them some prompts, like: What part of your practicing process is going well; Where

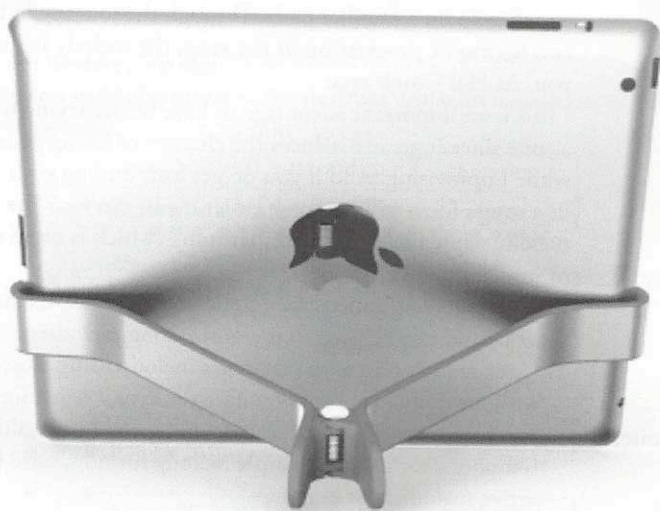
do you want to make changes? Practice makes permanent, and; What are you making permanent through your practice habits?

- **Nervous Takes.** Ask students to run up and down the stairs twice before recording themselves. Blog/writing: What happens when you play with a raised heartbeat? Be specific in your observations.

These are just a few ideas on how to integrate video in the lesson environment. The main point is just to use it regularly and see where it takes you and your students. When you develop your own ways of using recording regularly, please share by writing an ASTA article like this one!

P.S. – Trying to get the iPad set up for easy recording? The Felix TwoHand stand is my favorite gadget. It is cheap (less than \$10) and readily available from Staples, Amazon etc. To use it, clip it on the front of the iPad so that the front of the iPad tilts down toward the player. For basses and cellists putting it on a stand will work, for upper strings put it on a piano or shelf on the wall.

Felix TwoHand Tablet Stand, pictured here clipped from the back. For best results, clip it to the front instead so the iPad angles forward, toward the player.



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