



Katie Glassman's
FIDDLE SCHOOL

RESTARTER KIT



Welcome, Violinists!

Welcome to fiddling! Unit 1 of this Restarter Kit will help you gain the knowledge to get that traditional “fiddley” sound we all know and love. Unit 2 of this starter kit contains more specific information about Texas-style fiddling and some key differences between classical violin and fiddle. Once you jump into Fiddle School’s Lesson 1 in Session 1, treat the first six songs as etudes, an opportunity to learn how to play within the style and get familiar with the Fiddle School pedagogy.

A heads up: even if you’re an experienced violinist, be sure to watch the videos [Your Fiddle Bow Hold](#), [Bow Division](#) and [Bow Length](#) so that you can identify key stylistic differences between classical and fiddling.

If you’d like more review or if you’ve been playing for three years or less, check out the New Fiddler Starter Kit to help you feel ready to dive fully equipped into [Session 1: Texas Fiddle Foundations](#).

Your Practice Space

Here are the things you’ll need in your practice space:

- A mirror for self-evaluation
- Your computer or digital device connected to good, loud speakers
- A metronome
- A tuner

Your Fiddle Bow Hold

- In fiddling, we don't use bowing articulations. Instead, we want a consistent, smooth sound with no attack at the start of the notes. The bow hold I teach will help you achieve this sound.
- In fiddling, always hold your bow with the hair flat to produce a strong, full sound.
- I teach you to hold your thumb on the outside of the frog. If you still play classical, using two separate bow holds can help you differentiate between the styles. You can keep your violin bow hold when you're playing classical and then switch to your fiddle bow hold when you're fiddling.
- If the thumb under the frog is too uncomfortable, you can move your thumb to the inside of the frog like you're used to, but keep in mind that your thumb and pinky need to remain rounded and flexible.

NOTE: When you practice your bow hold, always have a balancing force at the tip of the bow so that your fingers can rest on the bow and do not have to grip it.

How to Build Your Fiddle Bow Hold

1. Gently hold the frog in your right hand and loop your left thumb through the tip of the bow. Hold the bow parallel to the floor, bow hair down.

2. Put your **thumb on its tip and rounded below the frog**. Lift your thumb and gently tap it against the frog a few times to be sure you're not squeezing.
3. Hook your first finger around the stick at your middle knuckle.
4. Your second finger hangs on the side of the frog.
5. Your third finger pets the eye of the frog.
6. **Your pinky is on its tip and softly rounded on the wood of the stick**, not the metal. Lift your pinky and gently tap it against the stick a few times to be sure you're not harboring tension there.
7. Your hand is pronated so that your palm faces out and away from you.

Your Bow Arm

In fiddling, your bow arm remains mostly the same as in classical, except that your "motor" is in your upper forearm, not in your fingers and wrist.

- Your upper arm is the wall, your forearm is the door and your elbow is the hinge. **Keep the wall still as you open and close the door.**
- As your door opens, your arm straightens. As your door closes, your arm bends. Your wall remains perfectly still.

To practice this:

- Raise your left arm straight in front of you, parallel to the ground with your palm down.
- Put your right hand on your left elbow.
- Straighten the right arm from the elbow to open the door.
- Bend the right arm at the elbow to close the door.

Bow Division

Playing with the proper bow length gives you that classic Texas fiddle groove. No matter what level you are, put stickers on your bow so that you can see how you're used to bowing and how to adjust your bow lengths for this style.

To prepare, find your roll of eighth-inch car pin striping from Unit 1 and tighten your bow hair an extra turn or two to avoid touching the hair when you apply the stickers. Now:

1. Find the center of your bow.
2. **Go 2" below that center and place a sticker.**
3. **Go about 2" above that center and place another sticker there.** This is the place on your bow where you'll play even eighth notes, which we call short bows.
4. Notice the distance between your two stickers so far and mirror that distance in the upper half of your bow, towards the tip. Place the final sticker there. This top sticker indicates the bow division for long bows. **The bottom sticker and the top sticker will be equidistant from the middle sticker.**

With this bow division, you're already equipped to learn all the bowing patterns in Fiddle School.

Bow Lengths

In Texas-style fiddling, we use two bow lengths: long bows and short bows. Long bows span from your bottom sticker to your top sticker. We use them for quarter

notes, half notes, and sometimes for even longer notes. When you play a long bow, fill the entire space between the stickers.

1. First, with your straight spine, hug your fiddle into your neck and snuggle your jaw into the chin rest. Place your thumb on the neck and hoist your left hand above the fiddle as you hang your fingers over the strings.
2. Now set up your bow hold. Set your bow on the strings, curve your thumb under the frog, curl your first finger around the stick and let your 2 hang. 3 pets the eye of the frog, and 4 rounds softly on the wood of the stick.
3. Now that you're ready, play some long bows on the A string. Start at your bottom sticker and open your door to bow to the top sticker. Then close the door and bow back to your bottom sticker. After you've done a few long bows, begin to connect them.

There are occasions where long bows will extend above the stickers, but rarely below.

Short bows are measured between your bottom sticker and your middle sticker, and between your middle sticker and your top sticker. We use short bows for eighth notes. Most short bows will be between your bottom sticker and middle sticker. To try some:

1. First, follow the same steps to set up your left hand and your bow hold.
2. Put your bow back on the A string. Bow from your bottom sticker to your middle sticker, no farther. Now close the door and bow back to your bottom sticker. Now connect them.

Fiddle Posture: Head, Neck, and Jaw

- Imagine your head is a ball balanced on top of your spine with a string pulling it toward the ceiling. Straighten your spine and tuck your chin ever so slightly.
- Trace your jaw with your right hand. Imagine that your fiddle is hugging your neck.
- Snuggle your jaw into your imaginary fiddle. Tilt your head slightly and turn it a little to the left.

Here are a couple points to look out for:

- **Never force your chin or neck forward to meet your fiddle.** Instead, always bring your fiddle to you and let it hug into your neck as close as it can.
- **Do not lean your head to the right.** The fiddle will always hug the *left* side of your neck, with your *left* jaw snuggling into the chin rest.

If you're not used to holding your fiddle yet, the instrument can feel uncomfortable against your body. This discomfort is brief and dissipates as you get used to the fiddle. If you're still experiencing discomfort after a few weeks, you can schedule a consultation so we can help you adjust your setup/posture.

Fiddle Posture: Left Arm and Left Hand

1. Your fiddle should be neither directly in front of you nor directly to the side. The ideal angle for your fiddle is right between these two extremes. At this angle, your fiddle and your bow will meet at a perfect 90-degree angle. Find this midway angle with your left arm, holding it parallel to the ground.

NOTE: use your back muscles (not the muscles on top of your shoulder) to lift your left arm to meet your fiddle. Using your back muscles here eliminates tension and protects your body in the long run.

2. Turn your palm to face the ceiling and take your right hand to your left elbow.
3. As you begin to bend your left elbow, use your hand to pull that elbow gently in towards your body as your left hand rotates clockwise. Now your left elbow is bent slightly in front of your torso. Your left hand is rotated with the wrist straight, palm facing outward to the left.
4. Imagine holding a ball in your left palm. Round your fingers around the ball and feel your palm become slightly concave. Keep your wrist straight.
5. Straighten your spine, tuck your chin, and imagine your fiddle coming in to hug your neck and snuggle your jaw.

Fiddle Posture: Left Hand

For open string playing position:

1. Place your left hand on the fiddle. Bring the fiddle to your neck and snuggle it in.
2. Place your left thumb on the neck of the fiddle near the body and use it to hoist your palm above the body of the fiddle.
3. Pull your elbow under the instrument to gently twist your forearm and palm towards the fiddle. Be sure the fiddle is not resting on the webbing between your thumb and index finger.
4. Imagine that you are holding a ball and round your palm and fingers around that ball. Notice how your fingertips point towards the strings. This is your open string playing position.

Stylistic Hallmarks of Fiddling

Equipment

- **Strings** - responsive steel strings such as Primis are ideal for fiddling. Helicores are a good crossover string for both genres.
- Fiddlers have **fine tuners** on all four strings.
- **Electric clip-on tuners** - these tuners are incredible for gigs, jam sessions, loud practice rooms and more. Use them to get your fiddle close to in tune before you fine tune to your backup players.

Technique

- **Vibrato** - Fiddlers only use vibrato on slow songs, long notes in Western Swing, or the last note of the song. Fiddle vibrato is slow and wide. In Fiddle School, you'll learn vibrato in Session 3.
- **Starting a song** - Fiddlers do not start with a breath as classical violinists do. In Session 1, Lesson 1, we'll address exactly how to start a song in fiddle music, but for now just know that we usually begin with rhythmic notes called *kicks* or *chops*. These occur before the accompanist or band comes in. The chops (aka the kick or shuffle) set the tempo of the song.
- **Bow length and bow speed** make up some of the most important differences between classical and fiddle. Classical players use much more of the bow than fiddlers do. In fiddle music, bow speed is much slower in general; we only use the top two-thirds of the bow in our tunes. Regulating your bow speed can be one of the defining factors for you to sound like a fiddler.

- **Bow articulations** - An articulation is when there is an attack on the very start of the note. You won't find bow articulations in fiddling. Fiddling is built of smooth (legato), slow, and connected bows.
- **Bow hair** - Since fiddlers don't use articulations, we play with a much looser bow. Just tighten the bow enough to run a pencil between the stick and the hair.
- **Performance** - Fiddle tunes are traditionally played from memory. Fiddlers also tap their toes. When you're fiddling, let it go and tap your toe.
- **Accompaniment** - In fiddle music, the accompanists' purpose is to provide rhythm for the fiddler. Traditionally, you'll hear this rhythmic backup on guitar, but other instruments you'll hear include bass, piano, tenor guitar, and even tenor banjo sometimes.
- **Listening** - At a square dance, jam, or fiddle contest, toe-tapping, handclapping, knee-slapping, or maybe even a hoot or a holler is well within the culture of fiddling. Listening is also an essential part of the culture and the Fiddle School method. Fiddlers listen all the time, whether we're learning a tune, playing at a jam session, studying the greats, or simply enjoying the music.
- **Learning style** - Fiddle School is designed to pass down fiddle music the way it's always been passed down: by ear. I teach each tune in Fiddle School phrase by phrase so that you can learn it the way a real fiddler would. You'll catch nuances that you wouldn't catch if you learned the tunes from sheet music. By the end, you'll have the tunes memorized and ready for a jam, contest, or square dance, where all the tunes are performed from memory.

Explore Fiddle School

- **History & Culture** - Look at the Practice Buddies in Lesson 12 of Session 1 if you want to learn more about the history and culture of Texas-style fiddle.
- **Listening Resources** - In the Fiddle Lounge, we've put together a playlist of Texas-Style Listening Essentials to help you get started. There, you can find some of my favorite recordings of Texas-style fiddlers, including Benny Thomasson, Dick Barrett, and Terry Morris, to name a few.

Fiddle School Community Events:

- a) Weekly Office Hours** – gather with a national champion instructor and fellow students from around the world. Jam two Fiddle School songs together, hear the latest Fiddle School news, and get answers to your fiddling questions. Included in your membership.
- b) The Fiddle School Forum** is a private group where students post videos of themselves playing, give and receive feedback, share their favorite music, and participate in fiddle discussions. Included in your membership.
- c) Certification Programs** – Fiddle School offers Mastery 1, 2, and 3 Certification Programs. Join a small group of students at your level and work together for one year. Includes teacher feedback every other week, motivating student groups, and accountability to progress beyond your dreams. Additional costs apply.
- d) Webinars** - I offer *Swing Improvisation Workouts* (intermediate/advanced) and *Texas-Style Tunes* (advanced) classes every month. Additional costs apply.

- e) **Virtual Camps** – We host two small virtual camps per year. Meet other Fiddle Schoolers and motivate yourself with a weekend of fiddle immersion. Additional costs apply.
- f) **Live Camps** – We host 1-2 in person camps per year. This is your opportunity to join small jam sessions and get to play music TOGETHER! Additional costs apply.

The Genres of Fiddling

You've probably had a glimpse into the many genres under the umbrella of fiddling. There's Irish, bluegrass, jazz, old-time... the list goes on and on. Each of these styles has its own repertoire, history, characteristics, jam etiquette, and technique.

In Fiddle School, I teach from a Texas-style fiddle perspective. Texas-style is a genre rich in cross-cultural tunes, solid technique, and a great culture of jam sessions, fiddle contests, and square dances. Many of the tunes in the program cross over to bluegrass, Irish, and old-time, but you'll notice distinctive elements of the Texas-style genre throughout. You'll learn three categories of tunes: breakdowns, waltzes, and tunes of choice. In these tunes, we'll learn bowing techniques to produce the thick, rhythmic, even sound that is characteristic of Texas-style fiddling. We also focus on good intonation and tone quality, which are important aspects of the genre as well. As you go on, we'll discuss Texas-style history, jam etiquette, contests, and more.

I love Texas-style fiddle (and I think you will too) but rest assured that whatever style of fiddle you'd like to play, the wholistic skill-building in the Fiddle School method will make you a more adept player in any genre.

How to Get the Most out of Fiddle School

Congratulations! Now that you've watched the Violinist Starter Kit, you're ready to begin Fiddle School's Lesson 1 in Session 1. We have so many videos and awesome features in Fiddle School that you'll want to take the tour and see how user-friendly it is. Be sure to watch the Fiddle School Tour to find your way around the website.

The best fiddlers aren't the ones who play fancy, showy things; they're musicians who know how to play simple things well. By working on foundational concepts like bow hold and bow length, you're mastering the simple things, which are the elements that will truly advance your fiddling. We focus a lot on these elements in Fiddle School because whether you've been playing for a lifetime or you're just starting out, those elements are the key to great fiddling.

I designed Fiddle School to help you find a genuine "fiddly" sound by building good technique and complimenting that with a good groove, solid fundamentals, and a seasoned repertoire. To experience the full benefits of Fiddle School, here are the things to look out for in each lesson.

Every lesson is designed to give you one month of material to work on. As you begin a lesson with the practice buddies, use them to dig deep into your technique. I'll offer exercises, tips, and practice guidance that naturally improve your sound and technique. For example, in the practice buddy in this starter kit where I talk about your bow hold, I explain specific positioning and how to practice it to create great rhythm and tone. Practice buddies like this one are designed to help you build new habits through lots of attentive practice, so I encourage you to watch them 2-3 times a week, spending enough time with them to incorporate their concepts into your daily practice.

The listening videos are your next step in a lesson. These are videos of the tunes you'll learn in that lesson. Listen to these videos every day of the month.

Listening is the only shortcut.

You're ready to start learning the tunes in the lesson after you've watched all the practice buddies at least once. I strongly encourage you to learn the tunes by ear using the learning videos in the lesson. It's tempting to go the quicker route and sketch out the tune by listening to the fiddle and guitar version, but I suggest you take the longer route: when you learn by ear with my videos, you learn how to play a tune, not just what to play. I teach lots of nuance in the learning videos, and you're more likely to have to go back and relearn notes, bowings, or technique if you skip them. Alternatively, if you decide to learn the song just by reading the sheet music, you'll miss out on nuances and your tunes will be much harder to memorize. And hey, the learning videos are fun. This is how fiddle tunes have been passed down for generations—from one fiddler to another.

After you've learned the song, it's time to go into the play-along tab. There, you can both listen to and play along with the songs. You can also slow down the tracks, which I highly recommend as you learn the tune. First play along with the slow fiddle and guitar track to be sure that all your notes and bowings match mine. Then test your memorization by playing along with the slow guitar-only track. The fast tracks are bonus tracks. They're built for classical players coming into fiddling as well as fiddlers who've been playing for years already. If you're just getting started or changing up your technique, I'd recommend playing with the slow track only (besides, they're still pretty fast).

When you learn with Fiddle School, you should feel like all your questions are answered. How long should your bows be? How should your left hand look? How can you practice a specific technique? The answers to these questions are in every lesson. By giving you all these tools, I want to make you feel solid and empowered as a musician. During each lesson, you should gain confidence in the

foundations of your playing and in your new tunes. Remember, the slower you go, the faster you'll progress.

To get the most out of Fiddle School, you can also take advantage of the many resources we offer outside of our video lessons. Check out our Fiddle Lounge, where you can find recommended listening and reading, and our live office hours, where you can meet other Fiddle Schoolers, play tunes with us, and ask us all your fiddling questions. To get more personalized attention and support, we offer private lessons and progress reports. If you want to explore new musical skills, attend a jam session, or build your musical community, you can look into the many diverse webinars we offer, along with our camps. Whatever kind of support you need, we're here for you.

Thank you so much for making Fiddle School part of your musical journey.