

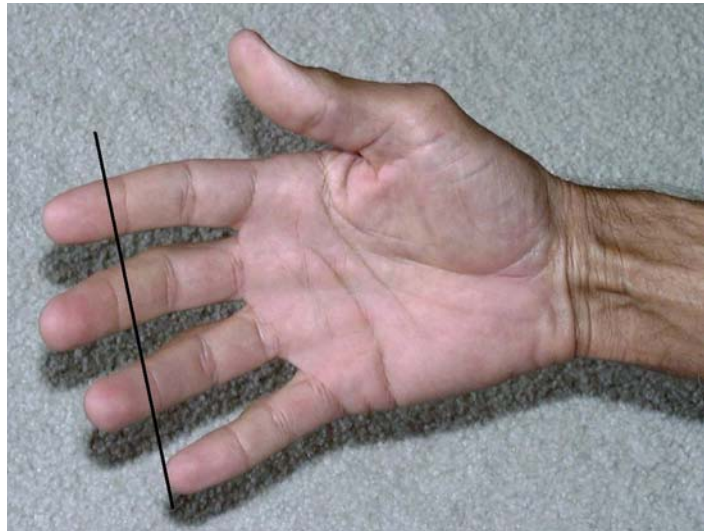
# Beginning Right Hand Technique: Holding the Bow

by John Silzel (<http://www.silzel.com>)

Holding the violin bow correctly is extremely important! You might think "How many ways are there to hold a wooden stick, anyway?" But unfortunately, the correct way doesn't "feel" normal at first, so it is something that has to be practiced until it is natural. (If a golfer has ever showed you the correct way to hold a golf club, you will know what I mean!)

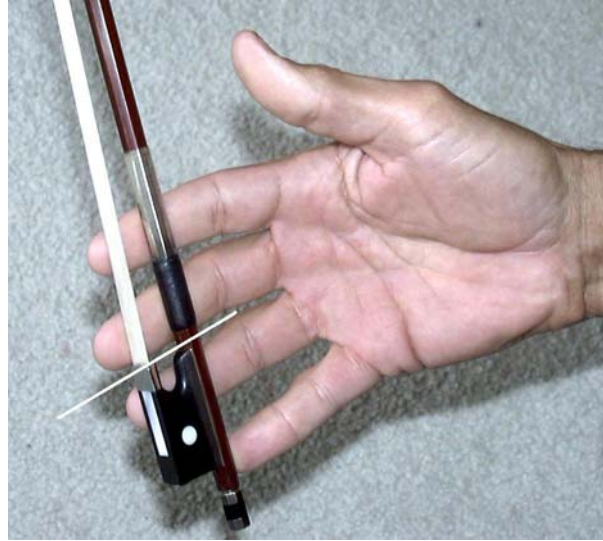
Practice going through the 3 steps below to position your hand and bow correctly. Do this at the beginning of a practice session, and any time your hand loses the correct position. You can even practice these steps away from your violin, using a pencil. This way, you can practice your bow hold while in class, riding in a car, reading a book, or any time your hands are idle. Soon you will find the correct bow hold so natural that you don't even have to think about it. Ready? Let's go!

**Step 1:** Hold your right hand out, palm up, with the fingers relaxed and a little apart. Draw an imaginary line from the tip of your pinky through the first little wrinkles on your fingers where they bend. The picture shows my line. Your fingers might be slightly different lengths than mine, but you should still have a "line". Got it?



(Don't worry if your line doesn't go perfectly through the wrinkles, most people's middle finger wrinkle will not match up. Make the best compromise.)

**Step 2:** This one's pretty easy. Hold the middle of your bow in your left hand, and put the stick right along the line. The tip of your pinky should be on the stick. Slide the stick along your hand until the end of the frog is right between your middle and ring fingers. The white line in the picture shows where you want the frog to be. The stick is sitting on my finger wrinkles. Feels normal so far!



**Step 3:** This step is really simple, too, but might feel weird at first. All you do is reach your thumb over and put the tip of your thumb on the spot where the two lines (the black line in Step 1 and the white line in Step 2) cross. Your fingers should all stay curved and relaxed, and your thumb should be curved out to make a small hill. If your thumb is making a valley or straight line, it's not right.



**That's really all there is to it!** But let's look at how your hand holds the bow from different angles so you can be sure you are holding the stick correctly. Holding your bow (or pencil!), see if your hand looks like mine in the pictures that follow! If it doesn't, go back through the three steps above and see what needs fixing. When you have it right, get used to the feeling, because that is what you will be doing with your right hand whenever you pick up your bow! Your hand and fingers should look relaxed (even though they may feel awkward at first).

## Check Your Bow Grip!

Compare your hand and bow to the pictures below.

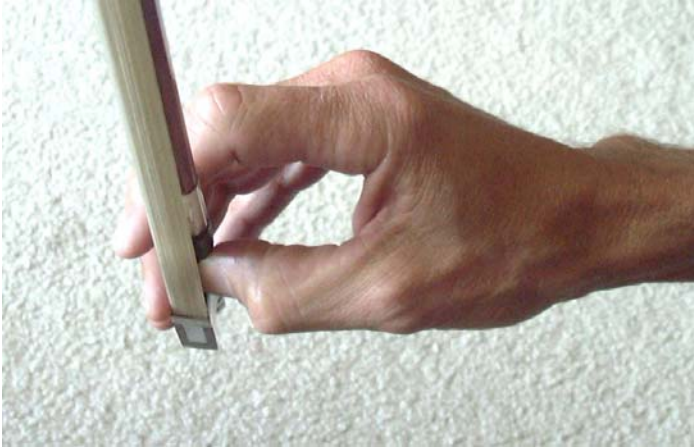
Does your hand look like the pictures?

Looking down from the top, my pinky finger tip is sitting on top of the stick. My pinky is actually curved just a bit, not straight. My ring, middle, and index fingers all are reaching over the bow a little, with the stick resting against the first wrinkles. My thumb is gently pushing the bow against the finger wrinkles. If I push down with my pinky, the bow tip comes up. If I push down with my index finger, the bow tip comes down. It's like a teeter-totter.



Here's a picture from below, looking up from the floor at my hand while I'm playing. All my fingers are curved slightly. See how my thumb is curved? My index finger can "steer" the bow by straightening or curving more. My thumb, ring, and middle fingers do most of the "holding". And the pinky finger is pretty much just riding along on top. In fact, you will be tempted to lift your pinky off the stick and let it point up into the air (like the Queen having tea!). But don't do it—you really need that pinky to do the teeter-tottering.





the space between the hair and the stick?

This picture is especially important! See how my thumb and fingers curve out so that there is a "hole" between my fingers and thumb? This is important! See how none of my fingers wrap under the frog? See how the tip of my thumb isn't stuck all the way into



Looking toward the tip of the bow, see how my pinky is curved? My thumb is bent and is pushing the bow stick upwards slightly and against my middle finger. Notice that my palm is nowhere near the bow stick. If your hand looks like this, you've got it!



Here's what your audience will see, and what you should see while playing in front of a mirror. This is actually a very comfortable grip, and one that will let you play many different kinds of bowing techniques as you progress.

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