

Vibrating on the cello serves two purposes:

- 1. Enhance expression**
- 2. Relax the left hand and arm**

When cellists first learn to vibrate, it is often fast and tight. However, vibrato is a tool for relaxing, because it allows you to free up your arm and hand through motion rather than holding it to one position. Thus, many of the following exercises focus on learning to slow down and widen vibrato. The later exercises focus on integrating a variety of types of vibrato in order to expand your palette of available colors.

Constant Speeds:

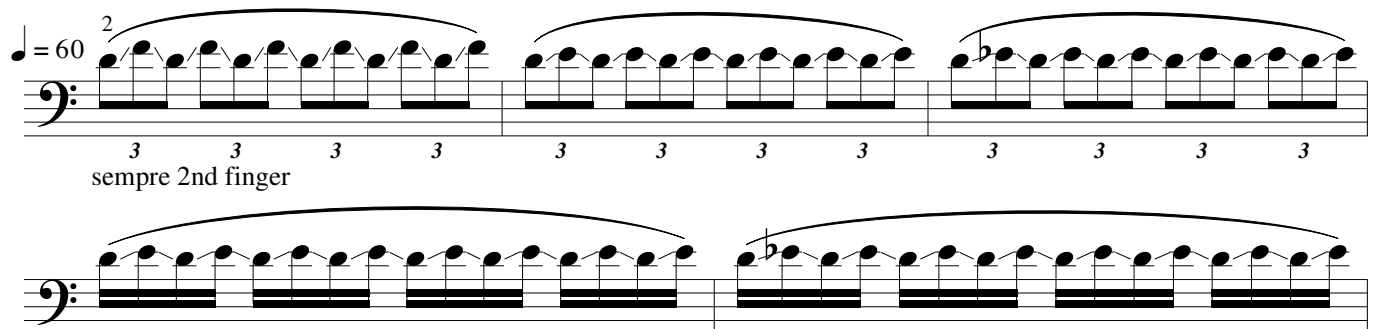
In order to slow vibrato down, it's valuable to practice within the confines of a metronome. As you practice the following, be diligent about oscillating in time with the metronome: avoid falling into your usual vibrato speed. This exercise is very mechanical, so use every opportunity to loosen your hand.

Press only lightly on the fingerboard. Move up and down the string like a shift, opening and closing your elbow joint. As the shifts become smaller, there may be a little rotation in the hand, but the main motion should come from the elbow joint.



sempre 2nd finger

1. Repeat with each of the other fingers (1, 3 and 4).
2. Try this exercise without pressing the string down at all (lightly brushing the string)
3. Try this exercise without any fingers on the string. Use the thumb to shift up and down the back side of the neck of the cello. This allows you to focus on the vibrato motion without getting caught up in the detail of the finger micro-motions.



sempre 2nd finger

1. Repeat these with the other fingers (1, 3 and 4).
2. Try the exercise on the other strings.
3. Take breaks! This exercise will heat your string up quickly.

You can vibrate 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 (or more!) to one metronome beat, as shown below. You can also practice vibrating without moving "shifting" your fingers, so that you stay on one note. I recommend that you practice both the shifting way on the previous page, and also the way shown below. Here, the stems show where your fingers rocks back and forth. Even though your fingers don't move, still try to feel the elbow opening and closing, ever so slightly.

1. Repeat the above exercises with different metronome speeds: slower (50 bpm), or faster (72 bpm).

Continuity:

As you develop vibrato, consistency is a big factor. You may find that you are vibrating some notes but not others (often referred to as "lightswitch" vibrato, because it is flipped on and off frequently). Or, you may stop vibrating right before you switch notes or shift. During the following exercises, focus on keeping the vibrato going at all times.

Here are some tips for continuous vibrato:

1. Focus on the motion from your arm, opening and closing the elbow. Regardless of what finger you are using, this motion will be consistent.
2. Before you shift or switch fingers, vibrate a little extra, to train your hand.
3. Picture each joint in your left hand, from the wrist to the the knuckles on each finger. As you vibrate, are there any joints that can relax further?

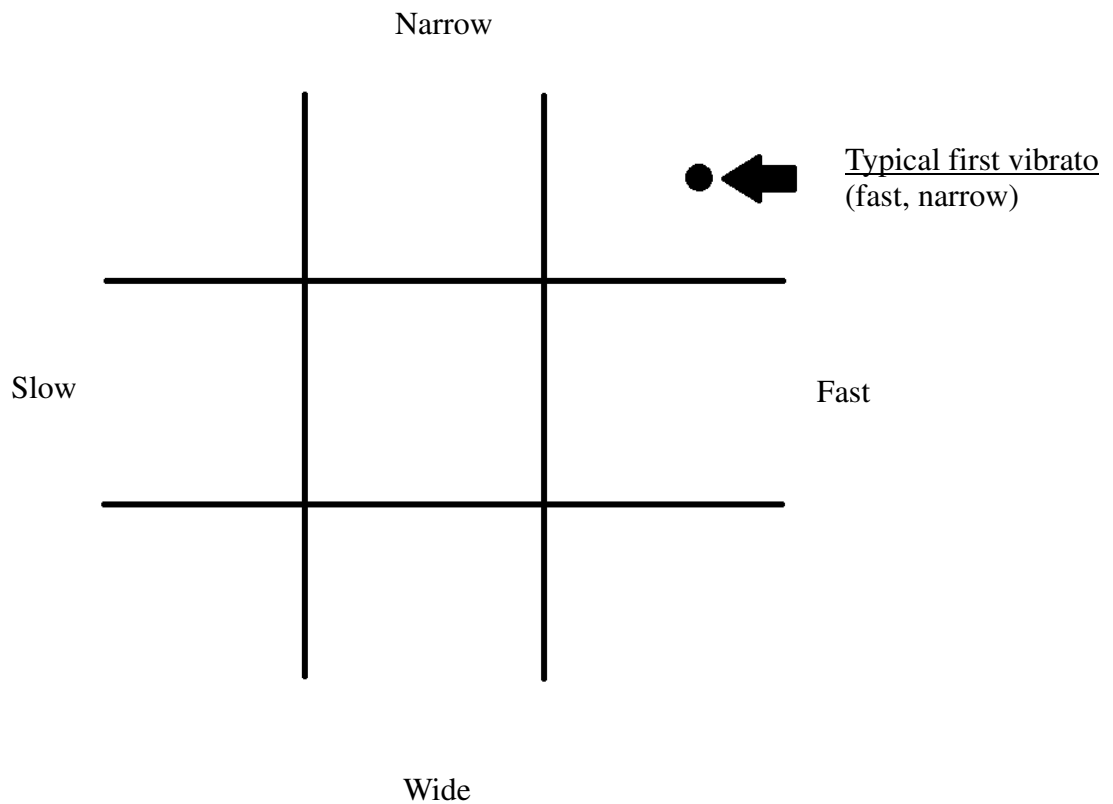
Continuity (continued):

As you shift between each finger combination, continue to vibrate until the moment you start the shift.

The image shows three staves of musical notation in bass clef. Each staff contains a sequence of notes with fingerings and slurs, illustrating vibrato techniques. The first staff has 8 measures, the second has 8 measures, and the third has 8 measures. The notes are mostly quarter notes and half notes, with various fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and slurs indicating vibrato. The notes are on the lines and spaces of the bass clef, with some accidentals (sharps) on the notes.

Multispeed Vibrato:

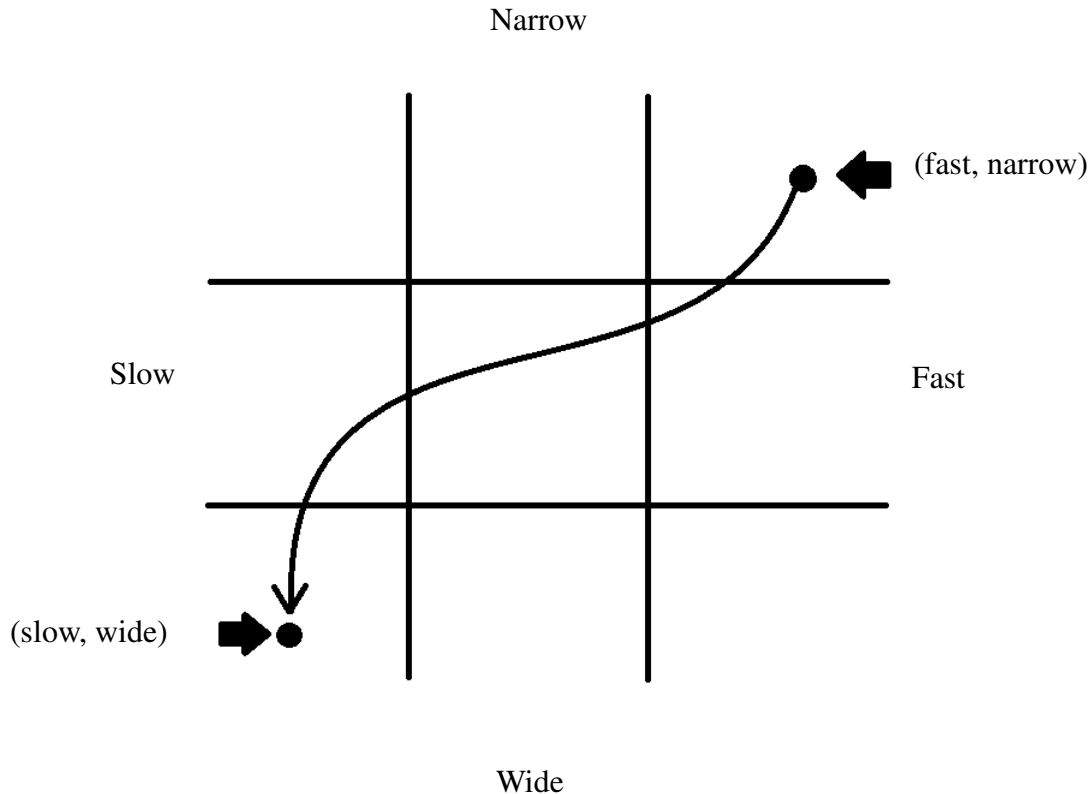
Expanding the range of possible vibratos will greatly increase your ability to be expressive. Using two main variables, speed and width, you can divide vibrato into 9 sections, shown below:



Multispeed vibrato (continued):

The first goal is to be able to play in any of the boxes. If you've mastered the exercises on the previous pages, you should find that it is much easier to reach the boxes that you may have struggled with before.

The second, more difficult goal, is to start in one box and move through to another point on a single note, like this:



Pick a note. Then pick two boxes from the above diagram. Start the note with one type of vibrato, then morph into the second by the end of the note. Examples are given below:

fast - - - - - slow
narrow - - - - - wide

slow - - - - - medium
narrow - - - - - wide

slow - - - - - fast
medium - - - - - narrow

medium - - - - - slow
wide - - - - - medium

1. Try the same exercises, but starting on different bows, and / or switching bows.
2. Try the same exercises, but adding different dynamics. Experiment with which dynamics "fit" which vibratos. Many of these vibrato changes call for a natural crescendo or diminuendo. Try doing it the natural way, and also the opposite way:

Bowing Examples

p *f* *p* < *f* *f* > *p*

Dynamic Examples