



Instrument care tips

Below you'll find some handy tips to give to parents or new learners about how to look after their instruments. Most of this will be obvious to you as a teacher but you should always provide parents and learners with the most obvious tips of instrument maintenance. If you wish to, some of these tips could be added to your contract with parents.

BOWED STRINGS:

Storage

- Keep in a place away from direct sunshine or potential heat. Delicate woodwork and heat do not mix.
- Some cases are fitted with a hygrometer, which measures the humidity in the case.
- Store cellos and double bass cases upright or on their side and violin and viola cases on their side or bottom.
- Make sure that there is a set of spare strings in the case at all times and some rosin.

Setting up

- Your child may play their violin or viola with a shoulder rest, sponge or cloth attached to the underside of the instrument or resting on your shoulder. This is up to the player and teacher to decide what is best.
- Bows should be tightened using the screw at the bottom (heel) of the bow before playing.
- Bow hair should not be touched by fingers as it will stop working if it is regularly touched, which can be expensive to repair.
- Using rosin on the bow regularly helps the bow glide on the strings. Your teacher will show your child how to do this.
- There is a variety of mutes available, including practice mutes. Most music doesn't require a mute for the first few years of learning but if your child wishes to be in a group or ensemble, this will be probably be required for some of the pieces. Speak to your teacher for advice on the right mutes for your instrument.
- The spike on a cello or double bass can damage the floor. To stop this from happening, a 'black hole', which is non-slip or an 'endpin anchor', which is anchored by the chair legs will need to be purchased.
- Strings should not be tuned at home by anyone other than the student, and then only with the tuners until Grade 5 level, otherwise strings can easily snap. A replacement will need to be purchased and time allocated in the lesson to fit it.

Packing away

- Loosen the bow each time your child puts it away in its case, completing enough turns of the end of the bow until there is no tension in the bow hair.
- Take off the shoulder rest and keep it in the case, gently dust the rosin away off the top of the violin and strings with a duster, and zip up the case.
- You can, occasionally, clean the strings with a small amount of white spirit on a cloth to remove any build up of rosin with a tissue or cloth.

Maintenance

- Do not be alarmed if bow hairs break off when playing, it is expected. The bow will need to be repaired every now and then; your teacher will let you know when this will need to take place.
- Strings can snap as they are worn down over time, your teacher will teach you how to replace strings but it will be quicker and easier to let the teacher do this during the first few years of learning.



HARP:

Storage

- Keep your harp in a place away from direct sunshine or potential heat. Delicate woodwork and heat do not mix.
- Store your harp standing up, covered by its soft case and make sure nothing is touching it.
- A harp trolley will be essential if you are planning to travel any distance with your harp.
- Make sure all the pedals are left in a neutral position.

Setting up

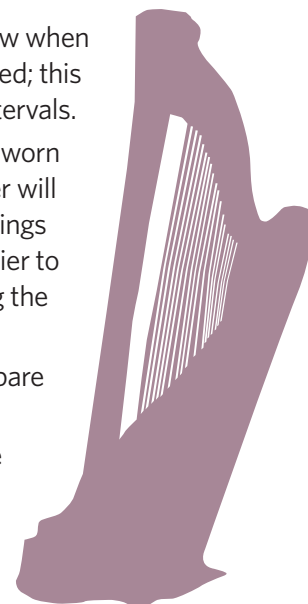
- Make sure your child has access to a height adjustable stool. Over time, as your child grows they will need to adapt to the instrument they are playing.
- A harp should not be tuned at home by anyone other than the player, then only with the tuners until Grade 5 level, otherwise strings can easily snap. A replacement will need to be purchased and time allocated in the lesson to fit it.
- Your teacher will assist in the tuning while your child is small.
- A digital tuner is a good investment.

Packing away

- Do not use any cleaning products on your harp as it affects the wood and varnish, a dry duster or soft lint-free cloth is the best solution.
- Always cover your harp when you have finished playing.

Maintenance

- Your teacher will let you know when your harp needs to be serviced; this should be done at regular intervals.
- Strings can snap as they are worn down over time, your teacher will teach you how to replace strings but it will be quicker and easier to let the teacher do this during the first few years of learning.
- Keep full stock of as many spare strings as possible.
- Keep the tuning key in a safe place, handy.



GUITAR:

Storage

- Keep in a place away from direct sunshine or potential heat. Delicate woodwork and heat do not mix.
- Store the guitar in its case on their side or bottom.
- Make sure that there is a set of spare strings in the case at all times.



Setting up

- You may decide play your guitar with a guitar support, which rests on the underside of the instrument. This is up to the player and teacher to decide what is suitable.
- There is a variety of capos available. Most classical music doesn't require a capo but if your child wishes to play other genres, this will be probably be required for some of the pieces. Speak to your teacher for advice on the right capos for your instrument.
- Digital tuners are a good investment.
- Strings can snap as they are worn down over time, your teacher will teach you how to replace strings but it will be quicker and easier to let the teacher do this during the first few years of learning.

Packing away

- When placing your instrument back into its case, make sure it fits all the correct indentations inside the case. Do not force your case closed, as it most likely means the instrument isn't properly placed.

Maintenance

- Occasionally strings break, this is why you should always carry spare strings.

BRASS

Storage

- Keep brass instruments away from heat sources.
- The box is the safest place to keep your child's instrument, however it doesn't have to go back in its box every time; once cleaned, leaving it put together can encourage practice, as long as it is not left somewhere where it can get accidentally damaged. You can buy a stand to store it outside of its case.
- Make sure the valve oil, (and slide oil for trombones) and mouthpiece cleaning brush are kept in the case.

Setting Up

- Your teacher will show your child how to put your instrument together when they begin their lessons.
- If your child is learning the trombone, you may consider purchasing a hand support, speak to your teacher about this. They help to spread the weight of holding the instrument.
- There is a variety of mutes available. Most music doesn't require a mute for the first few years of learning but if they wish to be in a group or ensemble, this will probably be required for some of the pieces. Speak to your teacher for advice on the right mutes for your instrument.
- It is perfectly normal for condensation to gather in the instrument whilst playing. The teacher will show your child how to remove this from the instrument, and this should be done regularly whilst playing and after.

Packing Away

- Always remove the mouthpiece before packing away.
- When placing your instrument back into its case, make sure it fits all the correct indentations. Do not force your case closed, as it most likely means the instrument isn't properly placed.

Maintenance

- Your child will learn how to maintain the valves/slide on your instrument with your teacher. We suggest that until that time, you let the teacher use valve oil on your child's instrument, because it can be easy to reassemble the instrument incorrectly.
- Speak to your teacher about getting your instrument serviced.



PIANO

Storage

- Try not to keep your piano in direct sunlight or near a heat source as it can affect the wood and the tuning of the instrument.
- Do not use any cleaning products on a piano as it affects the wood and varnish, a dry duster is the best solution.



Set up

- Make sure that the stool is height adjustable. Over time, as your child grows they will need to adopt a lower seated position in comparison to the keyboard.
- It is common that young players cannot reach the pedals when they begin to play. Although not essential, you can buy a footstool for your child, which can be used until they can reach the floor. The pedals feature in music from a reasonably early point, but it's not absolutely essential until around Grade 5 standard. The teacher will show your child how to use the pedals.
- You should always close the lid of the piano (including digital pianos) so that dust doesn't get to the keys.

Maintenance:

- Piano tuning is not an option but a necessity. This should be done regularly, by a professional; in the UK, you can find a local piano tuner via the [Piano Tuners Association](#).
- If you are moving house, or moving your piano a significant distance, let the instrument settle for a while before booking the piano tuner.

WOODWIND

Storage

- The box is the safest place to keep your instrument, however it doesn't have to go back in its box every time; once cleaned, leaving it put together can encourage practice, as long as it is not left somewhere where it can get accidentally damaged.
- Keep away from heat sources.
- Make sure all additional items (reeds, oil, mouthpiece lids and cleaning materials) are kept in the case.

Setting up

- Your teacher will show you how to put your instrument together when you begin to play.
- If you are learning the saxophone, bassoon, contrabassoon or bass clarinet, you may consider purchasing a neck strap, speak to your teacher about this. They help to spread the weight of holding the instrument.

Packing away

- Your instrument needs to be cleaned after every time it is played, to remove the moisture. It is perfectly normal for condensation to gather in the instrument whilst playing. The teacher will show your child how to remove this from the instrument, and this should be done regularly whilst playing and after.
- When placing your child's instrument back into its case, make sure it fits all the correct indentations. Do not force your case closed, as it most likely means the instrument isn't properly placed.

Maintenance

- A service is needed every 2-3 years, or sooner if the instrument under-performs.
- Your teacher will show your child how to use the cleaning materials. The teacher will get in touch and recommend products or services if they detect any instrumental faults or missing equipment.
- Specific advice for flute: If the instrument tarnishes – or if the joints become stiff - a silver cloth should be used to rub the outside, and both sides of the joining parts of the instrument; never add lubricant to flute joints, unlike other woodwind instruments. If the keys start to sound sticky, moisture has got into the pads, so they need to be cleaned and dried using papers; it can be a good idea to also leave the box open overnight in case the environment of the box cushioning is also moist.



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