

This is Lesson 12, an excerpt from the book, *“First Year Fiddle – Unit 1”* by Jay Buckey

You can see and hear how this program works here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aWd1qREkeA>

This lesson is early in the program and helps the beginning fiddler to gain more control of the bow. The lesson examples here are only the “open” strings; no fingers are used to note new notes. The other notes will be covered in a future lesson.

The examples in this lesson start with one string, the high E string. You will hear a measure of “click”. This will set the tempo and then the fiddle with a simple guitar rhythm backup, will play. You should listen to the example a few times and then play along with the recording.

This will help you in several ways:

1. It will keep your timing accurate and steady
2. You will learn how to listen to what’s happening outside of your instrument.

Good musicianship includes being aware of what the others are doing when playing in a group. Just like driving a car; you’re not the only car on the road, you have to constantly be alert and watching in front, back and sides. The same goes for playing the fiddle with others. You need to be aware of the other players. By playing along with the recordings you will be training your ear to blend in.

After we go through the examples of the four open strings on the instrument, we will then put them all together in a song example, *“Good Dogs Always Eat”*. I gave the tune that name because the first letter of each word matches our four fiddle strings; “Good Dogs Always Eat”.

The fiddle package includes more play-along audio tracks with the fiddle removed that are not on this audio/video presentation. This way, you will be the fiddle player in the band!

If you are a teacher, you will want to assign your students (depending on their ability) certain exercises to work on for that week’s study. When they return for their next fiddle lesson, you can play together with the recording *and then* let the student play by themselves with the recording. If they can go through the example on their own *with* the recording, you should then mark off the example title with a colored pen or, if they are children, use a funny sticker and put the date on it that they successfully accomplished the exercise.

This will help the student in several important areas:

1. They have a solid goal to aim for
2. They can see their progress
3. The “date” will be useful for the future for other goals, personal reflection, etc.

As a teacher, you may have some other methods to encourage and keep your student's interest. The above is something that I've done over the years that has been very effective.

This Lesson 12 from Unit 1 is only the beginning. There are 6 full units of instruction, examples and songs to keep your students moving forward. Each lesson builds on previous material and each Unit builds progressively on the previous Units giving the student a solid foundation for the fiddle, technique, theory, improvising and playing with others in a live, informal jam session.

Jay Buckey

# LESSON 12:

## PLAYING THE "OPEN" STRINGS

It's time now to start putting some of this theory and technique into real music.

Let's start with playing the open strings. "Open" means that there will be no fingers placed on the strings. Only the bow will touch the string.

When you are just starting out, it can be challenging to find the notes with the left hand and at the same time, bowing with the right. To help you gain more control of the right hand and arm, we will next play some exercises to build our bowing accuracy.

You will want to place your bow on the strings between the bridge and the fingerboard and draw it parallel to the strings. Avoid swinging the bow back and forth. Draw it straight across the strings keeping it between the bridge and fingerboard at all times. Keep the right wrist relaxed.



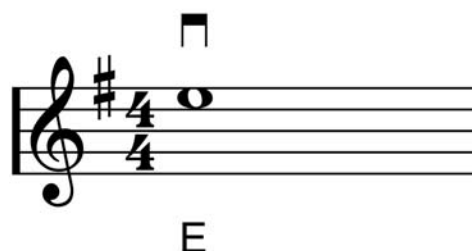
I also like to angle the stick out a little from the bridge so that the hair does not lay flat on the strings. This will give you a smoother sound.

The "∩" symbol (down-bow) is used on the sheet music when you draw your bow towards the floor. The "∨" symbol (up-bow) means to push it towards the ceiling.

Place the middle of the bow on the high E string then pull it towards the floor. Try to only play the E string, not two strings. As you pull the bow, count to yourself, “1, 2, 3, 4”.

On paper, that E note would look like a “donut” on the staff.

**Example 1:**



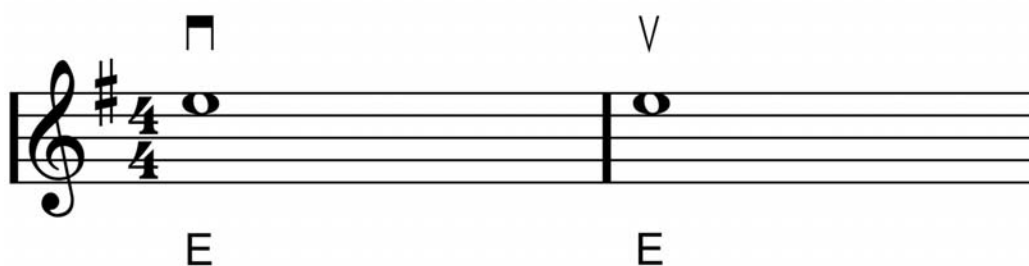
Try playing this note with the play along audio recording. The play along audio recording for this exercise, and all exercises and songs in this book, will start with a measure of “click”. You will hear four clicks then you will start to play the note. On the recording, there will be a Rhythm Guitar and a Fiddle as a guide.

The next recording will be the click and the Rhythm Guitar; I call this “Rhythm Backup”. This is just the backing track without the fiddle. If you feel comfortable with the exercise, try to play along with just the Guitar on the recording.

This way, you’ll be learning how to listen to others as you play and not be so focused on just your instrument. Good musicianship includes playing along with others and complimenting the overall sound.

Next, let’s do the same E note again, we will start the bow down and count to four, then without a pause, push the bow in the other direction, “up bow” for a second E note, also four counts.

**Example 2:**



How did that sound? Were the notes smooth and connected or scratchy and harsh? If those notes didn't sound too good (and there isn't a cat within two miles), there may be a couple reasons why:

1. You need rosin, or more rosin on the bow. If there's NO SOUND, you definitely will need more rosin. Rosin helps the hair on the bow "grab" the string.
2. If there's enough rosin on the bow but the sound is still scratchy, you may be pressing the bow too hard on the strings. The middle of the bow should be placed on the strings. If you start near the Frog, where your right hand is, you'll almost always get a scratchy sound.
3. Lean the bow away from you a little and play more on the edge of the bow hair. That can also help your tone.
4. Don't pull the bow too slow. If it's too slow, it will sound scratchy. Put some velocity behind it. Don't be afraid! Make some noise!
5. If you have old, rusty strings, CHANGE THEM! A good set of strings makes a big difference.
6. There could be some other reasons, one could be more experience. This is where a good teacher can be a big help. I can't see what you're doing right or wrong. A private fiddle lesson by a competent teacher makes a world of difference.

My suggestion to ALL of my local students is to just relax and take your time. This isn't a race to learn how to play the fiddle. We just want to learn to play some nice songs and have some fun, and eventually play our songs with others in a jam session.

If this is your first time playing this wonderful instrument, be patient with yourself and relax. Find a quiet place that you won't be disturb or disturb others. This way you can concentrate on what you're doing.

Listen to the way I play this on the audio recording and then play along with me on the recording:

**Example 3:**



You did great! You didn't squeak as much that time. This is easy stuff, huh? OK, so, are you ready to learn a new note?

The next note we want to learn is the string A, The A string is next to the E string. It looks like this on music.

**Example 4:**

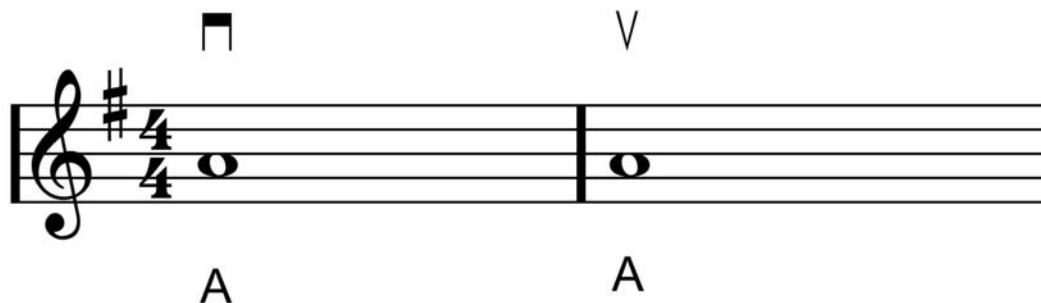


Notice that the A note also looks like a donut but is lower on the staff. It sits in the second space from the bottom. Do you remember the letter names of the spaces?

F, A, C, E

Just like we did with the E note, let's now play two A notes. Each A note will receive four counts.

**Example 5:**



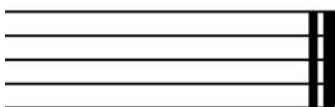
Excellent! Now, let's do it again but four A notes. Be sure to start you bowing with a down bow.

**Example 6:**



Wow, you're doing great!

This time, let's mix up the two notes, E and A that we've just been working on. In this next example, we will play two E notes then two A notes. There's also something new; at the end of the staff, there will be a thin vertical line and a thicker horizontal line. This symbol is called the "**Bold Double Bar Line**" and indicates the end of the song.



Be sure you start with a down bow:

**Example 7:**



Did you notice on that last exercise that the E note is physically higher on the staff than the A note AND that the pitch of the E note is higher than the A note?

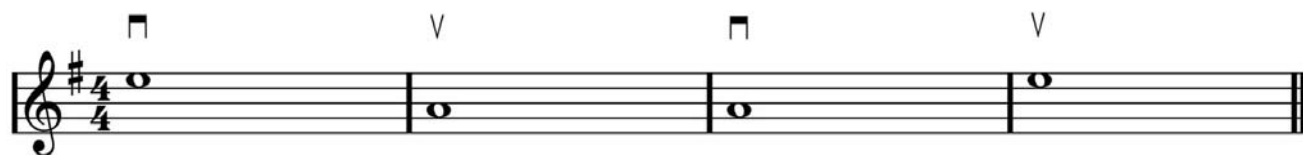
As the notes move up the staff, the pitch goes up and when the notes go down, the pitch goes down. THIS is the advantage to reading music. In time, you will be able to “hear” the musical notes in your mind as you see them on the paper; up and down.

In the next examples, the letter name will not be under the note. This time, you will need to identify the note by its position on the staff; i.e. you will need to read the music.

**Example 8:**



**Example 9:**



**Example 10:**



**Example 11:**

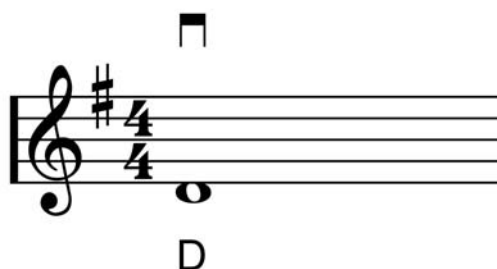




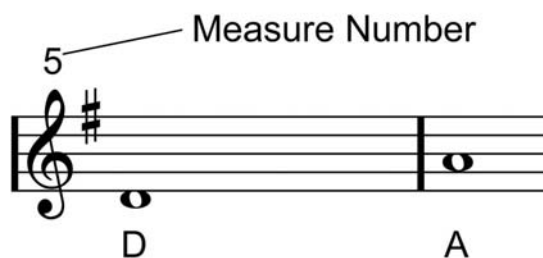
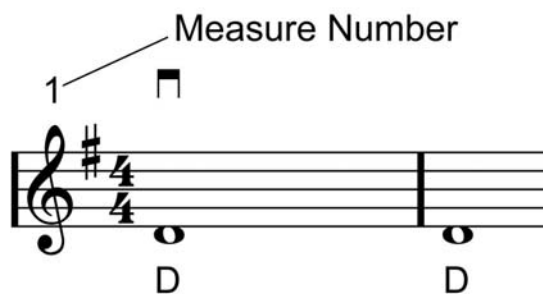
That wasn't so hard, was it? You're now reading notes... well, two notes. Let's learn a third note, D. This notes will be the string to the left of A, the third string, D.

The D string note is just below the lowest line on the staff. It looks like this:

**Example 12:**



Our next example will be twice as long, eight measures. At the beginning of the staff, just above the Treble Clef you will see a number. This is the measure number at the beginning of the staff. These numbers are helpful to quickly identify an area in the music.



Now, let's put the D and A strings together for a total of eight measures. The first note should begin down bow.

**Example 13:**

Example 13 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a first finger bowing direction symbol (a square with a diagonal line) above the first measure. The notes are: D (first measure), D (second measure), A (third measure), and A (fourth measure). The second staff begins with a fifth finger bowing direction symbol (a square with a diagonal line) above the first measure. The notes are: D (first measure), A (second measure), D (third measure), and D (fourth measure). The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the second staff.

Let's try that again, but mix up the D and A notes a bit. This time, there are no letter names below the notes. Can you "read" the music without the letters? I bet you can! Try it!

**Example 14:**

Example 14 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a first finger bowing direction symbol (a square with a diagonal line) above the first measure. The notes are: D (first measure), D (second measure), A (third measure), and D (fourth measure). The second staff begins with a fifth finger bowing direction symbol (a square with a diagonal line) above the first measure. The notes are: A (first measure), D (second measure), D (third measure), and D (fourth measure). The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the second staff.

This would be a good time for a review. Look at the next example below. This time, all three notes are mixed together. Get a pencil and put the letter names below each note.

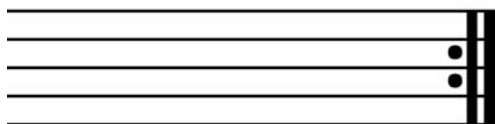
**Example 15:**



The letter names of the notes in the above example are, D, A, E, A, E, A, D, A. Did you get them correct?

There's something new in that last example; it's the 'Repeat Sign':

**Example 16:**

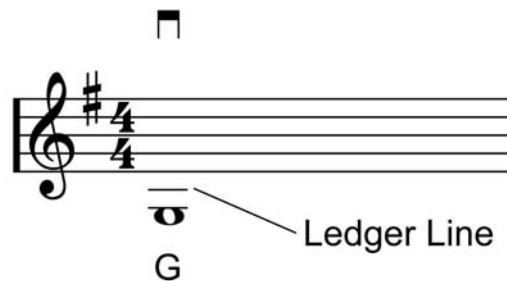


The two dots in front of the double bar indicate a repeat back to the beginning of the exercise or song.

Before we take a break, let's learn one more note, the G note. This will be the lowest string on the fiddle, just to the left of the D String. Fiddler's often times refer to this note as the "Low G" since it's the lowest note on the fiddle.

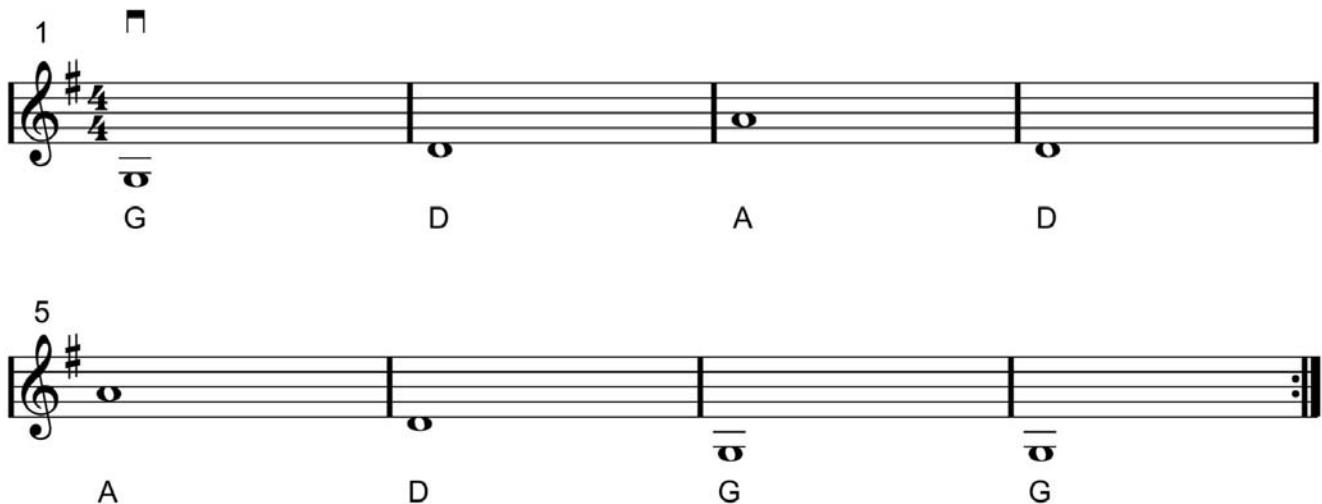
This note is several notes below the regular notes on the staff. The low G note sits below the second "Ledger Line"

**Example 17:**



Let's use this new, low G note with the D and A strings. Remember to start the example with a down bow and repeat one time.

**Example 18:**



That's great! Now, while all of the notes, G, D, A and E are fresh in our mind, let's put them all together in our first song, "**G**ood **D**ogs **A**lways **E**at".

# Good Dogs Always Eat 1

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

By Jay Buckey

Verse:

1

E A D G

5

D A E A

Chorus:

9

E A D G

13

D A E A