

E. Mills' Parent's Guide to What to Expect

By the End of Each Stage in the Development of a Beginner's Ability to Play "Twinkle" (Violin/Viola)

Stages	Time Span*	Musical and Psychological Aspects of Growth	Physical and Technical Aspects
1 Groundwork –	1-8 Months Depending on Maturity and frequency and consistency	<p>Can bow and respond to the teacher's requests most of the time. Can sing Pre-Twinkle songs such as "The Rest Position Song" and others with the correct actions. Can sing "Twinkle" Can imitate simple rhythms, either clapping or bowing. Can mime the rhythm of the 5 variations, the hand moving up and down as though playing the instrument. Can recognize the difference between D, A, and E, by ear and match with voice. Shows musical awareness by laughing when the teacher plays a wrong note or a wrong rhythm to Twinkle. Likes to march and do other movements with pieces on the CD.</p>	<p>Can place feet without assistance. Maintains balance so as not to be easily pushed back. Can hold the instrument <u>with the head only</u> for 1 or 2 minutes, perhaps walking around or standing on one foot. Can fix fingers in proper bow grip and then move the bow sideways and vertically, keeping the tip straight. Can place the taped part of the bow on the "Kreisler Freeway" and play up and down within the marked area. Can play rhythm of first variation on their highest open string, pause and change to A or D with clean sound and strong tone. Can watch the bow on the string and be aware of its motion.</p>
2 Planting Seeds –	1-2 Months	<p>Can look at fingers and name them when they are touched, saying "thumb" or "first finger" or "#1", etc. Can sing all of Twinkle using the finger numbers appropriate to their instrument. Can recognize which section is being played by teacher in a game, hearing a pitch difference in the starting notes of sections 2 and 3. Can identify each variation on the recording by the words used for the rhythm or by the number or by the letter.</p>	<p>Can move or wiggle any finger called for, either hand. Can place or lift any finger called for on their two highest strings. Can sing Twinkle by the fingers, putting up the appropriate fingers as they sing the numbers. Can "make a space" between 1-2, or a close half-step between 2-3. Can lift the fingers one at a time as in Twinkle: 3 – 2 – 1 Can finger each of the three fingering units in Twinkle while <u>someone else bows</u> first variation. Can put each of the sections together, parent bowing, slowly and with pauses and some verbal direction. Can play through the song using both bow and violin – with steady verbal instructions, even though losing sight of the melody if very young.</p>

* In most cases, time spans given in "months" may be changed to "weeks" for older students. Children with differing abilities &/or differing learning styles may need to break down these concepts into micro-steps.

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3 Sprouting –	1-3 Months Depending on use of recordings	<p>Pitch awareness is beginning to grow through much careful work on finger placement and the teacher’s frequent illustration of right and wrong sounds.</p> <p>Concentration has increased slightly, although not enough to allow playing the entire set, non-stop, without confusion.</p> <p>Can imitate longer rhythms, clapping or playing.</p>	<p>Can play the first variation at or near tempo.</p> <p>The tone is quite strong, and the bow returns to the same place on the string when knocked off to test it.</p> <p>Posture may have suffered while working on fingering but may be stressed later again.</p> <p>Each variation can be played best if done independently of the others.</p> <p>The theme is being played within the marked area only.</p>
4 Rooting and Branching –	1-2 Months	<p>Can now play Twinkle with other students, using the correct fingering if tempo is slow, with pauses.</p> <p>Enthusiasm has grown and they feel successful. This is what they have been waiting for.</p> <p>They have “performed” a short version of Twinkle (one variation and the theme) for friends or relatives.</p> <p>They may have taken the instrument to show at school.</p>	<p>Can place fingers on bow more quickly, and can place bow on the strings without losing proper grip.</p> <p>Still needs reminding to look at what s/he is doing.</p> <p>When playing <u>without group or piano</u>, often skips “like a diamond...”, and at the end repeats the middle section.</p> <p>Tone is good when “prep pause practice” is adhered to with clean stops, strong sound, no slipping.</p> <p>Can play entire piece up to tempo. Needs a rest or two.</p>
5 Weeding and Cultivating	1-3 Months Depending on quality of previous practice	<p>Has received more musical stimulation than previously from recordings and attendance at performances. Can enjoy Suzuki play-ins and concerts especially if they hear CDs 2, 3, and 4. This offsets the drudgery of “weeding”.</p> <p>Likes games like “fixing the teacher” or noting good and bad playing form while watching at group classes.</p> <p>Has had considerable <u>physical</u> assistance from parent and teacher, rather than just verbal criticism in the maintenance of good habits, so that mental focus can be on the week’s main point.</p>	<p>Common faults have been checked out and received corrective attention, one by one:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a sawing motion at the shoulder, instead of the bow elbow opening and closing 2) Poor head-instrument relationship, or the arm not supporting itself (violin/viola droops) 3) Body is twisted to the left 4) Eyes wander! 5) Left wrist is tensely drawn in, elbow is back. 6) Bow, when tested, “flies away” (not returning to the same spot), or else is glued <u>too</u> tightly to the string. 7) Feet are not “rooted” and support from feet to waist is poor, causing arms greater difficulty.

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6 End of the 1 st Season	1-2 Months	<p>Tempo is steady and musical sounding. Memory confusion in the middle and at the end has cleared up. Pitch is quite accurate and occasionally is self-corrected. Tone is strong, still unrefined, appropriately for this stage. The entire set of variations and theme has been performed at a studio solo recital or for another “all in the family” situation.</p>	<p>Physical and mental stamina has grown so that the instrument does not drop between variations, nor does the bow leave the string. String changes are often made beautifully, with the <u>elbow leading down</u> from A to E, the <u>hand leading up</u> from E to A. Bowling is straight and controlled within the taped area, as well as staying on the “Kreisler Freeway”</p>
7 “Resting” & Pruning –	1-2 Months	<p>THE SECOND SONG in the book has been started and TWINKLE TAKES A FIGURATIVE REST FROM CENTER STAGE. Twinkle is used now for daily warm-ups. To insure mental attention necessary for pruning jobs, one variation can be stressed for three days, and then attention shifted to another. Every third day, a total work-out can spot which variation needs attention next. Motivation to play rhythms strongly has often resulted from playing the first variation on open string D along with a recording of the Bach Double Concerto (Book 5 CD).</p>	<p>The theme may be learned in the lower half of the bow – carefully lifting the arm (elbow) to get to the frog on the up-bows. The STAGE FIVE list of problems is again useful for pruning purposes. Any commonly missed note or connection has been smoothed over and corrected. Renewed work on “prep pauses” has improved sound. Muscular tension has been reduced by the pruning, and the student is more comfortable than before.</p>
∞ Blossoming –	Around the level of the Allegretto 2 – 4 Months	<p>New awareness and musical alertness are shown, usually as a result of speeded up learning of notes in the newer pieces which are being practiced. Students recognize that playing Twinkle for warm-ups helps them play their new pieces better. They decide to play Twinkle for an important event like a “polished solo recital” or at school for their class. They are filled with pride in how well they did and with the reactions they got from others.</p>	<p>Their performances were the easiest and most fluent they have ever done. Their presentation manner was assured, their bowing sure, their intonation excellent, and a measure of their individual style was evident. The Theme is now being played with “whole bows” and a singing tone, at least part of the time.</p>

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9 Small Fruit Appears	1 – 2 Months	<p>Experimentation in practice procedures has been done to help maintain good intonation while playing in three keys. Much use of recordings and of taping lessons and practice sessions pays off.</p> <p>The student is eager to play for people who come to his or her house.</p>	<p>With the confidence gained, the students have started to correct some of their own mistakes, and to take suggestions more easily in current pieces.</p> <p>Their intonation in the difficult parts of the Etude and Minuets is quite good, although their second finger may be a little flat in the pieces in the key of A and D, so much work continues in all of the pieces preceding the Etude, including Twinkle.</p>
10 Fruit Grows Bigger –	1 – 2 Months	<p>They come to realize that Twinkle is their most impressive-sounding piece. It is also the longest piece. When the student reaches the Book 4 Concertos, these pieces will not be any longer, nor will they take any longer to master than Twinkle. Students have become accustomed to long, slow work paying off.</p> <p>The student concentrates completely when playing Twinkle now, rather than coasting on habits.</p>	<p>The effect of the student’s skills in Twinkle now rubs off decidedly on the earlier pieces like Song of the Wind or Perpetual Motion.</p> <p>A photographic, mirror, or video checkup on posture and technical motions can be interesting now.</p> <p>Interest and stamina now permit quite good quality playing straight through the first half of the book, non-stop, or even further.</p>
11 Fruit Ripens –	Near end of Book 1 1 – 2 Months	<p>The teacher has the student perform this as a solo at a public event like an institute or public demonstration as an example of excellence, or as a model for beginners and parents. Both his parents and his teacher are thrilled – and it all seems worth it! Parents have to smile when someone comments “How talented!”, or “What a born Fiddler!”</p>	<p>There is now a very different sound – full of conviction and produced with a flair, completely musical.</p> <p>Posture, bow control, and pitch are first class.</p> <p>With the entire Twinkle Variations now up to such a high level, the sound of the Minuets and of early Book 2 can be heard to have many of the same fine qualities.</p>