

One Size Does **Not** Fit All

by: Denise Gendron

String students are fortunate in having smaller-than-full size instruments available, so they can begin playing at a younger age than many other musicians. But what size is the right size? As with so many other musical questions, there are several right answers. The following are basic guidelines I use with my grade 3-6 students.

When sizing, it is best to have an example of each size instrument available, but that is rarely possible. When I travel between my four schools, I usually take three violins: 1/8, 1/2 and full size (4/4). From these, I can extrapolate when a 1/10, 1/4 or 3/4 size is appropriate for both violinists and violists. If I were sizing older students, I would hope to have a 15" viola, as well.

But how do you determine the correct size? I ask students to extend their left arm, then place the instrument in playing position (never letting go!) and ask them to curl their fingers around the scroll. The fingers should wrap around it comfortably, with a slight bend to the elbow. If a student seems to be between sizes, it is probably better to go smaller, as a stretched arm/hand leads to poor technique and even injury. Fortunately, music stores do not charge to change sizes as students grow out of their rental instruments.

Cellos, of course, are measured quite differently. I usually bring 1/2 and 3/4 cellos. Over the years, I have observed that the easiest way to check students 5 feet and under is to extend the end pin 6-7

inches, then have students stand behind the instrument. If correct, the scroll should be at their eye level. An incorrect size will be several inches too high or low; a correct size might need a slight adjustment to the end pin length. It is important to also check the student's hand size by putting their fingers on the fingering tapes (placed in advance on the fingerboard; see your method book for guidelines), as height is only a basic assessment. Students over 5' usually play on a full size instrument.

If you don't have instruments with which to measure, you could try one of the commercially produced sizing sticks (I haven't, but assume they're accurate). Or, more simply, use yourself! I consider it an advantage that I am barely large enough to play a full size instrument, as I can use my height and hand size to check the students. Larger people can do the same; students' hands placed palm to palm with yours will consistently reach to certain knuckles depending on what size they need. I have also observed that students usually need the same size between instruments – someone who needs a 1/2 size violin will often fit a 1/2 size cello. So, if you're desperate, size your cellists on violins!

It is more difficult to size bassists without the instruments, as the goal is to have the first fingering tape (closest to the scroll) at eye level, with the hand comfortably able to reach the fingering tapes. Again, if you have no choice, size the instruments to yourself (at your local music store, if necessary), then size the students to you.

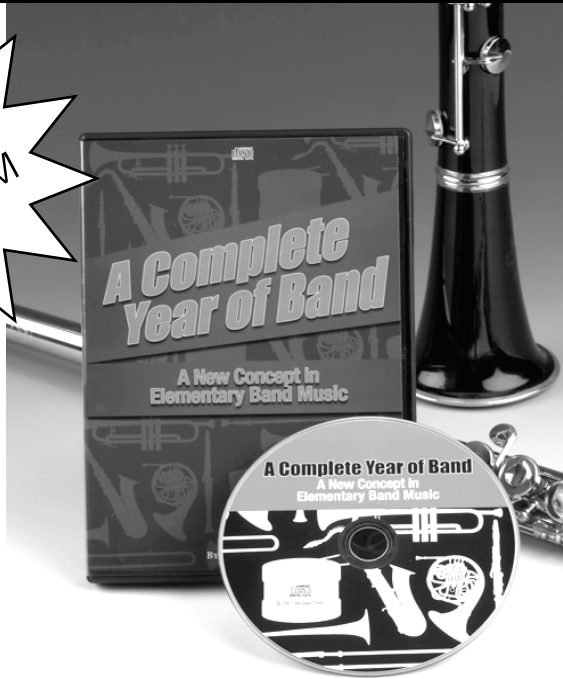
If you're new at string teaching, don't be afraid to ask for guidance! Experienced teachers love to share their knowledge. After all, that's why we're all here!

Denise Gendron teaches elementary strings and general music in the Union 38 school district.

A COMPLETE YEAR OF BAND



- * ELEMENTARY BAND
- * BEGINNING STRINGS
- * ADVANCED
- HIGH SCHOOL
- JAZZ BAND



VISIT US ONLINE @

WWW.COMPLETEYEAROFBAND.COM