



## **How to Buy a Used Violin: Part 1 of 2**

### **9 Guidelines for Buying a Used Violin + Downloadable PDF Checklist & Video Tutorial**

*Buying a used violin can be an overwhelming experience due to the large number of variables involved in the purchasing process. The articles in this 2 part series will help take the confusion out of this process by sharing 9 guidelines for buying a used violin and [PDF checklists](#) to print out and bring with when viewing instruments. There are accompanying videos on the [Music for Young Violinists YouTube channel](#) that will further educate you by illustrating these 9 guidelines.*

#### **1- Used Violins Are Great:**

One may think that buying new is the preferred option, but violins are great to buy used. Most violins sound better after they have been played for some time since the vibrations increase resonance and open up the wood to produce a richer tone. A good violin is built to last, will sound better over time and retain, or even increase, its value.

#### **2- Set Your Price Range:**

Violin prices range from the double-digits to the cost of a house (or more). To get an idea of an appropriate price range, research the costs of violins at established string catalogs like [Shar Music](#) and [Johnson Strings](#) and/or at your local violin shops, if available. Also, consult your violin instructor who will have a better idea on the range of prices in your area. Most informal sellers (i.e. [Craigslist ads](#)) will overestimate the value of the instrument they are selling so it benefits you to have an idea of what is normal.

### **3- Size Appropriately:**

Violins are offered in the following 9 sizes:

**\*1/32, 1/16, 1/10, 1/8, 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, \*7/8 & Full Size**

*\* Less Common*

If you are purchasing a smaller sized violin for a child, make sure you have them sized by an experienced violin teacher for the appropriate violin size. My colleagues and I have had violin stores incorrectly size our students which creates heartbreak for a young child and extra time and money for the parent.

Next, know that violin sizes are like clothing brands and there can be a slight range of lengths and weights for different instruments even if they are listed as the same size. Unlike clothing, never buy an instrument that is too big for your child because you want them to grow into it. This will hurt your child and create damaging techniques that will delay their development.

### **4- Cracks Are Normal:**

Before reviewing the next purchase guideline, be aware that cracks and minor repair issues are normal. My violin was built circa 1780 and has cracked several times over the past 238 years. Since the cracks were fixed in a timely manner by a competent luthier the instrument is in incredible condition and sounds fantastic. Cracks and minor repairs should be taken into consideration for reasons listed below, but are not necessarily a reason to avoid investing in a particular instrument. There are 2 circumstances that you should proceed with caution:

1- Cracks or open seams that have been left unrepaired for too long can warp permanently out of place and are complicated repairs.

2- Cracks that have extended beyond the purfling will impact the integrity of the violin and are putting the instrument at risk.

[Learn what purfling is by clicking here.](#)

## **5 - Investigate the Craftsmanship:**

Investigate the craftsmanship of the violin, bow and violin case before buying. Any repair or necessary upgrade such as new strings, bow hair or violin case will increase your investment and should be budgeted for.

Below is a checklist of what to review when inspecting a used violin. I recommend viewing the full explanations of this checklist on the second part of this series as well downloading the accompanying PDF to bring with you when viewing instruments.

[Click HERE to watch accompanying video.](#)

[Click HERE for part 2 of 2 from this series.](#)

[Click HERE to download the PDF of this checklist.](#)

- *Are the seams glued shut?*
- *Are there any cracks?*
- *Is the purfling inlaid or painted on?*
- *Is the bridge too high and/or not properly fitted to the instrument?*
- *Is the sound post in the correct location?*
- *Do the pegs move easily and hold their grip?*
- *Is the bow stick warped?*
- *Is there enough hair on the bow?*
- *Is the hair on the bow dirty?*
- *Does the violin need new strings?*
- *Is the chinrest adequate for your playing needs or will it need to be replaced?*
- *Does the violin come with a case?*

### **Additional Questions to Ask the Seller:**

- *Does the instrument come with any accessories like a shoulder pad, music stand or sheet music materials?*
- *Who is the maker of the violin, what model is it and when was it made?*

## **6 - Beware of the “Stradivarius” Label Trap:**

Avoid the “*Stradivarius*” label trap. A Stradivarius violin is a priceless work of art made in Italy by Antonio Stradivari during the 17th and 18th centuries. These instruments are kept in museums and played by select concert artists. They are so valuable and respected that they need to be accompanied by handlers to ensure they are being treated properly. If your seller tells you that the label inside says Stradivarius (or another famous legendary violin maker like Guarneri) and is worth lots of money this should raise a red flag.

That being said, I did have a student who bought a bundle of violins and bows at an auction for a modest sum of money. Their gamble turned out to be a valuable instrument collection worth 12 times the amount paid.

The endpoint is to do your research and don't be fooled by a false label.

## **7 - Hear the Violin Played:**

Hear the instrument being played before buying. This is important to your purchasing process because even a violin from a reputable maker or violin shop does not necessarily sound good. This also works in reverse where a lesser known violin maker or dealer may have a singular creation that really stands out in sound quality and will be a worthy investment.

Hearing a violin played under your ear is not always the best way to gauge the full spectrum of sound possible by your prospective instrument. Violins need a couple of meters (approximately 6 feet) for the acoustic properties to be fully realized, having another person play the violin while you maintain this distance will give you a complete perspective on the tonal capability of the instrument.

If you are a complete beginner you will need guidance for this and need to hear the violin played for you. If this is your situation, I encourage you to trust your intuition when evaluating what instrument speaks to your heart and preference. Many violin shops will let you take an instrument(s) on loan for a week so you can experiment with playing it. Also, you can ask your teacher if they will come with you

to help evaluate a potential purchase. A common courtesy for this is to use your paid lesson time in exchange for your instructor coming to the violin shop to respect your teacher's time and expertise.

### **8- Prices Are Negotiable:**

Always ask the seller if they are willing to negotiate the price. If you are buying from a private seller, chances are likely they are flexible and eager to get rid of their instrument. If you are buying from a violin shop, ask if they can add in a set of new strings, a free bow rehair in the next year or shoulder pad.

### **9- Violins Maintain Value:**

Violins hold their investment value over time. When investing in an instrument many people will alter their price range when they realize violins hold their value over time. If you take care of the instrument you choose then you should be able to sell it for the price you bought it for. Furthermore, if you purchased it from a violin shop there is a standard practice many stores follow where they will always trade the violin back for the original selling price in case you want to change sizes or upgrade in the future.

