

Prout School Music | String Ensemble

Summer Practice Plan (2026) - tentatively due September 4, 2026

Mr. Ryan Cox, Director of Music



Welcome to Strings!

Just like your sport of choice, it's important to keep your musical skills up in our off-season to avoid the "summer chops" phenomenon that happens every fall. That's the goal behind introducing this summer ~~assignment~~ practice plan. In the same way your coaches expect you to stay active when you're out of season, I'm expecting something very similar.

For our incoming musicians, welcome to Strings at Prout! You're part of a tight-knit musical family now, and we're all excited for you to join us. This is my chance to make sure you're familiar with the expectations of a high school music program. Since you're all coming from a variety of schools with vastly different definitions of what "orchestra" means, I want to make sure we're all on the same terms when August rolls around.

For our returning musicians, welcome back! Let's take the lessons we've learned from last year and keep the momentum going. What I'm hoping you'll notice when we reconvene in August is that rehearsals are way smoother when we're all confident players. We had a great year trying an independent chamber format! Size depending, I'd like to keep that approach going, and confidence is key in chamber music, as you now know. My goal with this ~~assignment~~ plan is to keep your chops in shape, so we can play at a level fitting of a quality chamber ensemble.

I tell our captains every year when we meet for the first time – there is no reason we can't be one of the best string ensembles in South County, if not the state. That starts with buying in, trusting the process, and pushing yourselves and each other to be better every day. I don't expect you all to play like professionals, but if you set out to improve a little bit each time you play, you'll be amazed at the progress looking back. So, let's get to work! I'll be practicing this summer as well – we're in this together.

Reach out any time over the summer if you have questions. All the details you need follow.

See you soon!

Mr. Ryan Cox, M.M.

Director of Music and Mathematics Faculty

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Follow us on Instagram! @proutschoolmusic

NOTE: Those who audition for RIMEA All-State are exempt from this assignment. See below.

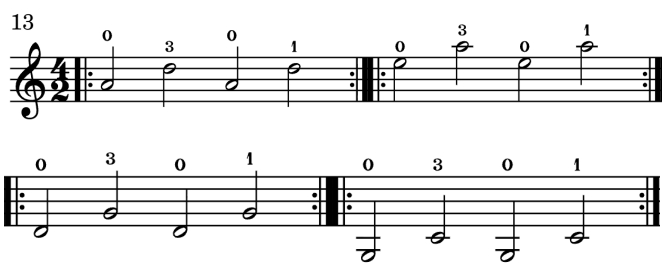
Your offseason practice plan

Everyone has three different parts to their practice plan – scales, technical work, and a couple etudes. Find the details for your instrument below, including links to all the resources you need.

New Members

Complete [this Google Form](#) so I can get some more information about your background!

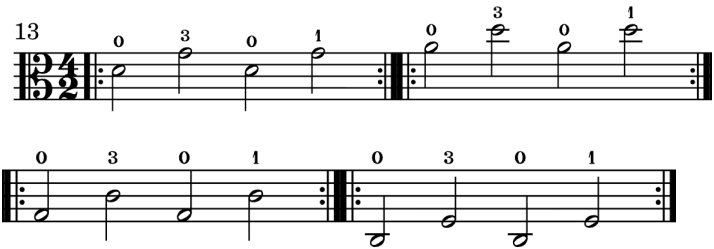
Violin

Scales Link to scale sheets	G, D, A, C major scales - Minimum of two octaves, three if possible for G and A - Aim for a tempo of quarter = 120, using the quarter/eighth pattern. However, you should pick a tempo that allows you to play the scales as cleanly and consistently as possible. Ex: 
Technique	Third position - First, if you've never played in third before, start with this exercise on each string. Listen carefully to make sure the 1st and 3rd finger placement stays in tune! You shouldn't be able to tell which finger you're using when.  - You might also try this study (vary your bowing!)  - Then, play #8 and 9 of the "third position study" in the Google Drive folder linked below. Vibrato work - First, check out this YouTube video from Ray Chen, and consult this worksheet. - Work just those exercises for a while! <i>Continues on next page</i>

	- Then, go back to your scales and other exercises, and start applying it! The only way to build your vibrato is to keep using it.
Etudes	Refer to this Google Drive folder and find the assigned excerpts for your instrument. I'm hoping to compile recordings, if I can find or make them. You have some choice here! - Everyone plays the Kayser study (#2). - Choose ONE of the Wolfahrt studies (#33 or #4). #33 is almost exclusively in third position to help reinforce the technique stuff above. - Anyone planning/hoping to play 1st Violin should play #33. However, if that's too difficult (especially if 3rd position is new for you), play #4 instead. No judgment!

Etude sources: Wolfahrt, Op. 45; Kayser, Op. 20; Laoureux, Practical Method for the Violin

Viola

Scales Link to scale sheets	C, G, D, F major scales - Minimum of two octaves, three if possible for C and D - Aim for a tempo of quarter = 120, using the quarter/eighth pattern. However, you should pick a tempo that allows you to play the scales as cleanly and consistently as possible. Ex: 
Technique	Third position - First, if you've never played in third before, start with this exercise on each string. Listen carefully to make sure the 1st and 3rd finger placement stays in tune! You shouldn't be able to tell which finger you're using when.  - You might also try this study (vary your bowing!) <i>Continues on the next page</i>

	 - Then, play #2 and 4 of the “third position study” in the Google Drive folder linked below. Vibrato work - First, check out this YouTube video from Ray Chen, and consult this worksheet. (Pardon the treble clef; it works the same way for you.) - Work just those exercises for a while! - Then, go back to your scales and other exercises, and start applying it! The only way to build your vibrato is to keep using it.
Etudes	Refer to this Google Drive folder and find the assigned excerpts for your instrument. I’m hoping to compile recordings, if I can find or make them. You have some choice here! - Everyone plays the Kayser study (#4). - Choose ONE of the Wolfahrt studies (#33 or #4). #33 is almost exclusively in third position to help reinforce the technique stuff above. - You are encouraged to try #33. However, if that’s too difficult (especially if 3rd position is new for you), play #4 instead. No judgment!

Etude sources: Wolfahrt, Op. 45 (ed. Spindler); Kayser, Op. 43; Herfurth, A Tune a Day

Cello

Scales Link to scale sheets	C, G, D, F major scales - Minimum of two octaves, three if possible for C and D - Aim for a tempo of quarter = 120, using the quarter/eighth pattern. However, you should pick a tempo that allows you to play the scales as cleanly and consistently as possible. Ex: 
Technique	Vibrato work - First, check out this YouTube video from Chili Dog Strings - Work just those exercises for a while! <i>Continues on next page</i>

	- Then, go back to your scales and other exercises, and start applying it! The only way to build your vibrato is to keep using it. Shifting study - Cellos already do a ton of shifting, and some of it is reflected throughout this assignment. So, check out the shifting study in the Google Drive folder linked below!
Etudes	Refer to this Google Drive folder and find the assigned excerpts for your instrument. I'm hoping to compile recordings, if I can find or make them. Unfortunately, no choice here - directions are marked for both studies in the file. (There's a very good chance these are familiar to some of you.)

Etude sources: Mooney, Position Pieces for Cello - Book 1

Bass

Scales Link to scale sheets	E, A, D, F major scales - Minimum of one octave, two if possible for E and F - Aim for a tempo of quarter = 120, using the quarter/eighth pattern. However, you should pick a tempo that allows you to play the scales as cleanly and consistently as possible. Ex: 
Technique	Shifting - This "Vomit exercise" by Gary Karr is a really important drill that bassists use to help with intonation and shifting. Give it a try, and see how far you get! Vibrato - First, check out this YouTube video from Chili Dog Strings - Work just those exercises for a while! - Then, go back to your scales and other exercises, and start applying it! The only way to build your vibrato is to keep using it.
Etudes	Refer to this Google Drive folder and find the assigned excerpts for your instrument. I'm hoping to compile recordings, if I can find or make them.

Etude sources: Simandl, 30 Etudes for the String Bass

How we're assessing it

Tentatively due September 4, 2026

Within the first week of school, you will be asked to play a selection of your scales and technical studies, as well as your assigned etudes. I'm not sure if I'll randomly draw some of each, or if I'll pick specific ones. **You should be prepared to play everything assigned** – they're all helpful for you to develop as musicians!

These selections can either be recorded at home and submitted on Google Classroom, or can be played in person for me when we're both free. Each area of your practice plan will count as its own playing test grade, which is counted out of five points. These are graded mostly on *effort, not perfection*. I'm using this as a way to keep you playing, and loosely figure out where you belong on parts. This is NOT an audition, and there MAY be some things out of reach for some of you. That's okay! **This is an assessment of what you CAN do, not what you can't.**

For full credit: The student plays the assignment on time, live or recorded, and (if recorded) the director is able to access the file to provide feedback. It is clear that the student has worked hard to present their best possible work, playing in tune, with appropriate tone, and in time, with appropriate rhythms and articulation.

Students who audition for the RIMEA All-State Festival are exempt from this assignment, since they will be preparing at a level beyond what I am expecting here. Since the audition takes place in Q2, they must complete a mock audition with me before the end of Q1.

Practice tips

1. Slow and clean is better than fast and sloppy.
2. Print your music, or use an iPad, and mark up your music. Circle tricky spots, write in notes, fingerings, articulation...whatever you have to do to succeed. The pros do it too.
3. Set clear goals every time you practice. These could be as specific as "I'm going to perfect these two measures" or as general as "I just want to play to blow off some steam after a tough day of work." Either way, always have an objective.
4. To that end, a locked-in, 20-minute practice session is better than spending 2 hours "practicing" but scrolling TikTok for most of the time.
5. Practice makes *permanent*, not perfect. Whatever you practice becomes habit.
6. A 1% improvement is still an improvement. Aim to improve one thing every time you play.

Resources

Metronomes: [Google](#) (built-in) | [Web](#) | [App](#) (what I currently use)

Tuner: [App](#) (what I currently use)

Questions? Email me!

I'm here to help, and no relevant question is stupid. My email is rcox@theproutschool.org.