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Review about Review: Creating a Practical and Effective Routine for Long-term Success

by Dr. Samara Humbert-Hughes, Suzuki Viola and Viola Teacher and ASA Secretary

I did not grow up as a “Suzuki kid” and did not come to know the Suzuki Method and Philosophy until I was in my early 20s. Since memorization was something which I was never required to do on my instrument, I found it very challenging to memorize the pieces in the Suzuki Repertoire books as I went through my teacher training process. One of the components I HAD to incorporate into my Suzuki Repertoire practice routine was review. I suppose my primary motivation was the fear of losing the memorization of those earlier pieces, but that is not why we do review as I now come to understand.

Remember that the "Suzuki Method" is often referred to as the "mother-tongue" method as it is meant to emulate how we learn language. The steps to language learning are as follows (Behrend, 1998,10):

1. Exposure/environment
2. Imitation
3. Encouragement
4. Repetition
5. Addition
6. Improvement & refinement

As you can see there is no step that distinctly says "Review," however, the final step "6. Improvement & refinement," is where Review pieces would fit in. Ideally, once a student is able to play an entire piece from memory, the student continues to play this piece regularly in their practice time, private lessons, and in group classes. In reality this brings up several questions: Why should we keep playing these pieces from memory anyway? Don't students get bored with the same pieces? If we keep adding more and more pieces, how do we find the time to play them all? I'll attempt to answer these questions below and also provide some ideas for an effective Review Routine, but first, let's start with "WHY?"

1. Why should we keep playing all those "old" pieces from memory?

Here are a few reasons!

- Continued memorization builds auditory memory (memory of pitches/melody). (Gebrian, 2024, pg. 145-157)
- Continued memorization builds motor memory (where your fingers/hands go). (Gebrian, 2024, pg. 145-157)
- Continued memorization helps to build "auditory-motor coactivation." (Gebrian, 2024, pg. 145-157)
- Continued memorization helps build the capacity for more memorization through the building of auditory "chunks." (Gebrian, 2024, pg. 145-157)
- You never know when grandma will call to have little Johnny play some music for her! If the student continues to memorize, the more pieces he/she will build in their mental library and be able to perform many things without too much extra preparation.
- Students feel confident when playing from memory!

- Students can enjoy the music when playing from memory.
- Students can focus on other aspects of playing (tone, intonation nuances, articulation nuances, musicality) when the piece is memorized.
- Students will feel more confident in group class if they have all of their pieces memorized.
- Memory builds memory like success breeds success!
- Once memorized, review pieces are meant to help develop other skills on the instrument. For example, take the Twinkle Theme. In late Book 1/early Book 2, this piece on the violin and viola can be used to teach harmonics/shifting concepts (replace the open strings with the half-way harmonic). **So Review Pieces are meant to raise our abilities with a piece that we can already play.** If we are too busy focusing on re-remembering the notes/bowings/rhythms, we are missing the point of review!

2. But don't students get bored with the same pieces?

Nope! In my experience students love playing pieces they know! However, there can be a sense of complacency when it comes to playing some of those earlier pieces again and again so keep in mind we need to raise our ability. To assist with this concept, in my studio we have a wheel of challenges that the student can spin for (it's on an app on my ipad) so that the student can play their review pieces with things like an upside down bow, standing on my balance board, or playing with their eyes closed.

3. But how do we fit in review pieces in our practice and/or lesson time?

Let me share how I do review in my studio and you, my lovely readers, will need to adapt as you see fit!

IN LESSONS ... ALL of my Suzuki students do review in the lesson in some capacity. Each lesson is structured the same for consistency, predictability, and for students to have a model plan to take home: Warm-Ups (Bow Ex., Left Hand Ex., Scale), Review Pieces, Working Pieces, Note-Reading.

For the Review portion of the lesson, I have the following routine depending upon the skill level/book level. (I teach Violin & Viola students.)

Students in Early Book 1 (through Allegro): We play one Twinkle variation. (They can spin for this, roll the dice, or pick, but I try to vary each week.) Plus, we play ALL of the pieces up until their working piece.

Students Mid-Way through Book 1 to End of Book 1: Each student has their own wheel on my app called *Decide Now* with the review pieces that apply to them—everything in the book they have polished. Each lesson, they spin the wheel for 2-3 review pieces (depends on time/which pieces they get). After the spin you can “deactivate” that piece so it blacks out, and they can’t get it again until the wheel is reset. This ensures that ALL the pieces are heard over a few lessons. If they know the piece pretty well, they can also spin the Challenge Wheel.

Students Book 2 through Book 3: These students have a wheel on the *Decide Now* app with 7 days of the week, and each of those 7 days has a list of review pieces (from a chart I have hanging in my studio). For example, if the wheel spin stops on Saturday, the student plays whichever pieces are listed on that day that they know, usually at least 3-4 pieces. Again, students can spin the challenge wheel.

Students in Book 4 Plus: At this stage, the student can continue the routine as above for books 2-3 (recommended if the student is younger) or review pieces are chosen on a case by case basis for private lessons/home practice to reinforce a particular skill in a current piece or for group classes. I also like to have students reading the duet parts to some of the earlier pieces. (They can play these harmony parts with younger students in group class performances.)

AT HOME ...

Students are expected to use a Review Chart of some kind in their home practice. They have a choice of 3, 4, 5, or 7 day depending upon their average number of practice days each week. Students can also use the spinner wheel as we do in lessons and/or apply challenges to their review pieces.

Other Ideas for Review ...

- Alphabet Review: Play all the review pieces in alphabetical order (i.e. Allegretto, Allegro, Andantino, Etude etc.).

- Musical Alphabet Review: Play all the review pieces in order with regard to the starting note (i.e. play all the review pieces that start on the note A, then play all the pieces that start on the note B, etc.).
- Play all of the odd-numbered pieces (pieces list below).
- Play all of the even-numbered pieces.
- Play all of the pieces with certain traits (i.e. all the pieces which start up-bow or which have the same form).
- Play all of the pieces by the same composer.
- Play all of the pieces that are Minuets or Bourrees or Gavottes.

In conclusion, remember that Review is a very unique part of the Suzuki Method and Philosophy. I hope you find some of these ideas helpful and maybe it will inspire some Review excitement in your studios!

RESOURCES/REVIEW CHARTS (links)

Decide Now (Spinner App)

[List of Challenges on Spinner Wheel \(we keep adding/changing/adapting\)](#)

[List of Challenges \(with cards\)](#)

[Possible Multiple Days Review Chart](#) (from Kimberly Meier Sims)

[5 Day Review Chart \(Violin\)](#)

[5 Day Review Chart \(Viola\)](#)

[7 Day Review Chart \(Violin\)](#)

[7 Day Review Chart \(Viola\)](#)

[List of Book 1-3 Pieces \(Violin\)](#)

[List of Book 1-3 Pieces \(Viola\)](#)

REFERENCES

Behrend, Louise. *The Suzuki Approach*. Miami, FL: Summy Birchard, 1998.

Gebrian, Molly. *Learn Faster, Perform Better: A Musician's Guide to the Neuroscience of Practicing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2024.



Violin Bow Hold Basics

by Dr. Louise Scott, Suzuki Violin Teacher Trainer and ASA Board Member, and Dr. Laura Tagawa, Suzuki Violin Teacher and ASA Past-President

Playing with a balanced bow hold is important at all playing levels. Beginner students through advanced and beyond need balance in their bow hand to play with beautiful tone, use all parts of the bow with ease, and play a variety of bow articulations. By understanding the function of each finger, students and teachers can better understand their roles in achieving a balanced bow hold.



Thumb: The northeast corner of the thumb touches the

bow where the bump on the frog and the wood meet. The second finger and thumb are opposite each other. The thumb provides power, tone, and balance of the hand.



ILLUSTRATION 22 Bow hand, view A.

The First Finger: This “pointer finger” guides the stick. A flexible hand allows the first finger to move nearer the middle knuckle on the up bow and closer to the first knuckle on the down bow.

Middle and Ring Fingers: These two fingers work as a team to hug the bow with the joints curved. The “hug” amount changes depending on the requirements of the sound and bow stroke.

Pinky: The little finger balances the bow.

When forming a balanced bow hold, the hand and arm should remain tension free. Having a “soft” bow hand, sometimes called a marshmallow hand, allows the fingers and joints to remain flexible. A balanced and flexible bow hand combined with adding weight to the string, rather than pressure, will

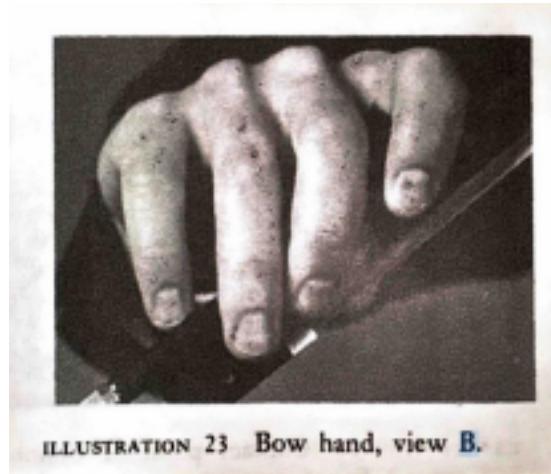


ILLUSTRATION 23 Bow hand, view B.

produce a beautiful tone.

There are a variety of bow exercises your teacher can show you to develop good bow hold form and balance. Attention to the bow hold and the function of each finger is important at all levels of playing, from beginner to professional.

Further reading suggestions: *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* by Ivan Galamian.

2025 ASA Fall Workshop “Suzuki Samurai” Recap



by Dr. Chris Dorsey, Suzuki Guitar Teacher and ASA President

The Arizona Suzuki Association's Fall Workshop “Suzuki Samurai” was held at Summit School in Phoenix, Arizona on November 15th, 2025. We had around 75 Suzuki Students in Violin, Viola, Cello, Guitar, and Voice from ages 4 to 17 and their families attend. Our guest teachers include Crystal Boyack (violin), Karin Hallberg (violin), Heidi Wright (violin), Louise Scott (violin), Laura Tagawa (violin), Samara Humbert-Hughes (viola), Rebecca McKee (violin & viola),

Wesley Skinner (cello), Emma Riebe (cello), Lori Hennesy (cello), Katrina Pezzimenti (voice), and MaryLou Roberts (guitar). The Student Workshop included Master Classes and Group Lessons, Japanese Taiko Drumming with Eileen Morgan of Fushicho Daiko, fiddling with Taylor Morris, and closed with a Celebration Concert with students and teachers performing together.

Our Teacher Workshop with Violinist Crystal Boyack was held that afternoon, attended by twelve teachers. Crystal Boyack, best-selling author of *Wee Violin: World Music Preparatory to Twinkle*, discussed how to use her Wee Violin, Viola, and Cello repertoire to develop foundational pre-Twinkle techniques, incorporating singing, movement, and interactive activities to engage students and families while building technical and musical skills.

We look forward to seeing you next fall!

Enjoy the ASA Fall Workshop 2025 photos!



Left, Violin Master Class with Dr. Louise Scott. Center, Violin Master Class with Heidi Wright.
Right, Taiko with Sensei Eileen Morgan.



Left, Taiko with Sensei Eileen Morgan. Right, Voice Group with Kari Weldon.



Left, Guitar Group with MaryLou Roberts. Right, Cello Group with Dr. Wesley Skinner.



Left, Cello Group.

Right, Cello and Viola Group with Dr. Samara Humbert-Hughes, Rebecca McKee, and Dr. Wesley Skinner.



Violin Groups with Dr. Karin Hallberg.



Left, Violin Group with Crystal Boyack. Right, ASA Workshop Finale 2025 at Summit.



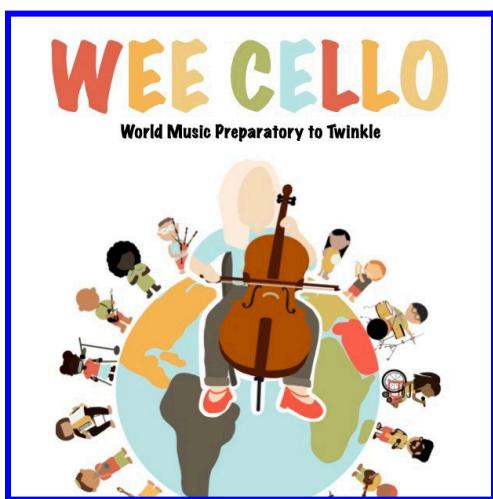
Reflection on Crystal Boyack's Wee Violin Workshop

by **Hannah Solomon, B.M., Suzuki Violin Teacher and ASA Member**

I very much enjoyed attending ASA's Teacher Workshop with Crystal Boyack in November! She offered such wonderful insight about how to teach younger students on the violin and provided creative and effective resources for all of the attendees of the workshop. To start, I love that her book *Wee Violin Music for Young Violinists Preparatory to Twinkle* offers culturally diverse repertoire and integrates music from all over the world. As an educator, I think it is important to be culturally responsive for your students and introduce diverse repertoire to them at an early stage in their playing. This book provides children with the opportunity to learn about different tonalities and modes when they are first starting out as well, which a lot of beginner books often do not do. Starting out as a general music teacher in my own career, I love that Crystal incorporates movement into her method book, too. For example, giving students the opportunity to do movements such as jumping, marching, and skipping helps students to develop their gross motor skills before playing the instrument right away.

Additionally, I like that she uses instruments such as egg shakers in order to help students feel a certain technique in their body first before executing it on the violin. Crystal's method truly opened my eyes about how important it is to include movement techniques when teaching beginner students so that they can see the role that their body plays when learning the violin while also making the process of learning a new instrument fun. Furthermore, I am interested in her approach of starting with the third finger first. This is something that I have not tried out before and am interested in testing it out with future beginner students that I will teach. She showed us through multiple videos that this method significantly helps with developing left hand technique and is a more effective approach.

Finally, I love Crystal's positivity and enthusiasm with teaching string instruments to beginner students, and I am hoping to participate at the Southwest Suzuki Institute this summer and to be able to continue to learn from her and her innovative curriculum that she has made for string teachers!



Review: Wee Cello, World Music Preparatory to Twinkle, Compiled and Edited by Crystal Boyack

by Mary Wilkening, Suzuki Cello Teacher and ASA Board Member

I enjoyed meeting Crystal Boyack on November 15, 2025 at the ASA Fall Workshop. Crystal is very enthusiastic and gives a lovely presentation of Wee Violin and Wee Cello. Crystal touted her approach to Pre-Twinkle as being a new approach using songs from around the world. Many of the songs were adapted from Music Together LLC, which is an introduction to making music as a family. I taught Music Together for eleven years and enjoyed singing many different songs in a variety of styles, keys, and languages.



I began using Crystal's book soon after the workshop, since I had just started two young cellists in Pre-Twinkle activities. The parents did not immediately have the book to work with and were lost without it. The numbers on the songs in the book didn't line up with the numbers on the recording on a phone. (The numbers

do line up on an iPad.) I do like the variety of songs to choose from. I do like using the half-string harmonic D and G to establish a good hand position. I do like using a left hand pizzicato to pluck the C string and A string in "Chiapanecas" that help create a round, arched hand position. I like the beautifully drawn illustration of children playing cello with good position, although the pictures of the cello on page 18 and after seem to show the left leg behind the cello instead of next to the lower bout.

My criticisms of the book may come from my lack of experience with it, but I find too many different songs to be distracting to students learning to play the cello. I prefer a simpler approach that emphasizes the techniques the children need to learn by using the melodies of Suzuki Book 1. I have used the Charlene Wilson words to Suzuki melodies called "Sing a Song of Twinkle" for many years. I also have a checklist of important steps to learning Twinkle. I found that introducing so many new songs with extraneous words in Wee Cello is confusing to children and their parents and makes the process longer than necessary.

I have chosen to concentrate on a few songs for each of the following foundation elements: Posture, Bow Hand, Endurance, String Crossings, Left Hand, Left Elbow, and Putting it Together. I have made a chart of these elements and I write the names of certain songs under each one that we can concentrate on for a few weeks. Just as young children like the same stories told to them repeatedly, they are comfortable with the same songs and techniques. That is the reasoning for Dr. Suzuki's using one song with variations (Twinkle Variation) to establish left-hand and right-hand techniques.

In summary, I welcome a new approach to teaching Pre-Twinkle. I like the variety of new songs to choose from. I enjoy the illustrations. I appreciate the sequence of songs and techniques. I think teachers should simplify the abundance of new songs and pick and choose carefully, paying attention to the techniques that the students need. While I don't think it is necessary to use all the songs for every child, it is nice to have the selection and a new approach.

News from Around the State



Dorsey Guitar Studio Performs at the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM)

The guitar students of Dr. Chris Dorsey, representing the Arizona Suzuki Association, performed at the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) twice this past fall.

In September, they performed Pop-Up Performances in El Río for the Celebrate Guitars weekend. In October, they performed in the Main Courtyard for Experience Spain,

playing Spanish Guitar favorites from the Suzuki Guitar School as well as the flamenco-inspired “Two Spanish Airs” for Guitar Ensemble by Juan Manuel Cortés.

Summit School, a preschool through eighth private school in Phoenix, has hosted Dr. Dorsey's guitar studio since 2001. In 2023, he began a new classical guitar program for all students in Kindergarten, First Grade, and Second Grade at Summit School with an approach based on the Suzuki in the Schools philosophy. In 2025, the program was expanded to include all Third Grade students.



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Music is the language of the heart without words.

- Shinichi Suzuki