

***AN IMPORTANT NOTE FROM Johnstone-Music ABOUT
THE MAIN ARTICLE STARTING ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE:***

We are very pleased for you to have a copy of this article, which you may read, print or save on your computer. You are *free* to make any number of additional photocopies, for *johnstone-music* seeks no direct financial gain whatsoever from these articles; however, the name of *THE AUTHOR* must be clearly attributed if any document is re-produced.

If you feel like sending any (hopefully favourable) comment about this, or indeed about the *Johnstone-Music* web in general, simply visit the 'Contact' section of the site and leave a message with the details - we will be delighted to hear from you !

FAQ
Frequently Asked Questions

CELLO

written by Cello Dreaming

Cello – Frequently Asked Questions

How much is a cello?

Depending on the instrument size, brand, shop, location, condition, quality of craftsmanship and if it is second hand or new, prices will vary from \$600-\$15,000 for a complete student package.

What is in a complete cello outfit?

Cello, 4 x quality strings (A, D, G, C), rosin, bow, dusting cloth, rock-stop, case.

What do I need to take cello lessons?

- Instrument, bow, rosin, soft cloth to wipe strings after playing with the bow
- Rock-stop or spike holder to stop your cello slipping on the floor
- Metal, wooden or collapsible music stand to read your music
- Straight-backed armless level chair – your knees should be just lower than your bottom when seated to play
- Cello lesson notebook
- Music books
- A4 folder for extra music copies given out during lessons or ensembles
- Spare set of strings in case one breaks
- Metronome and tuner to help with your sense of rhythm and tuning up your instrument

What is the difference between cello brands?

From a budding student or a teacher's perspective, the brand name is not important, how it works and sounds is. Talk with the sellers about particular brands they sell and listen to what they tell you. Try the cello before you buy or rent it.

The majority of student outfits and cheaper brands for sale in Australian string shops are made in factories in China, Korea, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong. I always suggest buying or commissioning an instrument and supporting expert luthiers if you can afford it.

You get what you pay for. A cello made by a luthier by hand and not in a factory line will be of better quality, an investment and more expensive.

What is the difference between factory cellos and handcrafted instruments?

FACTORY CELLO can be stamped out of plywood, quickly glued and finished, with tuning pegs that often are not carefully sized and hand-fitted into the peg box.

QUALITY CELLO is hand-carved from maple and spruce not plywood. The glue luthiers or string specialist shops use allows the instrument to be taken apart for repairs if required.

VARNISH should be pleasing to the eye, cover the whole body of the instrument and not sticky to the touch.

CELLO FITTINGS (fingerboard and pegs) on quality cellos are made of ebony or rosewood. Cheaper cello fittings can be alternate woods painted black or plastic.

TUNING PEGS need to fit precisely into the peg box or the instrument will slip out of tune. Planetary pegs are now available but these are an expensive option and can be fitted by any luthier or specialist string shop to any instrument to support the player with tuning the instrument

PLAYING ACTION should be set-up by a luthier. The angle of the fingerboard, the placement of the nut, the bridge, and the height of the strings above the fingerboard are all crucial dimensions for a working instrument.

CELLO BRIDGE should be made of a quality grade maple, cut with regard to the grain of the wood, and fitted by hand to the belly of the cello. No glue.

INSIDE THE CELLO the sound post should be fitted and positioned for quality sound by hand. The bass bar (which one cannot see at all without opening up the cello) must be correctly positioned and glued to the belly of the cello.

CELLO STRINGS should be the best quality you can afford, the right size or length to fit your cello, positioned on the bridge and nut with correct spacing and height. Fine tuners or adjusters are installed on the tailpiece, and these need to be installed correctly by an experienced professional.

ENDPIN should be easily adjustable and have a rubber stop on the end to protect the floor.

What is a cello 'set-up'?

FREE SETUP is often part of the student outfit when buying an instrument from a string specialist shop by their resident luthier. They ensure that each cello is individually assembled, setup, tuned, and inspected before sale. Your cello will be ready to play when you receive it—not sent to you unstrung or in pieces as sold by online suppliers.

Setup includes:

- shaping and planning the fingerboard
- carving and fitting the bridge to the cello
- carving the nut to professional curvature
- fitting pegs
- polishing the finish
- installing strings and tuning the cello
- fitting and adjusting the soundpost
- fitting and adjusting the tailpiece
- inspecting and pre-rosining the bow

If you buy a cello second-hand, take it to a luthier or local shop to check on the playing set-up and ensure it's in full working order.

Watch this video to see how it's done!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IY4ovyOMKMg>

Which cello size is right for me?

Cellos are available in $\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{4}$ (full size). Here is a rough guide by age based on my teaching experience. Some female adult students are best fitted to a $\frac{3}{4}$ cello depending on their length of back and arm.

- Ages 3-6 = $\frac{1}{8}$ size
- Ages 6-8 = $\frac{1}{4}$ size
- Ages 8-11 = $\frac{1}{2}$ size
- Ages 11-14 $\frac{3}{4}$ size
- Ages 14 – adult = full size

How do I get fitted for a cello?

Sit erectly on a chair of such a height that your feet can rest comfortably on the floor. Extend the endpin of the cello to about A4 paper length. Let the cello rest against your chest, peg box to the left of your head and aim for your heart at a 45-degree angle. If the cello is the correct size, the top of the cello will rest on your heart, the peg for the C string will be close to your left ear.

Should I rent a cello?

Renting a cello is a smart low cost and low risk option. You can rent a cello for six months or a year before making a purchase. Maybe you will lose interest in a few months. Maybe you will discover that you don't like that particular cello, and want to get a different one. Does the shop have a "rent to own" option? What about a "trade-in" at a future date for a better cello? Don't buy the first cello you see at the first string shop you visit. There are many rental options on the market. Make enquiries and do some research on what is best for your budget and situation.

How do I look after my cello?

1. Never leave a cello in a hot car
2. Never put shopping on it in the boot of the car
3. Put your end pin in when finished practicing or rehearsing so no-one trips over it and smashes it
4. Never leave it in a draft or directly in the sun or under an air-conditioning unit
5. Put it away in its case after playing
6. Put it on a cello stand if taking a practice break
7. Loosen the cello bow between practice and playing sessions
8. Find a safe and secure place to stow it at school, work or at home

Tipbook for Cello by Hugo Pinksterboer – Tipbook company (Hal Leonard Publication) – a great little pocket sized book packed with info on the history, maintenance, how to choose bows, rosin and strings.

If your cello is in good working order, you should rarely need to turn your pegs (unless you use gut strings) or if it is affected by seasonal weather changes.

Which strings do I buy?

The variety of strings can be overwhelming even for professional musicians and due to their expense most players often stick to what they know and trust.

I generally advise to keep string set-ups as simple as possible at the beginning. A student cello can sound \$500 more expensive with a better quality set of strings on and the student will enjoy playing on the quality string for longer. You get what you pay for. Remember to buy the correct size string for the size of the cello. Brands will sell fractional strings (1/8, 1/4, 1/2, 3/4 size).

Cello string brands are D'Addario, Jargar, Larsen, Pirastro, Prim and Thomastik-Infeld.

Recommended modern cello set –up:

A & D Larson Soloists Strings | Pirastro Permanent | Pirastro Passione | Jargar medium tone

G & C Thomastik-Infeld Spirocore Tungsten | Prim strings medium tone | Pirastro brands i.e. Dominant / Passione

What is the difference between string brands?

Each brand researches, produces and markets a specialised string technology, diameter, sound production, playing response and tension.

Nylon-String – Specialized string construction with fine precision winding made with tungsten alloy, aluminum, and polished silver. The strings will resist breakage while maintaining flexibility to provide a comfortable playing experience. Cello players will appreciate the sound and feel of nylon strings. Nylon is highly durable and able to withstand frequent musical performances.

Steel-String – Strings built from heavy-duty steel with a multi-strand core construction method with sturdy metals tungsten, aluminum, and titanium. A steel-string has a small diameter, which produces a faster bow response than with a nylon-stringed cello. The steel-string cello is durable and releases a loud, and metallic sound.

What kind of bow should I buy?

If you're a beginner with limited technical skills, you make few demands of your bow. It isn't likely that you'll yet need the qualities of a fine and expensive bow. For now, you simply need a bow with a reasonably strong stick and a good curve; a bow that's not too heavy or light and with a proper balance. As your skills increase, however, so do your demands on the bow and your ability to recognize the difference.

Here are **6 simple tips** to consider when you venture off to visit your local shop in search of the perfect bow to suit you.

1. **Type of Material:** **Brazilwood** (\$50 – \$300); **Pernambuco** (\$400 – \$10,000); **Carbon Fibre** (\$50 – \$4,000); **Fiberglass** (\$40-\$80)
2. **Sound:** Look for a bow that will give both a smooth, open sound, clarity of focus and articulation and quickness of response.
3. **Weight and Balance:** Average cello bow weights = 80 grams. Look for a bow that feels right in your hand. To test the weight, pick up a bow and hold it at a 45-degree angle. It should feel natural in the hand—well balanced from tip to frog with equal weight throughout.
4. **Shape:** Round or octagonal? With two bows made from the same wood, the octagonal shaft will be stiffer. Some octagonal bows are quite stiff, creating a hard, one-dimensional tone, lacking nuance.
5. **Price:** Establish a budget, but do expect to look at bows that are a little more expensive. If you don't know much about bows, try lots of bows to educate yourself about what is available.
6. **Test:** When you go bow shopping, be sure and bring your own cello and current bow with you as a benchmark. Each bow will perform differently on different instruments; remember that you're looking for a bow that complements *your* cello. Once you've chosen one or two from a batch, ask to see some more. Play the same brief passage with each bow, one right after another. There's a good chance that one or two will stand out.'

A good bow should become an extension of your right hand. It should flow with you as you play with minimum effort.

What rosin should I get?

Rosin is a resin used on the bow hair to create friction and a drag on the strings. Packaged in cakes, rosin is essential to make a string sound. Wipe rosin on the bow hair each time you play. A brand new bow requires more rosin. Wipe the string clean with a soft cloth once finished playing.

Dark Rosin: softer consistency and stickier – for cello and double bass players.

Rosin brands: Pirastro, Hill, Millant-Deroux, Jade.

Where do I go if I need a cello repair?

Book in with a luthier, instrument maker and repairer or if the instrument is under guarantee take it back to the shop you bought it or rented it from.

What kind of cello case should I buy?

Buy a case best suited to your needs. As a professional musician, I need a case to withstand the frequent rigors of travel by plane, road freight, car and public transport. I have three types of cases.

If you are investing and buying a quality cello, buy a quality case that looks after your instrument and protects it while traveling to school, work or rehearsals.

If your child is young, consider buying a trolley to help with taking it to and from school or use a soft case, which is lighter to carry on its own.

If it's a rental or beginner cello, it will come with a case as part of the beginner student package.

If you have the budget, spend more on the case so your child feels they have a great looking case that makes them feel proud to carry it around.

Look at a full range of cases here: <http://violins.com.au/store/cases-cello-cases?page=1>

Soft Cello Bags = soft case, padding and straps

Soft Cello Case = soft deluxe padded bag with straps

Hard Cello Case with wheels = foam case with more protection and straps

Hard Cello Case with shoulder straps = lighter and easier to carry

THIS MUSIC IS OFFERED AS A
FREE DOWNLOAD

in *johnstone-music*

Enjoy the music!

Please do see other original works for many different instruments and groupings, and also special transcriptions for cellists, and cellists with other instruments on the *johnstone-music* web page

Many downloads on *johnstone-music* are now available for a *symbolic* payment for those that are interested, to help cover the costs of this web site.

FREE PUBLICITY - If you care to inform of any public performance of the original music or arrangements of Johnstone or of colleagues included in this web site, no matter how important or not the event might be, we would be happy to give your event free publicity on the *johnstone-music* web page. Please try to write, if possible, 2 weeks or more in advance with any information; once past the date it might not be possible to add to the calendar of events.