



## ASTA Grading in the Viola Ensemble Database

The ASTA Grading used in the Viola Ensemble Database is based on the American String Teacher Association (ASTA) [String Syllabus](#).

**Grade 1:** Materials are designed to develop the most basic skills. The left hand remains in first position with few alterations of finger placement. The keys of G, D, A, and C major are most commonly employed. Simple rhythmic patterns are played with martelé, détaché, legato strokes, and short slurs.

**Examples:** Suzuki Book 1

**Grade 2:** All the notes of first position may be used, but rapid changes of finger placement are avoided. This grade includes some shifting and easy double stops and uses more varied rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms and irregular groupings. More varied bowings and special techniques, such as spiccato, tremolo, harmonics, trills, and vibrato are introduced.

**Examples:** Suzuki Book 2; Doktor: *First Solos for the Viola Player*; Bohm: *Perpetual Motion*

**Grade 3:** The ability to play in the first and third positions and to shift from one to another is assumed. This level includes two- and three-octave scale studies. Clef changes, double stops, and harmonics are possible, and improvisation is introduced. Pieces require a greater degree of dynamic control, more sophisticated bow strokes, and musical expression.

**Examples:** Bach: *Arioso*; Marcello: Sonata; Mozart: Divertimento; Suzuki Books 3 & 4; Telemann: Concerto

**Grade 4:** Grade 4 serves two functions: as a follow-up to Grade 3 (“student-level” pieces) and as a precursor to Grade 5 (“artist-level” pieces). The first five positions are used freely; a few higher notes may be added. Double stops and chords appear frequently. Bow strokes used include spiccato, sautillé, and staccato. A high level of musical sophistication and interpretation is required.

**Examples:** Bach: Cello Suites 1–3; Bloch: *Meditation & Processional*; Barber: *Solos for Young Violists*, Vols. 2–4; Glinka: Sonata; Hoffmeister: Concerto; Suzuki Books 5–7

**Grade 5:** This is artist-level music, but not the highest level of technical difficulty. The entire range of the viola is used, and mastery of all bow strokes is assumed. Many works listed at one level are also appropriate for another; this is especially true of études and studies. Many of those listed for Grade 4 can be continued through Grades 5 and 6.

**Examples:** Bloch: *Suite hébraïque*; Bach: *Brandenburg Concerto No. 6*, Cello Suites 4 & 5; Britten: *Lachrymae*; Brahms: Sonatas; Kimber: *Emerald Isle*

**Grade 6:** This selection of repertoire from every period will be useful to those who wish to explore the literature and build a repertoire of variety and breadth. This level is appropriate for students at the highest artistic and technical level.

**Examples:** Bach: Cello Suite 6, Violin Partitas; Bartók: Concerto; Bloch: Suite; Hindemith: *Der Schwanendreher*; Shostakovich: Sonata; Walton: Concerto