

String Instrument Buyers Guide

As we enter this new school year, your family may be considering whether to utilize a school owned instrument or purchase your own personal instrument. While using a school instrument is a much more affordable option, there are many positives to purchasing an instrument. This guide will help you determine what option (borrowing from the school, renting from a local music store or purchasing an instrument) will be more appropriate for your family.

We did our best to include instruments at the lower end of the price spectrum (appropriate for middle and high school students looking for their first instrument), and did not include advanced/professional level instruments. If you are looking to purchase instruments at that level, it is best to work with an instrument shop and your director to see which direction you should go in.

Why to purchase a quality instrument & quality strings

A quality instrument and quality strings will enable your student to be able to have a reliable platform upon which to build their skills. Oftentimes, school owned instruments will have seen years of use and abuse, which will affect the way an instrument performs.

A suitable comparison would be between someone using a 2001 used Honda Civic with 250,000 and a 2021 new Honda Civic with 39 miles. Both cars will get you from point A to point B in a safe manner, but the performance of the used car will not be as high as the new car. Many parts will wear out faster on the used car, meaning it will need more maintenance to keep it in suitable condition in comparison to the new car.

A new instrument from a quality manufacturer will allow your student to progress without being held back by their instrument. The sound quality will often be more pure than a lower quality/older instrument (along with lots of practice!), and the playability will be greater, as their sound quality will be less affected by the condition of the instrument and more affected by a student's own performance technique.

Additionally, many musicians and students are amazed and sometimes bewildered by the large number of strings available for the violin, viola, cello, and bass. Your instrument's strings are extremely influential in your student's ability to produce a clear, even tone with a more steady and consistent pitch. Each type of string has its own special characteristics, which can change the sound of your instrument. These characteristics can make subtle changes in the quality, playability, volume and responsiveness of the instrument.

A general rule for string players is to always have a set of backup strings that you keep in your case. This is important because a string can break at any time, and if you don't have an extra set on hand, you simply cannot play until you get another. Try to always have another set with you whenever you have your instrument.

Dangers of purchasing from Walmart/Costco/Amazon/Ebay

While purchasing an inexpensive instrument from Walmart/Costco/Amazon/Ebay is incredibly enticing, these instruments will often be **Instrument Shaped Objects (ISO)**. *ISO's* are instruments that look great, but do not actually play well, or play at all. Brands such as Mendini, Eastrock, Eastar, etc... are made to look nice, but will not actually play at a high level. These instruments are quickly assembled in a factory overseas, and do not receive the attention to detail and care which brands such as Yamaha, Krutz, and Giovanni Clementi provide for their instruments. These overseas brands, if they do actually play, will fall out of adjustment quickly and easily, have poor tone (sound) quality, and will break incredibly easily.

Over the past several years of teaching, we have found that when students use these inexpensive instruments, within a month of purchasing the instrument they will have problems with keys on the instruments not functioning properly, the instrument playing so out of tune that it diminishes the quality of sound which the ensemble produces, or parts on the instrument falling off. This has happened to nearly every student with one of these instruments. When they go to get them repaired or have a warranty replacement completed by the company which they bought the instrument from, they are often met with no response from the company or with not having an instrument to play for months.

We purchase instruments and have service performed at **Gottschalk Music Center** in Old Town Clovis. This specific store has a large selection of new and vintage instruments, and will also restring and inspect the instrument at no extra charge when the strings are purchased. They also price their strings and supplies very competitively and are almost always less expensive than online retailers. Prices will vary at other stores, but all of our local music stores do wonderful work and do their best to keep costs at a minimum to help young musicians. Some online recommendations include www.swstring.com and www.sharmusic.com. Purchasing your student a higher quality instrument, strings and accessories will make a huge impact on their musical experience, and help the student feel a pride of ownership and investment in their musical goals even if playing on a borrowed instrument.

If you're interested in purchasing or renting a string instrument please contact Gottshalk Music in Old Town Clovis, American Music at Ashlan and the 41, Patrick's Music near Fresno State, www.swstring.com or www.sharmusic.com.

Recommended models and instruments to purchase:

Violins : <https://www.swstrings.com/product/instruments/violin/350>, <https://kennedyviolins.com/>

Violas : <https://www.swstrings.com/product/instruments/viola/450V>

Cellos : <https://www.swstrings.com/product/instruments/cello/550>

Sizes:

Please measure the hand from the bottom of the palm to the tip of the middle finger.

If the measurement is less than 6 inches from tip to bottom,

Violins : 3/4 size

Violas : 15 inches

Cellos : 3/4 size

If the measurement is more than 6 inches, a FULL size will be appropriate for all instruments.

You can look at the chart on this website to learn how to measure yourself for the right size:

<https://www.fiddleheads.ca/shop/violin-sizes-viola-and-violin-size-chart.htm>

Price Range

ISO's will often be in the \$100 to \$500 price range. This would be equivalent to purchasing a brand new car for \$1000 to \$2000.

Student/Intermediate level instruments brand new will be in the \$300 to \$1,000 price range, depending on the instrument family and the quality of the instrument purchased. This is equivalent to purchasing a new car for \$10,000 to \$15,000. A used instrument in this category can often be 25% to 40% less expensive than a brand new instrument of the same model (make sure it is in good condition prior to purchasing!).

Advanced level instruments brand new will be in the \$2000 to \$100,000 range. Students/performers that are serious about continuing with a career in music may consider instruments in this price range. You might find in your research that strings have one of the widest ranges of costs of any musical instrument. This year we'll watch a video where our students can see a violin worth ONE MILLION dollars be played! This nice of an instrument is not necessary for the Reyburn or Clovis East Orchestras, just to be clear ;-)

Materials

Blue text will link you to an amazon item/google images. Although you may purchase these items from the links provided, they are meant more as a visual aid. When possible we strongly encourage our students and families to support our community and local music stores!

Required Materials for Orchestra

- Cloth to wipe down your instrument.
 - This should be a dedicated cloth used only for wiping off rosin from the fingerboard and body of the instrument after every practice session or performance.
- Rosin
 - Violin & Viola: Kolstein, Hill, Hidersine or Pirastro
 - Cello: Kolstein, Pirastro, Kaplan & Andrea
 - Bass: POPS, Kolstein, Hidersine or Carlsson
- Violin and Viola: Shoulder Rest
 - KUN or Artino Wood Collapsible shoulder rests
 - **Students, be sure to know the size of your instrument. Violins can be $\frac{3}{4}$ size or full size. Violas, if you look inside the f-holes of your instrument it will tell you the length of your instrument. This is important to tell the music store to ensure you buy a shoulder rest that fits your instrument.*
- Cello and Bass: Rock Stops or Xeros Strap Stops
- Strings - see more info below

Highly Recommended Accessories:

- [Combination Metronome & Tuner](#)
 - Korg
 - Tonal Energy - app
- Chromatic Tuner
 - Korg
 - Snark
 - C Tuner - app
 - insTuner - app
 - Peterson Strobe Tuner - app
- Metronome
 - Korg
 - Quartz
 - Freemetronome.com
- [Mute](#)
 - Tourte Two-Strings
 - **Be sure that you don't accidentally purchase a practice mute.*
- Upgraded bows are recommended for advancing players. Playing a bow in person before you buy is wise, it is a very personal choice. String shop specialists can help you select an appropriate bow. Please be sure to reach out to your director and coaches for additional support.

Recommended Strings & Exclusive Pricing for REC Students at Gottshalk Music in Old Town Clovis

In order to *drastically improve* the overall quality of our ensembles here at the Reagan Educational Center, we have our string shop use carefully selected, higher grade strings whenever our instruments get maintained as well as purchasing higher grade instruments moving forward. We have specifically selected strings are known for having a full, warm sound, and are some of the most popular brands of strings in the world because of their benefits: to reproduce the great sound and feel of gut strings but have a more stable pitch. Please note, there are some string models not included that would be appropriately suited for personally owned instruments of very advanced students. Please consult your local string technician for advice. Bass students are not required to purchase back up strings. These strings typically have a much longer lifespan and are quite expensive.

- Violin (Price Ranges \$35-85)
 - Thomastik Dominant
 - Pirastro Tonica
 - Warchal Amber
- Viola (Price Ranges \$30-95)
 - D'Addario Helicore
 - D'Addario Pro Arte
 - *D'Addario Kaplan
 - *Warchal Amber
- Cello (Price Ranges \$75-280)
 - D'Addario Helicore
 - *D'Addario Kaplan
 - *Jargar Superior