

Don't Fret[®] Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do finger position markers actually help the performance of beginning students?

A study of this issue (Louis Bergonzi, "Effects of Finger Markers and Harmonic Context on Performance of Beginning String Students", *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 1997, v.45, no. 2) concluded that students using finger position markers played better in tune compared to students not using them. Suzuki himself used finger position markers, and their long tradition of acceptance in violin pedagogy is indicated by the fact that the three great baroque treatises on violin playing (Francesco Geminiani, Michel Corrette, and Leopold Mozart) advocated their use. Finger position markers give students a consistent input to train the judgment for intonation correctly and quickly. This increases their efficiency in learning, their security with the instrument, and their sense of accomplishment.

2. Shouldn't students use their ears rather than visual aids?

Students do and will use their ear, but the question is *how to develop an accurate sense of pitch* most quickly. If students' playing is *out of tune* or inconsistent, their *ear soon learns to accept it*, and proper auditory development is *delayed* rather than enhanced.

3. Wouldn't auditory input (practicing with recordings) be better than a visual aid?

In our highly visual culture, many kids' primary learning style *is* visual. Bergonzi (see above) also studied this issue and found that the use of finger position markers improved students' intonation independently of the use of recordings. The group of students in his study who *improved the most* was that which used both pre-recorded cassettes *and* finger position markers, with more of the improvement being attributed to finger position markers.

4. How will it help me as a teacher?

You will be a more effective teacher. The teacher can use the Don't Fret both to shape the auditory sense and to teach intervals, especially half- and whole-steps. Since the student has a secure guide to placing the fingers, the teacher is also freer to deal with other aspects of playing: technique, rhythm, etc. The Don't Fret also simplifies the teaching of scales, keys, high- and low- finger positions, and (for 'cello) extensions.

5. Will using Don't Fret require me to change or modify my teaching methods?

Not at all! Don't Fret is simply a *tool* that gives the student and the teacher a concrete reference to the correct placement of the fingers. As such, it enhances the clarity and precision of *any* methodology.

6. Do students become dependent on the Don't Fret?

Experience indicates that most students use the Don't Fret to learn new notes, and thereafter refer to it only when they suspect that they are out of tune. In this way it reinforces auditory development and increases the efficiency of their learning.

Those students who start string study with a strong musical background hardly look at the Don't Fret--they know the structure of musical tones and have good auditory skills.

Those students whose auditory skills seem the least developed are the most dependent upon it initially, but as their auditory proficiency increases, their use of the Don't Fret declines. Once the student shows signs of being self-correcting in intonation, the Don't Fret should be removed.

7. Why is Don't Fret superior to other markers (tapes, dots, etc.)?

- A. **Mechanics:** Much better than tapes and frets; it won't slip, slide, buzz or leave residue on the fingerboard.
- B. **Accuracy:** Don't Fret is designed by applying a mathematical formula to the MENC instrument standards. Where instruments do not conform to the standards printed on the Don't Fret, the teacher may adjust the placement of either the bridge or of the Don't Fret. When properly applied, Don't Fret will be more accurate than fingerboard tapes.
- C. **Structure:** The use of color allows the student to easily distinguish between notes. One patented feature of the Don't Fret is that a scale pattern is built into the color scheme. The 7 colored lines are arranged in the pattern of a major scale, analogous to the white keys on a piano.
- D. **Color Scheme:** All sizes (1/16 violin to full 'cello) use the same color scheme, allowing the classroom teacher to have a common reference for all instruments.

WILL YOUR STUDENTS HIT THE RIGHT NOTES?

Don't Fret!