



Katie Glassman's
FIDDLE SCHOOL

TUNE-UP KIT



Welcome, Fiddlers!

The two units in this starter kit contain everything you'll need to jump into Session 1: Texas Fiddle Foundations with confidence.

In these units, we'll go over technique, style, and positioning. Ultimately, these are the aspects that will give your sound that special something. Even if you already feel confident in these aspects of your playing, it's worthwhile to watch these videos.

Once you jump into Fiddle School's Lesson 1 in Session 1, treat the first six songs as exercises, an opportunity to learn how to play within the style and get familiar with the Fiddle School pedagogy.

If you've been playing for three years or less or you just want more review, you'll find all kinds of helpful nuggets in the New Fiddler starter kit.

Your Bow Arm

- Your upper arm is the wall, your forearm is the door and your elbow is the hinge. **Keep the wall still as you open and close the door.**
- As your door opens, your arm straightens. As your door closes, your arm bends. Your wall remains perfectly still.

To practice this:

1. Raise your left arm straight in front of you, parallel to the ground with your palm down.
2. Put your right hand on your left elbow.
3. Straighten the right arm from the elbow to open the door.
4. Bend the right arm at the elbow to close the door.

Your Bow Hold

NOTE: When you practice your bow hold, always have a balancing force at the tip of the bow so that your fingers can rest on the bow and do not have to grip it.

1. Gently hold the frog in your right hand and loop your left thumb through the tip of the bow. Hold the bow parallel to the floor, bow hair down.
2. Put your **thumb on its tip and rounded below the frog**. Lift your thumb and gently tap it against the frog a few times to be sure you're not squeezing.
3. Hook your first finger around the stick at your middle knuckle.
4. Your second finger hangs on the side of the frog.
5. Your third finger pets the eye of the frog.

6. **Your pinky is on its tip and softly rounded on the wood of the stick**, not the metal. Lift your pinky and gently tap it against the stick a few times to be sure you're not harboring tension there.
7. Your hand is pronated so that your palm faces out and away from you.

Bow Lengths: Long Bows & Short Bows

In Texas-style fiddling, we use two bow lengths: long bows and short bows. **Long bows** span from your bottom sticker to your top sticker. We use them for quarter notes, half notes, and sometimes even longer notes. To play long bows:

5. Set up your posture, left hand, and bow hold with the steps laid out in Modules 1-3.
6. When you're in position, place your bow on the A string at the bottom sticker. Open your door (your forearm) and bow to the top sticker. Then close the door and bow back to your bottom sticker.
7. After you've done a few long bows, try connecting them by eliminating the pause between bows.

Short bows are measured between your bottom sticker and your middle sticker, and between your middle sticker and your top sticker. We use short bows for eighth notes. Most short bows will be between your bottom sticker and middle sticker. To play short bows:

1. Place your bow on the A string, then open the door to bow from your bottom sticker to your middle sticker, no farther. Then close the door and bow back to your bottom sticker.
2. After you've done a few short bows, try connecting them.

Fiddle Posture: Head, Neck, and Jaw

- Imagine your head is a ball balanced on top of your spine with a string pulling it toward the ceiling. Straighten your spine and tuck your chin ever so slightly.
- Trace your jaw with your right hand. Imagine that your fiddle is hugging your neck.
- Snuggle your jaw into your imaginary fiddle. Tilt your head slightly and turn it a little to the left.

Here are a couple points to look out for:

- **Never force your chin or neck forward to meet your fiddle.** Instead, always bring your fiddle to you and let it hug into your neck as close as it can.
- **Do not lean your head to the right.** The fiddle will always hug the *left* side of your neck, with your *left* jaw snuggling into the chin rest.

When you're not used to holding your fiddle yet, the instrument can feel uncomfortable against your body. This discomfort is brief and dissipates as you get used to the fiddle. If you're still experiencing discomfort after a few weeks, you can schedule a consultation so we can help you adjust your setup/posture.

Fiddle Posture: Left Arm and Left Hand

1. Your fiddle should be neither directly in front of you nor directly to the side. The ideal angle for your fiddle is right between these two extremes. At this angle, your fiddle and your bow will meet at a perfect 90-degree angle. Find this midway angle with your left arm, holding it parallel to the ground. *NOTE: use your back muscles (not the muscles on top of your*

shoulder) to lift your left arm to meet your fiddle. Using your back muscles here eliminates tension and protects your body in the long run.

2. Turn your palm to face the ceiling and take your right hand to your left elbow.
3. As you begin to bend your left elbow, use your hand to pull that elbow gently in towards your body as your left hand rotates clockwise. Now your left elbow is bent slightly in front of your torso. Your left hand is rotated with the wrist straight, palm facing outward to the left.
4. Imagine holding a ball in your left palm. Round your fingers around the ball and feel your palm become slightly concave. Keep your wrist straight.
5. Straighten your spine, tuck your chin, and imagine your fiddle coming in to hug your neck and snuggle your jaw.

Fiddle Posture: Left Hand

For open string playing position:

1. Place your left hand on the fiddle. Bring the fiddle to your neck and snuggle it in.
2. Place your left thumb on the neck of the fiddle near the body and use it to hoist your palm above the body of the fiddle.
3. Pull your elbow under the instrument to gently twist your forearm and palm towards the fiddle. Be sure the fiddle is not resting on the webbing between your thumb and index finger.
4. Imagine that you are holding a ball and round your palm and fingers around that ball. Notice how your fingertips point towards the strings. This is your open string playing position.

The Importance of Learning and Crafting Tunes

If you often play in jams or bands with other musicians who lead the melody, you may be accustomed to playing mostly licks, fills, and solos. Maybe you play the occasional chop or chord. These are useful skills, but you may hit a plateau or find yourself playing the same kind of thing over and over again—your usual “bag of tricks.”

Similarly, there are also lots of players who have played the same fiddle tunes forever but don't seem to play them any “better” year after year. How do you level up if you've hit a plateau like this?

Fiddle School uses carefully crafted fiddle tunes as the vehicle to improving everything. Learn the tunes as presented and you'll learn how to bow your songs better, which will help speed, style, and accuracy. You'll learn how to play with the right rhythm and feel, develop consistency and play without mistakes, and above all, you'll learn how to play great tunes the way the greats played them. You will be a tasteful player, and that comes across in everything you do musically.

As you work through these crafted versions, you will build the skills to perform with confidence and style. I promise. You'll be ready when your time comes to lead a song and play in tune, in rhythm, and with good bowings that help you to keep up even when things get really fast.

Even if you ultimately want to play a musical role that's not front and center, learning tunes is the best way to build your skills and style by leaps and bounds. Every tune in Fiddle School is tailored to give you everything from good bowing habits to proper positioning and timing. Each part I teach in my program helps you build good habits and technique naturally, simply by learning the tunes the right way.

The best fiddlers developed their skills by learning a crafted repertoire of tunes. If you do the same by learning the Fiddle School repertoire of tailored traditional songs, you'll be amazed at your progress in every area of your musicianship. And your fellow bandmates and jam buddies will notice too.

Listening

- Especially if you're new to Texas-style fiddling, one of the best things you can do for your fiddling is to listen, listen, listen. Listening is what makes you sound authentic. When you listen, you teach your ear what a good model is. You learn to recognize the tunes, good intonation, tone, and rhythm. Listening also makes memorization much easier by helping your ear naturally catch on to patterns in tunes so that they stick in your head.
- In the Fiddle Lounge, we've put together a playlist of Texas Style Listening Essentials to help you get started. There, you can find some of my favorite recordings of Texas-style fiddlers, including Benny Thomasson, Dick Barrett, and Terry Morris, to name a few. Listen for their infectious rhythm combined with beautiful tone and intonation in each tune.
- As you explore these Texas-style masters, you'll be amazed at how it bolsters your own fiddling too. Above all, when you listen, enjoy.

The Genres of Fiddling

- If you've been fiddling for a while, you've probably had a glimpse into the many genres under the umbrella of fiddling. There's Irish, bluegrass, jazz, old-time, and so much more. Each of these styles has its own repertoire, history, characteristics, and technique.

- In Fiddle School, I teach from a Texas-style perspective. Many of the tunes in the program cross over to bluegrass, Irish, old-time, or Western Swing, but you'll notice a couple hallmarks of the Texas-style genre throughout.
- You'll learn three categories of tunes: breakdowns, waltzes, and tunes of choice. In these tunes, you'll learn bowing techniques to produce the thick, rhythmic, even sound characteristic of Texas-style fiddling. You'll also focus on good intonation and tone quality, which are important aspects of the genre as well. As you go on, you'll learn more about Texas-style history, jam etiquette, contests, and more.
- Whatever style of fiddle you like to play, the holistic skill-building in the Fiddle School method will make you a more adept player.

How to Get the Most out of Fiddle School

Even if you're already an experienced fiddler, I still encourage you to give regular time and attention to technique so that you continue to build effective habits and to progress as a musician. Every lesson is designed to give you one month of material to work on. To experience the full benefits of Fiddle School, here are the things to look out for in a lesson:

- As you begin a lesson with the **practice buddies**, use them to dig deep into your technique. I'll offer exercises, tips, and practice guidance that naturally improve your sound and technique. Practice buddies are designed to help you build new habits through lots of attentive practice, so I encourage you to **watch each of them 2-3 times a week**, spending enough time with them to incorporate their concepts into your daily practice.

- The **listening videos** are your next stop in a lesson. These are videos of the tunes you'll learn in that lesson. Listen to these videos every day of the month.
- You're ready to start learning the **tunes** in the lesson after you've watched all the practice buddies at least once. I strongly encourage you to **learn the tunes by ear using the learning videos in the lesson**. Don't take shortcuts: when you learn by ear with my videos, you learn *how* to play a tune, not just what to play. **You're likely to have to go back and relearn notes, bowings, or technique if you skip these videos.**
- After you've learned the song, it's time to go into the **play-along tab**. There, you can both listen to and play along with the songs. You can also slow down the tracks, which I highly recommend as you learn the tune.
 - First play along with the slow fiddle and guitar track to be sure that all your notes and bowings match mine.
 - Then test your memorization by playing along with the slow guitar-only track.
 - The fast tracks are bonus tracks. They're built for classical players coming into fiddling, as well as fiddlers who've been playing for years already. If you're just getting started or changing up your technique, play with the slow track only (besides, they're still pretty fast).

To get the most out of Fiddle School, you can also take advantage of the many resources we offer outside of our video lessons.

- Check out our **Fiddle Lounge**, where you can find recommended listening and reading.

- Visit our **live office hours**, where you can meet other Fiddle Schoolers, play tunes with us, and ask us all your fiddling questions.
- To get more personalized attention and support, we offer **private lessons** and **progress reports**.
- If you want to explore new musical skills, attend a jam session, or build your musical community, you can look into the many diverse **webinars** we offer, along with our **camps**. Whatever kind of support you need, we're here for you.