

Cello — Workbook

This workbook turns the Cello course into daily practice you can actually do at the instrument. Each section matches a course module and mixes hands-on exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists that build correct habits from the first session. Work through it with your cello in hand, a tuner, and a metronome, and use the editable templates to track tuning, practice time, and intonation week over week.

Setup, Posture, and Caring for the Cello

Confirm your end-pin length, contact points, and care routine so every later session starts from a balanced, tension-free position.

Exercise: Balanced Setup Self-Check

Sit in full playing setup on a hard flat chair. Extend the end-pin, settle the cello against your body, then let go with both hands and answer the prompts honestly. Adjust the end-pin and chair until every answer is correct.

- Does the cello stay balanced when both your hands let go, resting on the chest and knee contact points?

- Is the C-string peg just behind your left ear and the top edge of the cello touching the centre of your sternum?

- Are both feet flat on the floor with your knees no higher than your hips, and are your shoulders down and relaxed?

- Is the cello tilted slightly to the right so the bow can reach the A string without hitting your leg?

Worksheet: My Cello Specifications

Fill in the details of your specific instrument and setup. Keep this on hand for string changes, repairs, and resetting your end-pin to the same length each day.

Cello size (4/4, 7/8, 3/4)

My correct end-pin length (cm or marked notch)

Current string brand and type

Date strings last changed

Rosin brand

Tuner or app I use

End-pin anchor type (rockstop / strap)

Checklist: Daily Open and Close Routine

- Tighten bow hair to a pencil-width gap before playing
- Apply three to four rosin strokes if the tone sounds slippery
- Tune A, D, G, C with the fine tuners against the tuner
- Cross-check each adjacent string pair as a ringing perfect fifth
- After playing, wipe rosin dust off strings and the cello top
- Loosen the bow hair three to four turns before storing

The Bow Arm and Open Strings

Lock in a relaxed Franco-Belgian bow hold and a straight, even tone before adding any left-hand notes.

Exercise: Bow Hold and Tone Drill

Build the bow hold finger by finger, then draw long open-string tones in front of a mirror. Spend at least ten minutes and record one take on your phone to hear your real tone.

- Place the bent thumb at the frog corner, then add the middle fingers, index, and curved pinky; is every finger rounded and the grip relaxed?

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- Draw eight slow counts per bow on each open string; can you keep the volume even from frog to tip with no scratch or whistle?

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- Watching the mirror, does the bow stay parallel to the bridge the whole stroke, about a third of the way from bridge to fingerboard?

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- At each change of direction, does the sound stay smooth with no bump from a stiff wrist?

Exercise: String Crossing Ladder

Practise raising and lowering the whole right arm to change string levels. Keep the bow rhythm steady and both strings equally clear.

- Play four steady notes on D then four on A without breaking the rhythm; is the only thing changing your arm height?

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- Repeat for the G-and-D pair and the C-and-G pair; which crossing feels least smooth and needs more reps?

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- Gradually speed up the alternation; at what tempo does the tone start to break down?

Checklist: Bow Hold Fault Finder

- Scratchy near the frog: lighten the index finger weight
- Thin or whistly tone: move the bow away from the fingerboard or slow the stroke
- Glassy skid: add a touch of weight or apply more rosin
- Volume fades at the tip: keep supporting with the index finger as natural weight drops
- Bump at bow changes: keep the wrist flexible through the turn
- Pinky collapses flat: reset it to a curved shape on top of the stick

The Left Hand and First Position

Shape a relaxed left hand and master the first-position finger pattern that underpins everything you play.

Exercise: First-Position Frame Builder

On each string, set the 1-to-3 whole-step frame with the half steps placed by fingers 2 and 4. Use the open-string resonance ring to check that each stopped note is exactly in tune.

- On the D string place 1 (E), 3 (F sharp), 4 (G); does the third-finger F sharp make the other strings shimmer when truly in tune?

- Lift your thumb off the neck while sounding a note; does the note still ring clearly, proving the fingers are doing the work?

- Drop and lift only the fourth finger ten times; does it stay curved instead of collapsing flat?

- Move the same frame to the G string (A, B, C) and the C string (D, E, F); does the spacing feel consistent across strings?

Worksheet: First-Position Note Map

Write the note each finger produces in first position on each string, using your standard whole-step frame. Fill it from memory, then verify on the cello.

C string: open / finger 1 / finger 3 / finger 4

G string: open / finger 1 / finger 3 / finger 4

D string: open / finger 1 / finger 3 / finger 4

A string: open / finger 1 / finger 3 / finger 4

Which finger 4 notes match the next higher open string

Exercise: First Melody Coordination

Choose one beginner tune (Hot Cross Buns, Mary Had a Little Lamb, Ode to Joy, or a Twinkle variation). Practise hands separately, then together, with a metronome at 60 bpm.

- Bow the rhythm on open strings, then finger the notes silently; can you do each cleanly before combining them?

- Does each left finger arrive and press just before the bow sounds the note, with no smear at the start?

- After three error-free repetitions at 60 bpm, raise the tempo slightly; where does it break down and need looping?

Checklist: Left-Hand Posture Check

- Hand keeps a rounded shape as if holding a tennis ball
- Thumb rests lightly behind the neck opposite the 1-and-2 gap, not clamping
- Wrist stays straight and in line with the forearm
- Fingers strike on their pads near the tips with lifted knuckles
- Press only hard enough for a clear note, no harder
- Unused fingers hover close to the string, ready to drop

Scales and Reading Music

Develop reading fluency in bass and tenor clef and build clean major scales from memory.

Exercise: Bass Clef Read-and-Play

Use the mnemonics (lines Good Boys Do Fine Always; spaces All Cows Eat Grass) to read a short passage. Name each note out loud, then immediately find and play it.

- Can you name every line and space in bass clef instantly without counting up from a known line?

- For four new measures, do you say the note, find the string, place the finger, and draw the bow as one connected chain?

- Where does middle C sit relative to the bass staff, and can you find it on the cello on demand?

Exercise: C, G, and D Major Scale Routine

Play each scale slowly with separate bows, chasing the resonance ring on every in-tune note, then slur two and four notes per bow. Use a metronome and aim to memorise all three.

- Play the one-octave C major scale from the open C string staying in first position; are all eight notes ringing in tune?

- Slur two notes per bow, then four; can you distribute the bow so you do not run out before the slur ends?

- Play each scale descending; does coming down expose any intonation or finger-lifting problems to fix?

- Which of C, G, and D major can you now play from memory with no music in front of you?

Worksheet: Tenor Clef Reference

Fill in the tenor clef layout from the course, then practise naming a few higher notes before playing them. Treat tenor clef as its own picture, not a conversion from bass clef.

Which staff line is middle C in tenor clef

Tenor clef lines bottom to top

Tenor clef spaces bottom to top

Two higher passages I practised reading in tenor clef

Notes I most often misread (to drill on flashcards)

Checklist: Beyond-Beginner Readiness

- I can read fluently in bass clef without counting
- I recognise tenor clef and know middle C is the fourth line
- I play two-octave C major cleanly and from memory
- I keep a practice journal noting problem spots
- I record myself monthly to track progress
- I have a teacher check-in or duet partner scheduled

Your Action Plan

1. Week 1: Set your end-pin and posture daily; sit in setup two to three minutes and learn the parts of the cello and string order.
2. Week 2: Tune reliably with fine tuners and play long open-string tones, eight counts per bow, aiming for an even, scratch-free sound.
3. Week 3: Build the Franco-Belgian bow hold with the pencil and spider-crawl drills, then practise smooth bow changes and the C-G-D-A arm levels.
4. Week 4: Drill clean open-string crossings in pairs and introduce detache versus legato versus staccato strokes.
5. Week 5: Establish the left-hand frame and thumb placement; do fourth-finger drop drills and tap the first-position pattern on each string.
6. Week 6: Lock in the first-position note map and play your first simple melody hands-together at 60 bpm with a metronome.
7. Week 7: Memorise bass clef lines and spaces and read-and-play four new measures every day.
8. Week 8: Learn the one-octave C major scale, then extend to G and D major, chasing the resonance ring on every note.
9. Week 9: Begin two-octave C major and skim tenor clef so it is familiar before it appears mid-piece.
10. Week 10: Record a short performance, start a practice journal, and book a teacher check-in or find a duet partner for next steps.

