

# Introduction to Cello Thumb Position

Cassia Harvey

When cellists start playing past 7th position, we learn a way of putting the hand on the fingerboard called *thumb position*. Unlike other positions, thumb position is not a place; it is a hand position that can be used all over the cello.

To learn thumb position, lay your left thumb on its side across the A and D string. The left wrist should be straight, with your left elbow gently out to the side. The thumb should touch the A string with the side of the thumb where it bends (the joint in the middle of the thumb) and should touch the D string with the skin on the side of the nail. The thumb should be generally straight as it lies across the two strings. Make sure your strings are in tune before you start!



The side of the thumb will likely be tender and sore after just a little bit of thumb position. To build a thumb callus, practice a small amount of thumb position every day, gradually increasing how much you play. If you use a book like *Thumb Position School for Cello* (CHP261,) the difficulty of the exercises increases incrementally, allowing the thumb to strengthen naturally.

This is the sign for the thumb: ♯

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For a comprehensive study of thumb position on the cello,  
see *Thumb Position School for Cello* (CHP261.)

To learn treble clef, see *Treble Clef for the Cello* (CHP442.)

Roman numerals refer to strings. I = A string, II = D string

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Musical staff 1: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Measures 1-4. Fingerings: I, II, I, I. Thumb position starts in measure 3.

Musical staff 2: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Measures 5-8. Fingerings: I, 2, 3, 3. A "half step" is indicated between measures 6 and 7. Thumb position II in measure 8.

Musical staff 3: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Measures 9-12. Fingerings: 3, 3, 3, 3. Thumb position II in measure 12.

Musical staff 4: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Measures 13-16. Fingerings: 4, 1, 3, 4, I, I, 1, 2, 3. Thumb position I in measure 13.

Musical staff 5: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Measures 17-20. Fingerings: I, I, I, I. Thumb position I in measure 17.

Musical staff 6: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Measures 21-24. Fingerings: 3, I, 4, 4. Thumb position I in measure 23.



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