

Choosing a Quality String Instrument

In general, it is best to rent or buy an instrument from a music store rather than buying online from a source that doesn't specialize in musical instruments. Many parents are tempted to make a minimal investment until they are sure their child will continue playing, but an instrument that doesn't meet basic standards may be completely unplayable. Very often bridges don't fit correctly, making it difficult to press the strings down with the fingers, and impossible to bow one string at a time. The wood of inexpensive instruments is usually soft, leading to broken pegs, scrolls, necks, etc. Pegs and fine tuners need to function well or it will be nearly impossible to tune the instrument. These are just a few of the most common complaints with inexpensive instruments, but enough to demonstrate that students may end up terribly frustrated by a dysfunctional instrument. A quality instrument can help set a student up for success, but a low quality instrument may make them want to quit before they've really begun.

When purchasing or renting an instrument, be sure the student is able to try it out in person first. Keep in mind that string instruments come in fractional sizes and it is important to find the right fit. Regarding price, parents should expect to spend at least \$200 for a new violin or outfit (with bow and case) and \$650 for a cello outfit. A local store may have used instruments for lower prices, but make sure it can be tuned and played before purchasing. Upgrading string quality can make a drastic improvement in sound. Also, investing \$50 towards a better bow can make a much bigger difference than paying the same amount of money toward a better instrument.

Where to look for an instrument? Do not buy an instrument at the same location where you can buy groceries and home goods. Instruments are specialty items and should be purchased from specialty stores. The best bet is usually a violin shop if you have one locally. They will be the most likely to have quality instruments and be able to service them well. General music stores are the next best option, though sometimes the people that work there are more familiar with guitars and drums than bowed instruments. If you must shop online, choose a site that specializes in string instruments, like Sharmusic.com or Southwest Strings: swstrings.com.