



CORONA STRINGS · FREE GUIDE

# Choosing Your First Violin

*A plain-language buying guide for the Philippine market*

For parents, adult beginners, and students. Sizing, set-up, fair prices  
in pesos, and the things no one tells you when you walk into a music store.

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*From the Maker's Hand to Yours*

Written by a working Filipino violinist · [coronastrings.com](http://coronastrings.com) · Marikina

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*Buy the player, not the violin. The best instrument is the one that makes a beginner want to pick it up again tomorrow.*

# O1 Start here

Buying a first violin should be a happy thing. Too often it turns into a guessing game — wrong size, a bargain that won't stay in tune, a long list of add-ons you didn't need. This guide fixes that.

Corona Strings is run by working musicians, and everything here is what we'd tell a friend who messaged us asking, "Where do I even start?" No jargon for its own sake, no brand worship, and honest peso figures for the local market. Read it once before you shop and you'll walk into any store knowing more than most.

## Who this is for

- Parents buying a child's first instrument — the section on sizing alone will save you money.
- Adult beginners starting fresh or returning after years away.
- Students ready to move up from a starter outfit to something better.
- Expats and non-Filipino residents learning how the local market works.

### ◆ The one rule that matters most

A cheap violin that is properly set up will outplay an expensive one that isn't. Set-up — not the price tag or the label inside — is what decides whether a violin is a joy or a chore. We'll come back to this word a lot.

## How to read this guide

Each section stands on its own, so jump to what you need. But if you only have ten minutes, read Section 2 (sizing), Section 6 (prices), and the checklist at the back — those three carry the most weight when you're actually standing at the counter.

# 02 Getting the size right

This is the single most common mistake — and the easiest to avoid. A violin that’s too big slows a beginner down, hurts the arm and wrist, and builds bad habits that take years to undo.

Violins come in fractional sizes, from tiny 1/16 up to 4/4 (“full size”). The fraction is about body length and string length, not a measure of quality — a good 1/4 violin is just a good violin that happens to be small. Adults and most teens use 4/4. The smaller sizes exist so a growing child can play comfortably.

## Measure the arm, not the age

Age charts are a rough guide only — children grow at very different rates. The reliable method is arm length: have the player stand and stretch one arm straight out to the side, palm up. Measure from the side of the neck to the middle of the palm (where you would hold the scroll). Match that measurement to the chart below.

Violin size	Arm length (neck to mid-palm)	Typical age	Notes
1/16	Under 38 cm	3–5 yrs	Very small starters
1/10	38–42 cm	4–5 yrs	Uncommon locally
1/8	43–46 cm	4–6 yrs	Common first size
1/4	47–51 cm	5–7 yrs	Popular for young kids
1/2	52–56 cm	7–9 yrs	Frequent upgrade size
3/4	57–60 cm	9–11 yrs	Last step before full
4/4 (full)	60 cm and above	11+ / adults	Standard adult violin

### ◆ If you’re between two sizes, go smaller

A slightly small violin is comfortable and easy to control. A slightly large one strains the left hand and discourages practice. When in doubt, size down — especially for a beginner.

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## The three sizing mistakes I see most

### 1. “Buy big so they grow into it.”

This is the classic well-meaning mistake. Clothes you can roll up; a violin you cannot. An oversized instrument forces the arm to over-extend and the fingers to stretch too far, which makes early playing painful and tuning impossible to hear properly. Children quit over this without anyone realising why. Buy the size that fits today.

### 2. Guessing the size online without measuring.

Ordering a “kids’ violin” from a marketplace listing without measuring is a gamble. Listings mislabel sizes constantly. Measure first, then match.

### 3. Forgetting they’ll outgrow it.

A child on a 1/8 or 1/4 may need the next size within a year. That changes the maths completely — which is exactly why renting is often smarter for small sizes. See Section 8.

*A violin that fits disappears in the hands. A violin that doesn’t fit is all the child ever feels.*

## A quick fit check in the store

- Have the player hold the violin up in playing position, scroll pointed forward.
- Their left arm should be comfortably bent, not locked straight.
- The hand should curl around the scroll without reaching.
- Fingers should fall onto the strings naturally, with a relaxed, rounded shape.

# 03 What “set up” really means

“Set-up” is the most important word in violin buying — and the one stores explain the least. It is the hand-work that turns a box of parts into a playable instrument.

Two violins can come off the same production line. One gets twenty minutes of skilled attention from a luthier; the other gets none. The first sings and stays in tune. The second buzzes, fights you, and slips flat by the end of a lesson. Same violin, completely different experience. That difference is set-up.

## The parts a proper set-up touches

### The bridge

The thin curved piece of maple holding the strings up. It must be carved and fitted to that specific violin — its feet shaped to the belly, its height and curve adjusted so each string is reachable and the bow can play one string at a time. A bridge that arrives as a flat, mass-cut blank, dropped on uncarved, is the number-one sign of a violin sold without set-up.

### The soundpost

A small dowel of spruce standing inside the body, under the treble foot of the bridge. It carries the sound through the instrument and holds the top under string pressure. If it falls or sits wrong, the violin goes dull or silent — and only a luthier should move it.

### The pegs

They should turn smoothly and hold. Pegs that slip (the string keeps going flat) or stick (you can't turn them at all) are the most common beginner frustration, and almost always a fitting problem a luthier can solve in minutes.

### The strings, nut, and fingerboard

Decent strings make a startling difference on a modest violin. The nut (the small slotted piece at the top of the fingerboard) and the fingerboard itself should be smooth and shaped so the strings sit at a comfortable height — too high and pressing notes feels like hard work.

### Fine tuners

Small screws on the tailpiece for tiny pitch adjustments. Beginners benefit from a full set (one per string) because they're far easier than pegs for small corrections.

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◆ Ask one question that tells you everything

“Has this violin been set up by a luthier, and can I hear it played?” An honest seller answers happily and hands it over. A vague answer — or a violin that has clearly never been touched — tells you to either negotiate set-up into the price or walk away.

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## Why “it comes with everything!” can be a trap

Bundle outfits sold online — violin, bow, case, rosin, tuner, extra strings, all for one low price — look generous. The catch is that the saving usually comes out of set-up and the bow. You get a full box and an instrument nobody adjusted. If you buy a bundle, budget to bring it to a luthier for a proper set-up before the first lesson. On a cheap outfit, that visit often matters more than the violin itself.

*A set-up is not an upgrade. It is the difference between an instrument and an ornament.*

# 04 The 6 things every new violin needs

A violin alone isn't ready to play. Here is the genuinely necessary kit — no more, no less. Most starter outfits include these; your job is to check that each is actually decent, not just present.

## 1. A properly set-up violin

The instrument itself, with a fitted bridge, a correctly placed soundpost, and pegs that hold. Covered in Section 3 — it's first for a reason.

## 2. A bow that's straight and rehairable

Sight down the stick: it should be straight, not warped. The hair should be even and able to tighten and loosen. The bow is the most under-valued part of an outfit — a poor one makes a good violin sound scratchy.

## 3. Rosin

A small cake of resin you draw the bow across so it grips the strings. Without rosin, the bow slides silently. A basic cake lasts a beginner a long time.

## 4. A case

A hard or moulded foam-shell case to protect the violin from knocks and from our climate. A flimsy soft bag is false economy — one drop and the repair costs more than the case.

## 5. A shoulder rest

A padded support that clips across the back so the violin sits securely without hunching the shoulder. The right rest prevents pain and bad posture. Sizes match the violin size.

## 6. Good strings and a chin rest that fits

Quality strings transform a modest violin. The chin rest should suit the player's jaw comfortably — an uncomfortable one quietly discourages practice.

### ◆ A cleaning cloth counts too

Add one soft microfibre cloth to wipe rosin dust off the strings and body after playing. It costs almost nothing and is the single best habit for keeping a violin healthy. More on care in Section 9.

# 05 and 3 things the store may upsell

These aren't scams — they're real products that simply aren't worth it for a first violin. Knowing them keeps your money where it belongs: on a good instrument and good lessons.

## 1. Top-tier "professional" strings on a beginner violin

Premium strings can cost as much as a starter outfit. On a beginner instrument the ear can't use what they offer, and a learner wears strings out fast anyway. A reliable mid-range set is the smart choice until you've grown into the instrument.

## 2. An upgrade bow you don't need yet

A carbon-fibre or pernambuco "step-up" bow is a lovely thing — later. For the first year, the bow that comes correctly haired with the outfit is fine. Spend the upgrade budget on lessons instead; they'll improve the sound far more than a fancier bow will.

## 3. Polishes, gadget kits, and "tone" add-ons

Bottled polishes can damage varnish over time; a dry cloth does the daily job better. Cleaning kits, novelty mutes, and stick-on "tone enhancers" are nice-to-haves, not needs. A clip-on tuner is genuinely useful — but a free phone app does the same job.

### ◆ Spend the difference here instead

Every peso you save by skipping upsells is better spent on (a) a proper luthier set-up, (b) a few lessons with a real teacher, or (c) putting it toward the next size up when a child grows. Those three things make a player happy. A bottle of polish doesn't.

*Stores sell add-ons because that's where the margin is. Spend on the instrument and the teaching — that's where the music is.*

## SECTION 06

# 06 Fair prices in the Philippines

Here are honest peso ranges for a violin that is set up and ready to play. These reflect the Metro Manila market as of 2026 and will drift with import costs and exchange rates — treat them as a compass, not a fixed map.

The single most important line in this whole guide: below roughly ₱3,000 you are usually buying a “violin-shaped object” — something that looks like a violin but is built and finished so poorly it can’t be properly set up or tuned. It frustrates beginners and ends up in a closet. Spending a little more on a real entry instrument is the better economy.

Level	Peso range*	What you’re getting
Avoid (“VSO”)	Under ₱3,000	Looks like a violin; can’t be set up well. Skip it.
Student / entry	₱4,000 – ₱12,000	A real, set-up beginner violin. Right for most first-timers and children.
Intermediate	₱15,000 – ₱50,000	Better tonewood and workshop attention. For committed students upgrading.
Advanced	₱60,000 – ₱250,000	Hand-finished workshop or fine instruments for serious and pro players.
Professional / fine	₱250,000 and up	Soloist and orchestral-career instruments. A different conversation entirely.

\*Prices are 2026 Metro Manila estimates for a violin that is properly set up and playable, and will vary by seller, brand, and exchange rate.

### ◆ What a child’s first violin should cost

For most children starting out, a properly set-up student instrument in the ₱4,000–₱12,000 band is the sweet spot. Go lower and you fight the instrument; go much higher and you’re paying for quality the child will outgrow before they can use it.

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## What you should — and shouldn't — spend on

### Worth paying for

- A proper luthier set-up. The best peso-for-peso upgrade there is.
- A case that actually protects the violin.
- Lessons. The fastest route to a good sound is a good teacher, not a pricier violin.
- The next size up on time, for a growing child.

### Don't over-spend on (yet)

- Premium strings and step-up bows on a first instrument (Section 5).
- A full-size violin “to save money later” if the player isn't full-size now (Section 2).
- Brand names you're paying for over playability. Hear it before you decide.

## How to judge if a price is fair

- Ask whether the price includes set-up. If not, add the cost of a luthier visit before comparing.
- Compare like with like: a set-up student violin vs another set-up student violin, not vs a bare bundle.
- Be wary of a “too good to be true” price — the saving is usually hidden in skipped set-up or a weak bow.
- A fair seller lets you play it or hear it played, and explains what you're paying for.

*Cheap is not the same as accessible. Accessible means the right instrument for your level, at a price that respects both your budget and your ears.*

# 07 Workshop vs. factory violins

As you move up in price, you'll meet two broad kinds of instrument. Knowing the difference helps you understand what your money is actually buying.

## Factory violins

Mass-produced on an assembly line, often with machine-cut parts. They're consistent and affordable, which is genuinely useful at the entry level — most good student violins are factory-made. The catch: they usually ship without set-up, and tonewood is chosen for yield, not voice. A set-up factory violin is a perfectly good place to start.

## Workshop violins

Made in smaller batches where a skilled maker hand-finishes and individually adjusts each instrument — better wood, crisper carving, real attention to the sound. They cost more and they reward it: they play more easily, sound warmer, and hold their value. This is the territory of a serious upgrade.

What to look at	Factory	Workshop
Purfling (edge inlay)	Sometimes painted on	Real inlaid wood
Scroll carving	Uniform, can look soft	Crisp, individual
Varnish	Sprayed, very even	Hand-applied, has depth
Set-up out of the box	Usually none	Usually fitted by the maker
Sound under the ear	Serviceable	More open and responsive
Price	Lower	Higher — and worth it later

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## How to tell them apart in person

- Look at the purfling — the thin line around the edge of the top. Run a fingernail along it: real purfling is inlaid wood you can feel; a painted line is just a stripe.
- Study the scroll. Hand carving has crisp, slightly individual curves. Machine work looks uniform and a little soft.
- Check the varnish. Sprayed varnish is flatly even; hand varnish has subtle depth and variation in the light.
- Listen. Play the same simple notes on each. A better instrument speaks more easily and rings a touch longer — you'll hear it even as a beginner.

### ◆ Why it matters for you

You don't need a workshop violin to start — a set-up factory student violin is the right first step for almost everyone. Understanding the difference simply means that when you do upgrade, you'll know what you're paying for and won't be sold a sprayed factory violin at a workshop price.

# 08 Renting vs. buying

For adults the answer is usually “buy.” For growing children it’s often “rent” — at least until they stop changing sizes. Here’s how to decide without overthinking it.

## When renting makes sense

- The player is a child still growing through the smaller sizes (1/8 to 3/4). They may need the next size within a year, and buying each one is expensive.
- You’re not yet sure the interest will stick — renting lets you find out without a big outlay.
- You want a set-up, maintained instrument with the shop handling repairs and size swaps.

## When buying makes sense

- The player is an adult or has reached full (4/4) or 3/4 size — no more growing out of it.
- The commitment is clear and lessons are underway.
- You’ve done the maths and rent-to-own or outright purchase costs less over your horizon.

### ◆ Look for rent-to-own

Many shops let your rental payments count toward a future purchase, and let a child trade up sizes along the way. For a young beginner this is often the most sensible path: low risk now, and nothing wasted if they fall in love with it.

## A simple way to decide

Estimate how long the player will stay on their current size. If it’s under about a year (a growing child) and you’re still testing commitment, rent. If it’s indefinite (an adult, or a child at full size) and the interest is real, buy — and buy once, well, with a proper set-up.

*Rent while they grow. Buy when they’ve grown — into the size, and into the love of playing.*

# 09 Keeping it healthy

A violin is wood under constant tension, living in a tropical climate. A few small habits keep it sounding good and spare you costly repairs. None of this takes more than a minute.

## Daily

- Loosen the bow after playing. Stored tight, the stick warps over time.
- Wipe the rosin dust off the strings and body with a dry microfibre cloth. Left to build up, it bakes onto the varnish.
- Put it back in the case. The case is the safest place in the house — not the bed, not the sofa.

## Weekly

- Check the bridge is standing straight and hasn't leaned toward the fingerboard from tuning. A leaning bridge can warp or fall.
- Wipe down the fingerboard and under the strings where grime collects.
- Notice whether tuning is holding — sudden slipping can mean a peg or string needs attention.

## Monthly

- Inspect for open seams or cracks, especially after big weather or aircon swings. A faint buzzing or a thin dark line along an edge is worth a luthier's look.
- Check the bow hair. If it won't grip even with fresh rosin, or lots of hairs have snapped, it's heading for a rehair.
- Tune carefully and confirm the fine tuners still have travel left.

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## Surviving the Philippine climate

Our heat, humidity, and the sharp swings between aircon and outdoor air are the real enemies of a violin here. They open seams, swell or shrink pegs, and stress the wood.

- Never leave it in a parked car or in direct sun — heat can soften glue and varnish in minutes.
- Avoid blasting aircon straight at it. Rapid drying is as hard on wood as heat.
- If you keep it in a heavily air-conditioned room, a small case humidifier helps steady things.
- Let the violin adjust gradually when moving between very different rooms — don't rush it out of the case into a blast of cold air.

## Leave to a luthier (don't DIY)

- Moving or resetting the soundpost.
- Re-fitting or carving a bridge.
- Gluing open seams or cracks.
- Easing slipping or stuck pegs.
- Rehairing the bow — roughly once a year for an active player.

### ◆ The yearly check-up

Once a year, take the violin to a luthier for a quick health check — the same idea as a dental cleaning. Small adjustments caught early are cheap; ignored, they become expensive repairs.

*Look after the instrument and it looks after the player. A healthy violin is one a beginner never has to fight.*

# IO Quick answers

The questions I get asked most, answered plainly.

Is a second-hand violin a good idea?

Often yes — a used instrument that's been cared for can be excellent value, and many hold up for generations. The catch is condition: cracks, open seams, a warped neck, or a missing soundpost can cost more to fix than the violin is worth. Have a luthier check any second-hand violin before you commit, and treat a private sale the same way you'd treat a used car.

Can my child start on a full-size violin to save money?

Please don't. A full-size violin on a small child forces the arm and hand to overreach, which hurts, builds bad habits, and is the quiet reason many kids quit. Size to the child today and move up as they grow — renting makes that affordable. See Sections 2 and 8.

What about electric or silent violins?

They're great for late-night practice and for players who want to plug into an amp — but they're a different instrument with a different feel, and they don't teach the same tone control as an acoustic violin. For a first violin and proper lessons, start acoustic; add an electric later if the music calls for it.

How often do strings need replacing?

For a learner playing regularly, roughly every six to twelve months — sooner if they sound dull, fray, or won't hold pitch. You don't change all four the moment one ages; change the set when the tone noticeably flattens.

Do I really need a teacher, or can I learn from videos?

Videos are a wonderful supplement, but early violin is almost entirely about physical habits — how you hold the bow, where the elbow sits, how the wrist moves — and a teacher catches in one lesson what a video can't see you doing wrong. Even a few lessons at the start pays off for years.

Viola, cello, or violin — does this guide still apply?

Most of it, yes. Sizing, set-up, the value of a good bow, renting while growing, and tropical-climate care all carry over to viola, cello, and bass. The specific peso ranges differ by instrument, but the principles are the same.

## SECTION 11

# II A plain-language glossary

Every word a seller might use, in plain terms — so nothing said at the counter can catch you out.

Term	What it means
Luthier	A maker and repairer of stringed instruments. The person who should set up your violin.
Set-up	The hand-work that makes a violin playable: fitting the bridge, placing the soundpost, easing the pegs, and adjusting the strings. The most important word in this guide.
Bridge	The curved piece of maple that holds the strings up off the body. Must be carved and fitted to each violin.
Soundpost	A small spruce dowel standing inside the body that carries the sound and supports the top. Only a luthier should move it.
Pegs	The four tuning pins in the scroll. Good pegs turn smoothly and hold their pitch.
Fine tuners	Small screws on the tailpiece for tiny tuning adjustments — much easier for beginners than the pegs.
Nut	The small slotted piece where the fingerboard meets the pegbox; it sets the strings' height and spacing at the top.
Fingerboard	The smooth black board under the strings that the fingers press against.
Scroll	The carved spiral at the top of the violin — the curl in our logo. A mark of the maker's hand.
Purfling	The thin inlaid line running around the edge of the top and back. Real purfling is inlaid wood; a painted stripe is a sign of a cheaper instrument.
Rosin	A cake of tree resin drawn across the bow hair so it grips the strings and makes sound.
Rehair	Replacing the horsehair on a bow — needed roughly once a year for an active player.
Shoulder rest	A padded support clipped to the back of the violin so it sits securely without hunching the shoulder.
Chin rest	The shaped piece the player's jaw rests on, near the tailpiece.

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Term	What it means
VSO	"Violin-shaped object" — a very cheap instrument that looks like a violin but can't be properly set up or played. Worth avoiding.
Workshop violin	Made in small batches with real hand-finishing and individual set-up — a step up from mass-produced factory instruments.

SECTION 12

# I2 Your buying checklist

Print this page and bring it with you. If you can tick most of these boxes, you're buying well — whatever the budget.

## SIZE & FIT

- I measured the player's arm, not just their age
- The left arm bends comfortably in playing position
- The hand reaches the scroll without stretching
- If between sizes, I chose the smaller one

## THE KIT

- A bow that's straight, with even hair
- Rosin included
- A hard or foam-shell case (not a soft bag)
- A shoulder rest in the right size
- A cleaning cloth

## SET-UP

- The seller confirmed it's set up by a luthier
- The bridge is carved and fitted, not a flat blank
- Pegs turn smoothly and hold their pitch
- Strings sit at a comfortable height to press
- A full set of fine tuners is fitted

## MONEY & SENSE

- Price is above the "VSO" range (over ~₱3,000)
- I confirmed whether set-up is included in the price
- I declined upsells I don't need yet
- I heard it played, or played it myself
- For a growing child, I considered renting

◆ Bring this, and one more thing

If you can, bring someone who plays — a teacher, a friend, or your luthier. Ten minutes of a trained ear and a second opinion is worth more than any spec sheet. And if a seller won't let you check these things, that's your answer.



*From the maker's hand to yours*

## Thank you for reading

We hope this makes your first violin a happy one. Corona Strings is a Filipino strings shop based in Marikina, run by working musicians. Every recommendation in this guide is one we stand behind. Our free practice tools are live now — a sight-reading trainer, a chromatic tuner, and more — and our curated instruments and lessons are coming soon.

While you wait, try the tools at  
[coronastrings.com / practice](https://coronastrings.com/practice)

— *From all of us at Corona Strings*

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