

Viola Strings

Searching for strings to match the type of sound you want to produce from your viola is not a simple task. It can take years to discover the various sets available on the market today and explore their different characteristics and components. It is important to replace your strings in accordance with how frequently you play and you should never compromise the sound of your instrument by playing on a dull and used set. It is also important to broaden your horizons with the sounds you want to produce from your instrument. Years are spent trying to find your perfect viola and bow, and a well matched set of strings is arguably as important as this. You wouldn't wear a Hugo Boss suit with a pair of pumps.

A good set of new strings can cost up to £100 so it is easy to fall into the trap of leaving them on well past their sell by date. You should not forget that string manufacturers are businesses and they are always looking for new ways to sell their products. As a student on a modest income in my second year at Birmingham Conservatoire I find it helpful to acquire a good knowledge of the market by reading reviews of strings before determining which set to try next. Below is a brief summary of the companies and the range and cost of their products.

String Manufacturer	Brands	Average cost per set of four strings
Pirastro	Evah Pirazzi (light, medium or heavy)	£83
	Obligato	£82
	Passione (5 different tensions)	£88
	Tonica	£65
	Permanent	£62
Thomastik-Infeld	Dominant	£75
	Spirocore	£60
	Vision and Vision Solo	Vision Solo: £80 Vision: £68
	Superflexible	£48
	Precision	£40
Larsen	Larsen (Dolce, Medium or Forte)	£84
D'Addario	Helicore	£46
	Zyex	£44
	Pro Arte	£36
	Kaplan	£94
Warchal	Brilliant (Steel and Hydronalium)	£54
	Karneol	£37

The price of a set of strings is an approximate guideline as to its quality. This applies in particular across a manufacturer's product range, since they have target markets for each set they produce. However, be aware that the most expensive strings in the shop are not necessarily the ones which will give you the sound you are searching for.

Another factor is the "gauge" of the string, which refers to its tension. There are often three different options, low, medium and high. You should choose your gauge in relation to the resonance of your instrument.

In addition to the many gut and synthetic strings available on the market there are hybrid options, containing gut with synthetic core, such as the Passione set from Pirastro.

You will often find that strings from one set work well with those from another. Before making your final choice you should be encouraged to experiment with strings in different combinations.

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