Positions and shifting

Shifting and playing in higher positions on the fingerboard is an important technique for studying Volume 4 pieces. Violinists must learn to reach high notes accurately and play melodic lines musically in other positions. Although there is some shifting in Volume 3, from Volume 4 onwards every piece uses higher positions.

Playing music seamlessly across different positions requires two basic skills:
1. Shifting accurately and quickly between positions;
2. Forming a clear mental map of the notes all over the fingerboard.

How to practise accurate shifting
A simple same finger shift from a lower position to a higher one involves three actions:
- **Lift** - release pressure on the finger you are shifting on - and the thumb;
- **Shift** - slide lightly up the string to the target note (listening carefully to hear when you've reached your destination) - thumb slides up simultaneously;
- **Drop** - on the note when you have arrived.

Here's an exercise to get started. Practise on A string as shown below, from 1st to 3rd position. Before shifting, play the two notes, B and D accurately in 1st position. Shift smoothly without hurrying.

Check: did your finger and thumb slide smoothly?

Now shift on one finger through positions II to VIII, listening each time for the target note. Play slowly and carefully **without sliding beyond the target note**.

Different kinds of shifts
Shifting often requires you to arrive on a different finger, e.g. shifting from F to a high D at the end of the first page.
of Vivaldi's A minor concerto (1st movement).
In this example, first finger acts as a guide, moving from F to A (3rd position) before 4th finger is placed on D.

slide lightly on 1st finger to A, then place 4th on D (3rd position)

after arrival, keep 1st down to anchor position

Eventually 1st finger's slide from F to A must be practically inaudible. 1st finger stays down, anchoring the position while you play the run down to E.

This kind of simple shift - on the lower finger - is called a classical shift.

You can achieve a different musical effect by shifting on the upper finger - a romantic shift. In these kinds of shifts there is an audible connection between the notes. The violin's entry in Monti's Czardas is played on the G string with a romantic shift for dramatic effect.

slide on 4th finger to A (5th position)

There are other kinds of shifts, mostly variations or combinations of classical or romantic shifts.

Musicians Tip
So how do violinists decide which kind of shift to use? It really comes down to their personal interpretation - how they want connect the notes in the flow of the melody. A good way to approach this is to sing the passage you are working on. Does it sound more natural with a clean step between notes or an audible slide? I like to listen to recordings of the great violinists. Their connecting shifts and slides are part of the music and not all the same: they use nuances of shape, intensity and speed to build and illuminate their unique musical interpretations.

Fingerboard maps
Below are the fingerboard maps for 3rd position, showing the notes without accidentals - i.e. no sharps or flats.

The maps will help you to memorise the basic finger patterns of 3rd position. Also take time to learn and memorise adjacent notes - that are next to each other on other strings.
3rd position - A and E strings

D and A strings
G and D strings

Additional resources and links:
Kurt Sassmannshaus's Violin Masterclass website has excellent sections on shifting and other violin techniques, with free access to demonstration videos and much more. Go to http://www.violinmasterclass.com/shifting.php for shifting.

For more tips, videos and resources, visit www.teachsuzukiviolin.com