

## FROM THE LUTHIER WORKBENCH

So you bought a new instrument?

Congratulations! We at Dallas Strings are happy that we were able to help you obtain your new instrument! I hope that it helps you to express yourself musically for decades to come. I wrote this guide to help you keep your instrument in optimum playing condition. If properly maintained, your instrument will not only increase in value, but will also sound better each time you play it! Please consider the following advice diligently.



From the workbench of the  
Luthier...

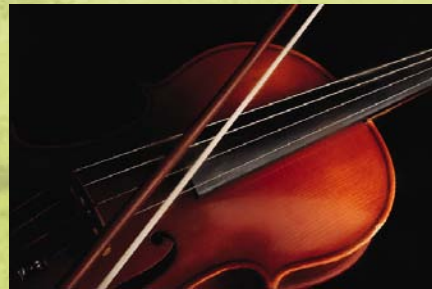
What is a Luthier?

The word Luthier comes from the French word *Luth*, which means "lute". A Luthier is someone who builds or repairs string instruments.

I'm the Senior Luthier here at Dallas Strings and work on instruments just like yours every day. I can personally guarantee the quality and workmanship that your handmade instrument has. Let me help you maintain your instrument and keep it in optimum playing condition!



*For the love of music...*



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**DALLAS STRINGS**  
it's about the love of music

# MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

- 1. Have a Luthier check over your instrument at least once a year.**

Dallas Strings offers this as a free service and will do a number of minor tweaks at no charge. Feel free to come in more often than once a year, there is no limit. If repairs are necessary, an estimate will be presented to you before any work is performed.
- 2. Have your bow(s) rehaired regularly.**

I recommend that you get your bow rehaired every 6 months. This time period can be stretched out longer depending on how much you play your instrument. Dallas Strings offers competitive prices on this service.
- 3. Replace your strings regularly.**

I recommend that you put new strings on your instrument once a year. If you practice/play several hours a day, this might shorten your string life. Sometimes strings can go dead (go false) even quicker for no explained reason. Also the weakening of the sound quality of the strings is difficult to be perceived over a long period of time. If you think your strings are dead, get a second opinion from a teacher or colleague. If you purchase a set of strings from us, we'll gladly install them for you at no extra charge.
- 4. Once a year, clean out your case.**

Clean out all of that clutter, it only creates more weight for you to lug around! Clutter tends to build up in our cases when we musicians get busy. Take the time to sort through what you really need in your case and what you can do without. Use a vacuum cleaner crevice tool and really clean out your case. On a warm, sunny day, very lightly spray the inside of your case with a 1:1 solution of distilled white vinegar and water. Do not saturate it, lightly moistened is enough. Set the case open outside (without the instrument or bows) in the sun until dry and for the vinegar smell to dissipate. This serves two purposes. First the vinegar is a natural disinfectant and deodorizer that will not hurt your instrument. Second, the sunlight exposure will ward/kill off any insect larvae that might exist in your case. A very common variety of arthropods (related to moths) love to munch on bow hair. They are microscopic and fortunately harmless to humans. They typically only infest a case that has been closed for long periods of time. If you practice regularly and perform this simple maintenance, you won't ever have an infestation problem.
- 5. Do polish your instrument, but don't overdo it!**

Cleaning and polishing your instrument to look nice and shiny is a good thing in moderation. Be careful when choosing a cleaner/polish to use on your instrument. There are many different types of varnish out there and they might not be compatible with certain cleaners or polishes. Visit Dallas Strings to obtain the right kind of cleaner/polish for your instrument. Always test a cleaner/polish on a small inconspicuous area of your instrument first. As long as you are wiping your instrument off with a clean, dry, soft cloth every time you stop playing, polishing won't be necessary all that often. Once every six months is more than enough for a newer instrument. As often as once a month is probably ok, but any more frequency might do more harm than good. Older instruments (half a century or more) will require more frequent polishing to help maintain natural oils in the wood that have dissipated over time with age.
- 6. Clean your fingerboard and strings with some steel wool.**

This cleaning procedure is only necessary when there's visible varnish buildup on the fingerboard and/or strings or when the strings become discolored from tarnish. You will not need to do this step often if ever if you're regularly wiping down your instrument with a clean, dry, soft cloth. Obtain some fine steel wool from a hardware store. Look for the 0000 grade. This is a very fine, soft variety of steel wool. Warning- Do not use steel wool on any varnished part of your instrument! It will leave swirls and scratches! Hold your instrument so that your bridge is facing the floor over a table with a soft scrap towel. If you have a larger instrument, get some help from another person. Pinch a small amount of the steel wool around your strings and scrub them to remove finger oil, rosin buildup, tarnish, etc. The steel wool will shed small metal filings that should not be allowed to fall on your instrument's varnish. Holding the instrument upside down prevents this as the filings just fall to the floor. Use it to rub down your fingerboard as well. It will remove built up skin oil and rosin from the board.

## TIPS

### Always keep your instrument in an environment that *you* would be comfortable in.

Professional quality varnish like what's on your new instrument is far less forgiving to extreme weather/climate. If you're too hot, think it's too humid, too cold, etc. so is your instrument. Never leave your instrument in a car. The varnish on your instrument can boil within 5 minutes in the Texas summer heat in a car. Also the special glue holding your instrument together liquefies with heat. If the instrument freezes, the wood will shrink and the varnish will not. This will cause the varnish to fracture and buckle, leaving the surface of the instrument looking like shattered glass. Varnish repairs are expensive and your instrument will never sound as good as it did with its original coat of varnish. Protect it!

### Wipe off your instrument!

Your orchestra director is not crazy when they tell you to do this over and over again. There's a good reason for this! Rosin buildup on an instrument will not only collect dirt, oils and gunk, but will also eventually fuse with the varnish and will deaden the sound of your instrument. (it also looks ugly) Always wipe your instrument with a clean, dry rag. Cotton is best for this. Old t-shirts work great!

### Fine tuners are training wheels.

**Violinists and violists only!** If you have fine tuners installed on your tailpiece, they are designed to help beginners tune their instruments. Most often these fine tuners deaden the sound of your instrument. As soon as you're given the ok from your teacher and you're very comfortable with tuning with just the pegs, have them removed. The exception is the highest string. Many professionals leave a fine tuner on the Violin E or the Viola A.

**Cellists only!** There are a number of tailpieces available with integrated fine tuners if you don't already have them. A wood tailpiece with fine tuners is heavy and tends to deaden your instrument's sound. There are many different types of tailpiece upgrades you can do. Most of them can enhance the sound of your instrument, sometimes dramatically! Visit us at Dallas Strings and let us show you some of your upgrade options.

### Keep at least two bows.

You never know when you'll have a plug fall out while you're playing fortissimo! It's wise to keep a backup bow just in case. This will also come in handy when it's time to get your bow re-haired. Many professionals like to keep a carbon fiber bow as their backup bow. These bows work great when you're required to play your instrument outside where you don't want to take your good bow. Wood bows can act strange when playing outdoors.


### Take care of your instrument's varnish.

Your new instrument has varnish designed to improve the sound quality of your instrument. Because of this, it is far less protective than the varnish on your rental or student-quality instrument. Be mindful of this. Nicks and dings will be far more noticeable and the instrument's sensitivity to hot and cold will be greater. Move slowly, carefully, and deliberately with your new instrument. Watch out for doorways, that crowded rehearsal hall, young kids, pets etc. Unfortunately accidents do happen and if they do, feel free to come by my shop and let me take a look at that scratch or ding. Often I can fix the affected area with touchup varnish for a minimal fee.

### “Oh my gosh! My instrument is broken! Now what do I do?”

If the worst case scenario happens, don't panic. Most people would be surprised to know how fixable a “busted” instrument can be. I've seen pictures and talked with a Luthier who fully restored a Stradivari violin that sank with a ship and had been under the ocean for over a year! I've fixed a viola that had been run over by a big, bulky SUV. I've just about seen it all. Bring it by and let me take a look at it...

I love my job, and it's a pleasure to work on the fine instruments that we sell here at Dallas Strings. Each and every instrument that passes through our inventory, I get to know personally. The instruments, being made of organic materials, are all unique like each of us. Bringing your instrument by the shop for me to see is like visiting an old friend. Please come by and chat with me, I'd love to hear your success stories with your new instrument. *Don't be a stranger!*



Cody Sisk  
*Vice President & Luthier*