



# 4 SECRETS TO LUSH STRING WRITING

TAKE YOUR STRING LINES FROM  
GOOD TO GREAT.

CHRISTOPHER SIU

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# SECRET 1: KNOW HOW THE SECTIONS WORK

*Know the strengths, and limitations.*

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Before discussing how to layer the strings together, make sure you are familiar with the individual sections and their ranges. Here is a quick overview:

Violins: G3 - A7 (sweet spot in high register)

Violas: C3 - A6 (sweet spot in middle register)

Cellos: C2 - C6 (sweet spot in low and high registers)

Basses: C1 - C5 (sweet spot in low and middle registers)

Note that while the instruments' ranges are quite large, the sweet spot of each section varies. Writing to the strength of these sweet spots will result in an extremely beautiful and lush sound, where all the sections will feed off of each other.

The main form of expression comes from volume and vibrato (very easy to remember). Typically, as emotion rises, string plays vibrate their strings more. This creates an emotional sound we're all familiar with.

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# SECRET 2: WIDE AT THE BOTTOM, NARROW AT THE TOP

*How to distribute your string voices*

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The way we distribute our string voices is crucial. According to the overtone series, the higher up we go in the frequency spectrum, the smaller intervals you can write without it sounding muddy and cloudy.

Therefore, I always recommend that for sustained string chords, you should have a minimum of a perfect 5th from below C3. An octave is usually recommended.

Once you write above C4 (C above middle C), smaller intervals like 3rds and 2nds become more appropriate without sounding muddy and cloudy.

To ensure your string chords sound full and rich without any conflict, double check on a piano. If you're not a piano player, hold down the sustain pedal and play each of the notes the strings will be playing, from bottom to top. This way, you'll get a full representation of what you will hear when the string sections are playing together.

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# SECRET 3: COUNTERPOINT

*Independence of the lines*

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In its most basic definition, counterpoint is the relationship between voices which are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and contour. In other words, if I have violins 1 playing a melody and violins 2 playing harmony, violins 2 should support violins 1 in adding harmony, but it does not have to follow the same rhythm as violins 1; it is its own line.

The beauty and complexity in string writing derives from counterpoint, especially when engaging all the sections. For example, you could have the violins playing the main melody, the violas playing the harmony down a 3rd but keeping the same rhythm as the violins, the celli playing counterpoint by **moving when the violins hold a longer note**, and the basses providing the roots of each chord in longer note values.

This technique expands the string orchestra from being heard as one large body of sound, to individual voices that travel independently, contributing to a greater whole.

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# SECRET 4: USE CHORD EXTENSIONS

*Add interest to your chords*

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When we hear the term 'extensions', we tend to think of complex jazz chords and strange combinations of notes. But if you really think about it, chord extensions are simply notes that don't belong in our basic 3-note triad.

For example, extensions to the C major triad would include the 7th (B), 9th (D), 11th (F), and 13th (A). Note that we are continuing to build our chord up in 3rds.

Dominant 7th chords allow for the most flexibility in terms of how you alter the extensions (sharp or flat). For example, if you have G7, in addition to the natural extensions (9, 11, 13), you can also alter them:

**G7 #9: G B D F A#**

**G7 b9: G B D F Ab**

**G7 #11: G B D F A C#**

**G7 b13: G B D F A C Eb**

Each of these altered extensions changes the tone of your chord in a small way without changing the chord itself. Experiment with these colours!

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# THANKS FOR READING!

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These are some of my go-to considerations when writing for lush, emotional strings. Each one of these steps is very important to achieving that warm sound we all love.

If you have any further questions, feel free to shoot me an email! I'm always happy to help.

Wishing you all the best in your musical career!

Your friend,  
Chris

My website: <https://www.christophersiu.com/>

YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzM2CcAZ3kqT-y01ybxFOnw>

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