Position Shifting Exercises for the Viola

Description: Exercises and scales for developing accurate shifts to 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th positions

Background: Systematic practice on each string, C, G, D and A with optional bowing variations

Instrumentation: Viola

Level: Beginner/Intermediate

Bill Anderton Music

www.billanderton.uk

STUDIES IN POSITION SHIFTING, 1st 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th positions

Play each repeated section at least twice, testing notes for intonation as you play and listening carefully. If you can record and play back so that you can listen to your playing, this will help you spot any intonation problems.

Tempo should be fairly slow and played with at least half a bow per beat, as these studies are primarily for intonation practice. An exception might be the spiccato variations (see note below about variations) which should be played *allegro*.

Keep your fingers down on the finger board when possible, especially the first finger. Don't let your finger joints flatten. Make contact with the string at the tip of each finger, ensuring that you don't pull the string to one side. Keep your left hand thumb bent and your left-hand wrist angled.

To move from one position to another, slide your first finger to the new position making sure that your thumb does not get left behind and retains its correct shape. At first, make this a deliberate and careful slide, then as you gain confidence, speed up the slide until you can play seamlessly.

Check that you know what key you are playing in at each key signature change. The keys on the C and G strings are major. The keys on the D and A strings are minor and I have used the 'natural' minor keys which means that there are no additional accidentals to include (which there would be in the melodic and harmonic minor modes).

Listen carefully when you play an open string in any of the sequences. It may sound out of tune. Of course it isn't, but this will indicate that the note you played before it is. Each time you play a C, G, D, or A in any position, you can test its intonation against the appropriate open string.

Don't be alarmed when you encounter scales that go beyond 5th position. I've included these as a challenge and an introduction to the higher positions which will pay dividends as your experience and technique develops.

In my own scales practice I like – and can recommend – keeping a consistency in the fingers used for shifting and usually, where possible, shift from second finger to first when going up in pitch and from first finger to second when coming down. This is what I've applied here, particularly noticeable in Studies 13 to 16. These studies also help improve use of the fourth finger.

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No. 1: On the C String; No. 2: On the G String; No. 3: On the D String; No. 4: On the A String

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No. 5: On the C String; No. 6: On the G String; No. 7: On the D String; No. 8: On the A String

Nos 9 to 12: Shifting from 1st to 4th and from 4th to 1st positions
No. 9: On the C String; No. 10: On the G String; No. 11: On the D String; No. 12: On the A String

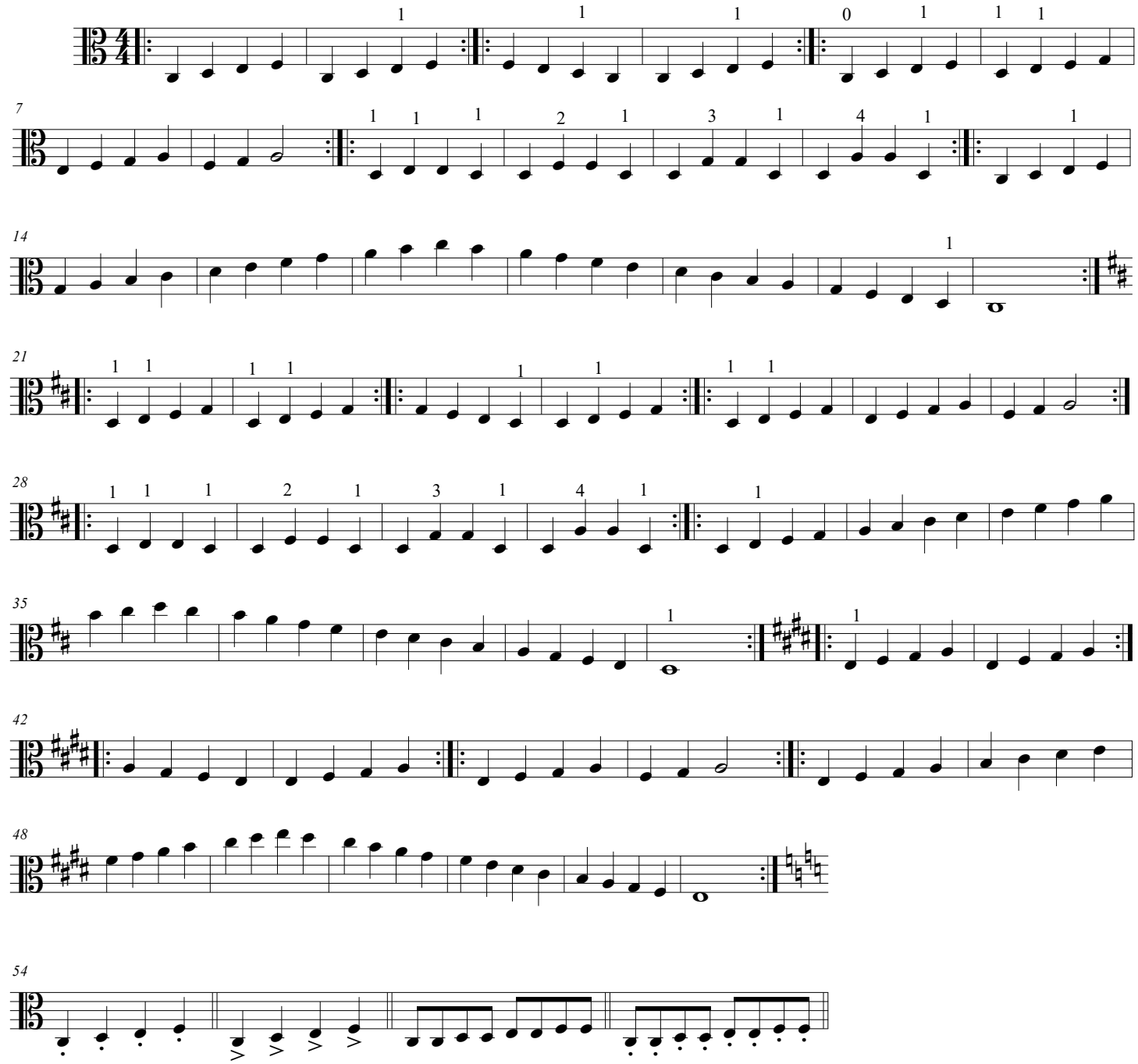
Nos 13 to 16: Shifting from 1st to 5th and from 5th to 1st positions
No. 13: On the C String; No. 14: On the G String; No. 15: On the D String; No. 16: On the A String

VARIATIONS

You will find four variations at the end of one or two of the studies. These can be applied to all studies on all four strings, in all the keys that are used. The variations are: 1. Dotted crotchets, played lightly with half bows (middle half of the bow) and a slight lift of the bow at the end of each note; 2. Accented crotchets which can be played with whole bow *martelé*; 3. Quavers to be played with wrist and finger motion only at the heel of the bow and then at the tip; 4. Dotted quavers to be played *spiccato* with a bouncing bow (*allegro*). You might also think of your own variations to help with any particular bowing technique that you would like to improve.

Study No.1

Position Shifting to and from 2nd Position on the C String



Light half bows with a lift at the end of each stroke

Whole bow martele

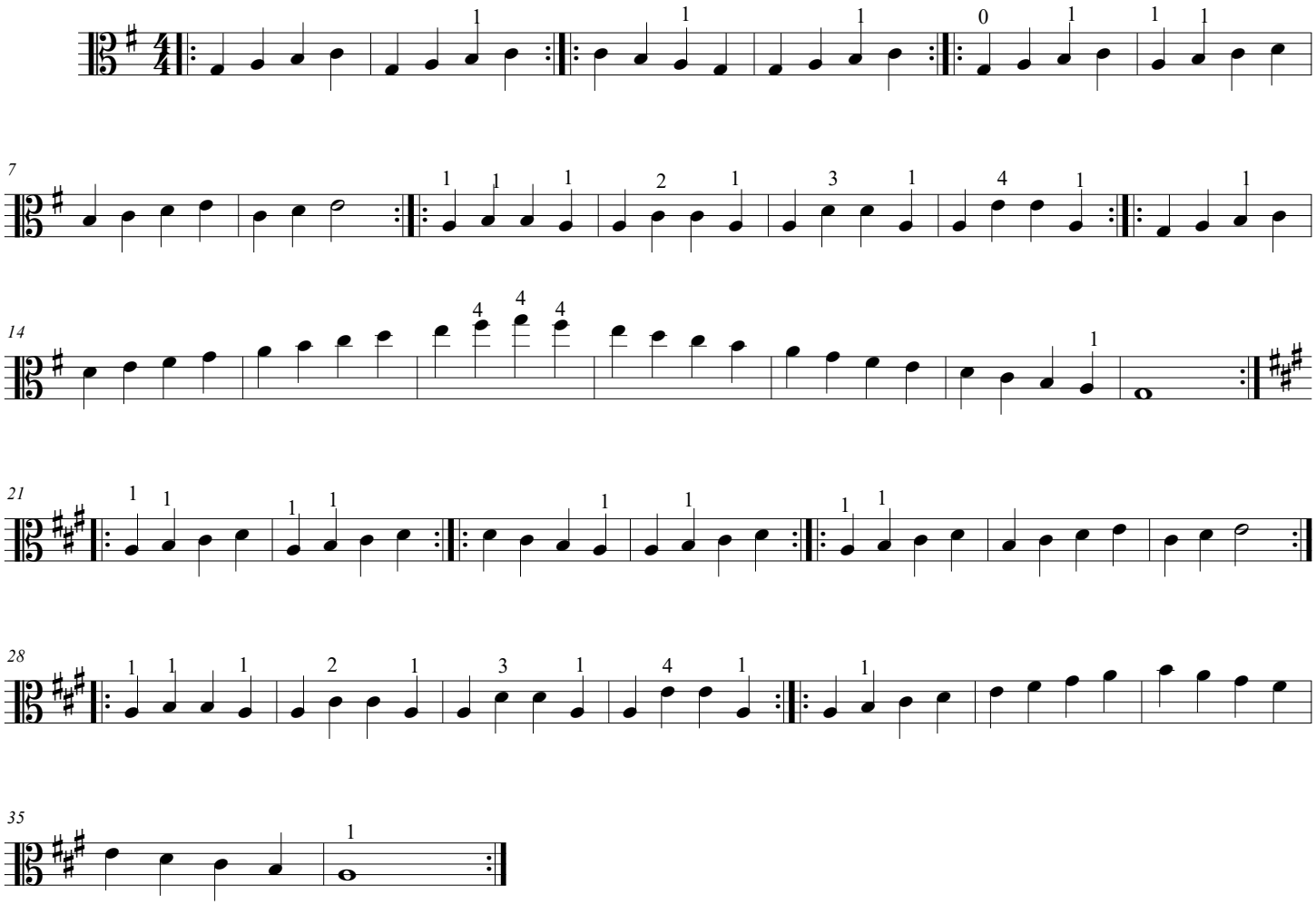
Wrist and finger motion, 1. at heel; 2. at tip of bow

Spiccato

Variations can be applied to all studies on all four strings:

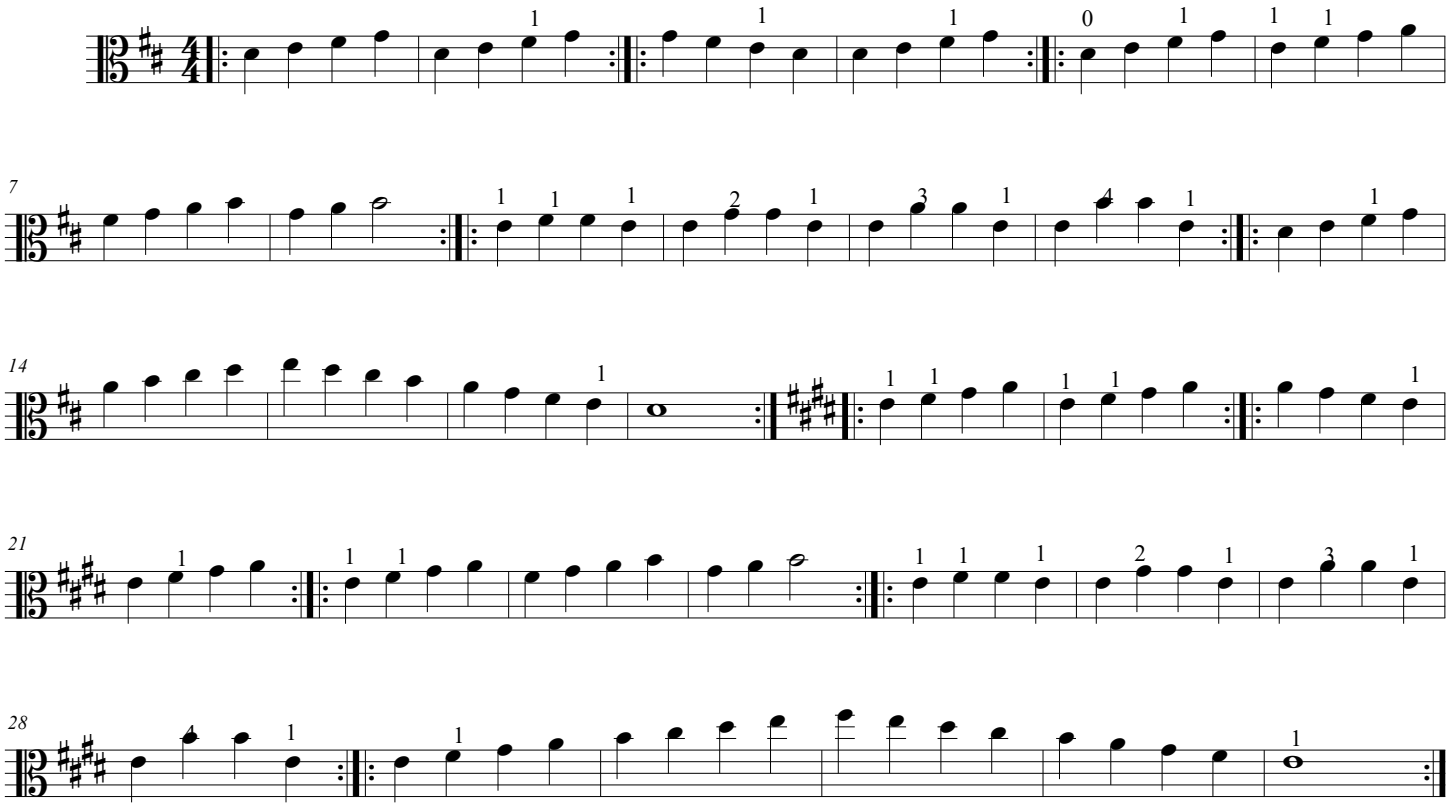
Study No.2

Position Shifting to and from 2nd Position on the G String



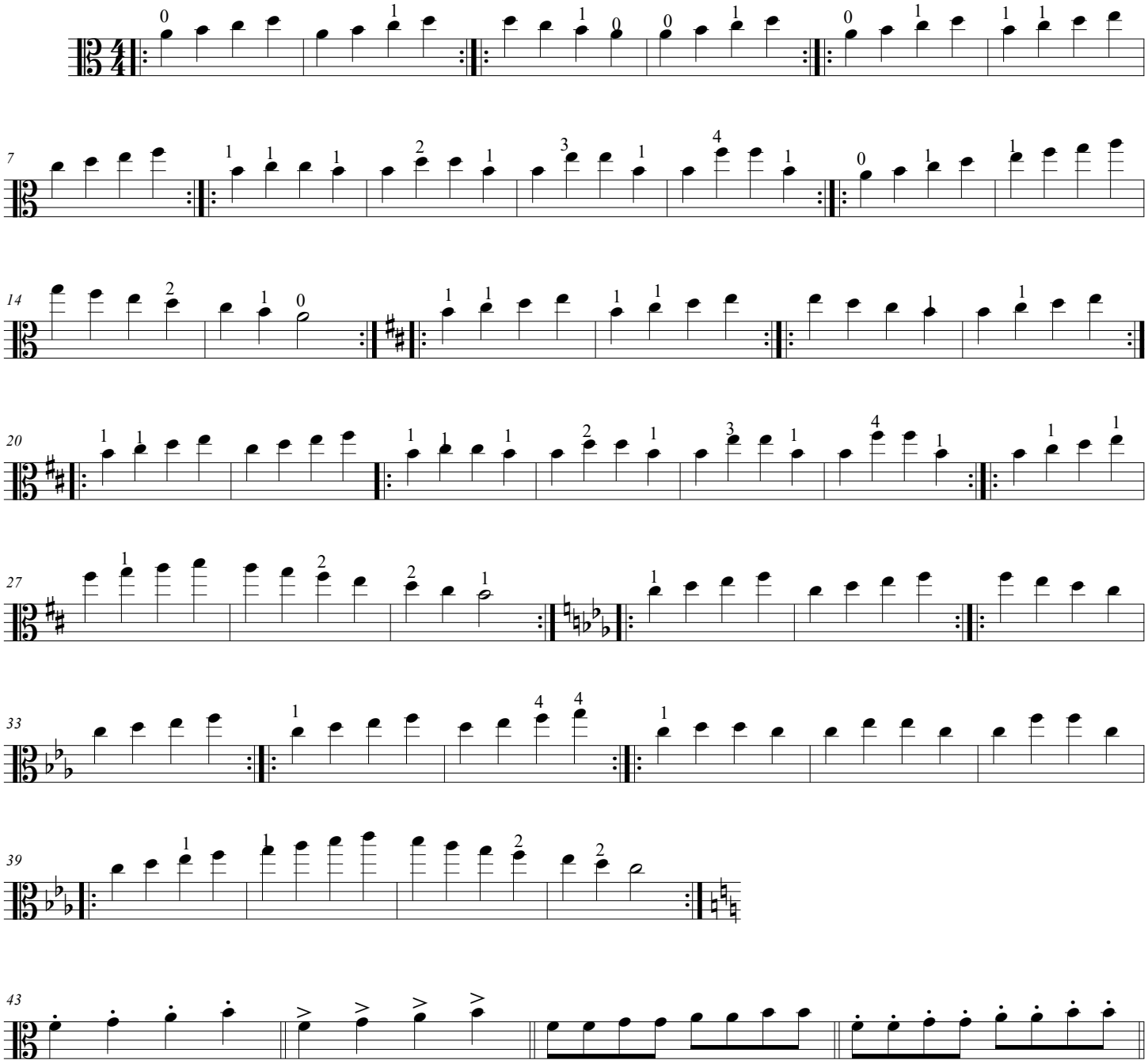
Study No.3

Position Shifting to and from 2nd Position on the D String



Study No.4

Position Shifting to and from 2nd Position on the A String



Light half bows with a lift at the end of each stroke

Whole bow martele

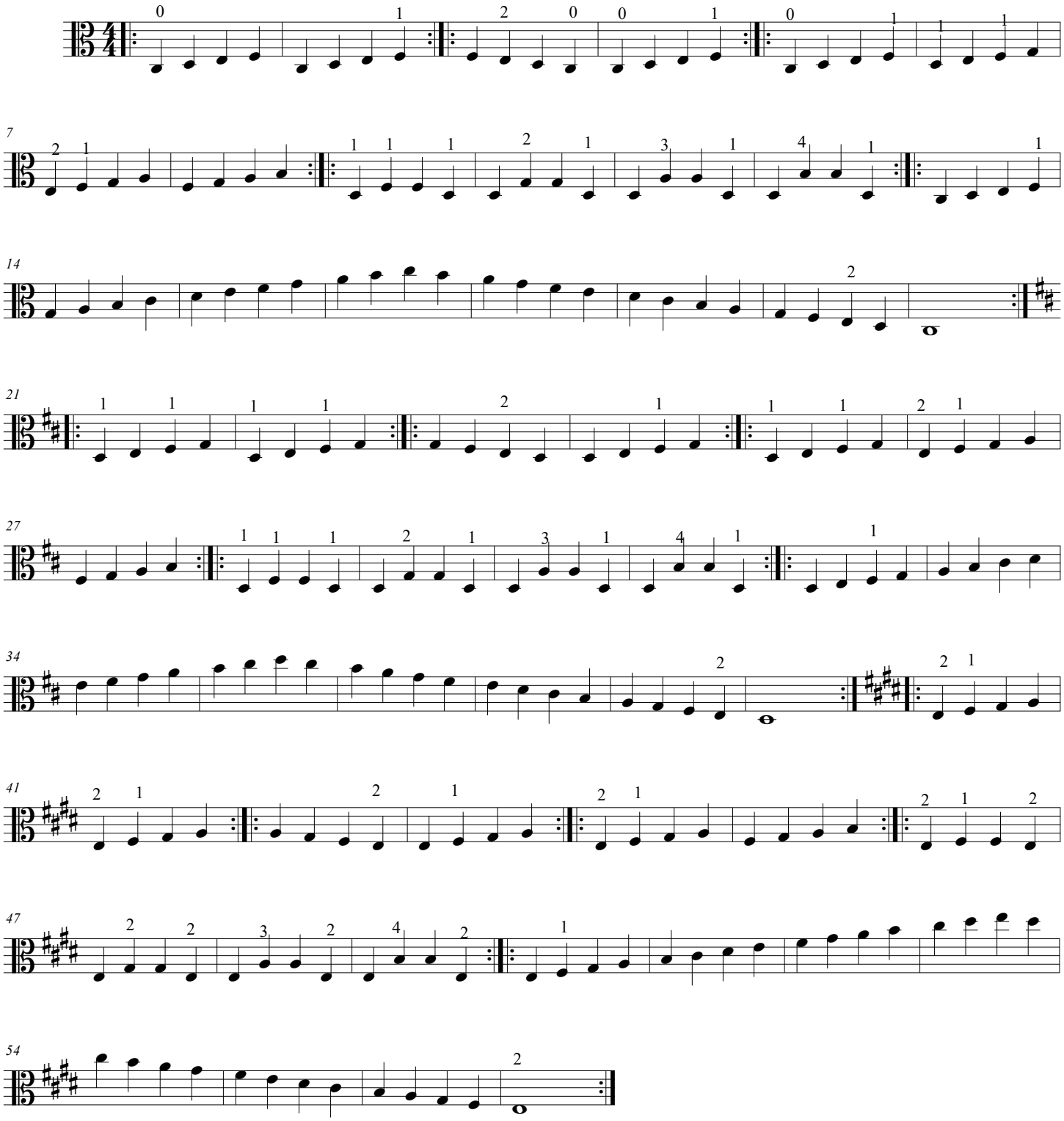
Wrist and finger motion, 1. at heel; 2. at tip of bow

Spiccato

The four variations above can be applied to the study for each string.

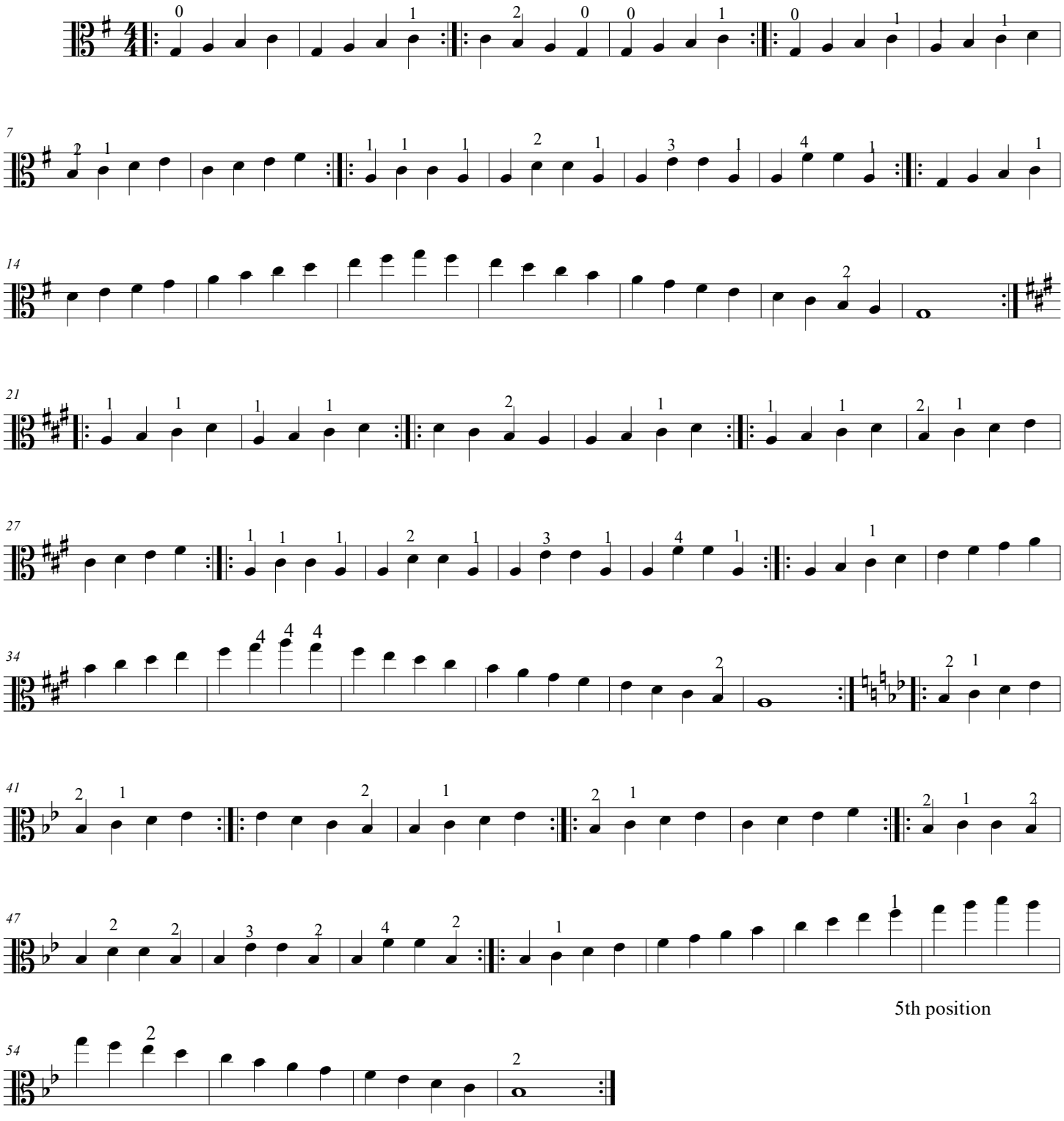
Study No.5

Position Shifting to and from 3rd Position on the C String



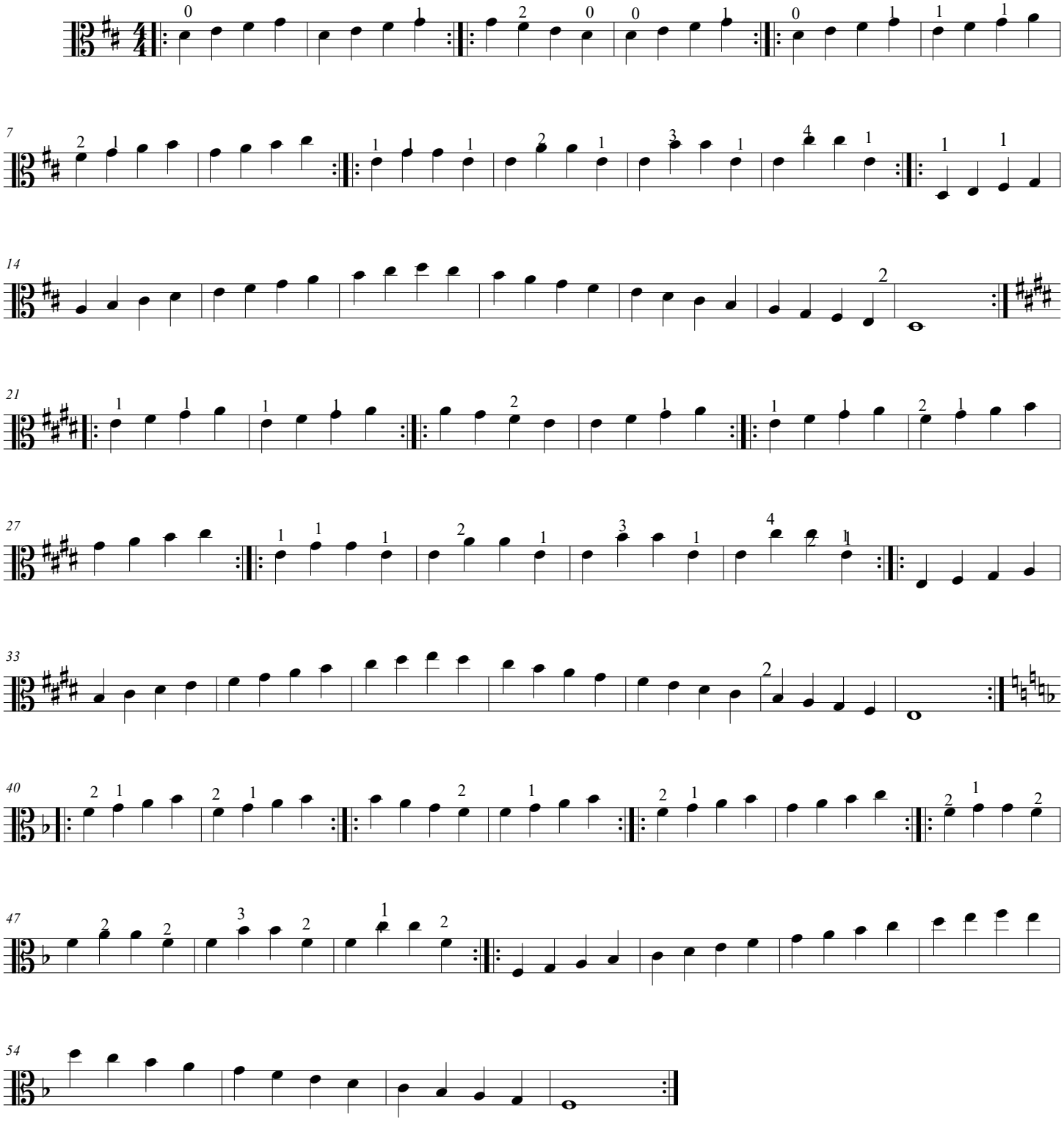
Study No.6

Position Shifting to and from 3rd Position on the G String



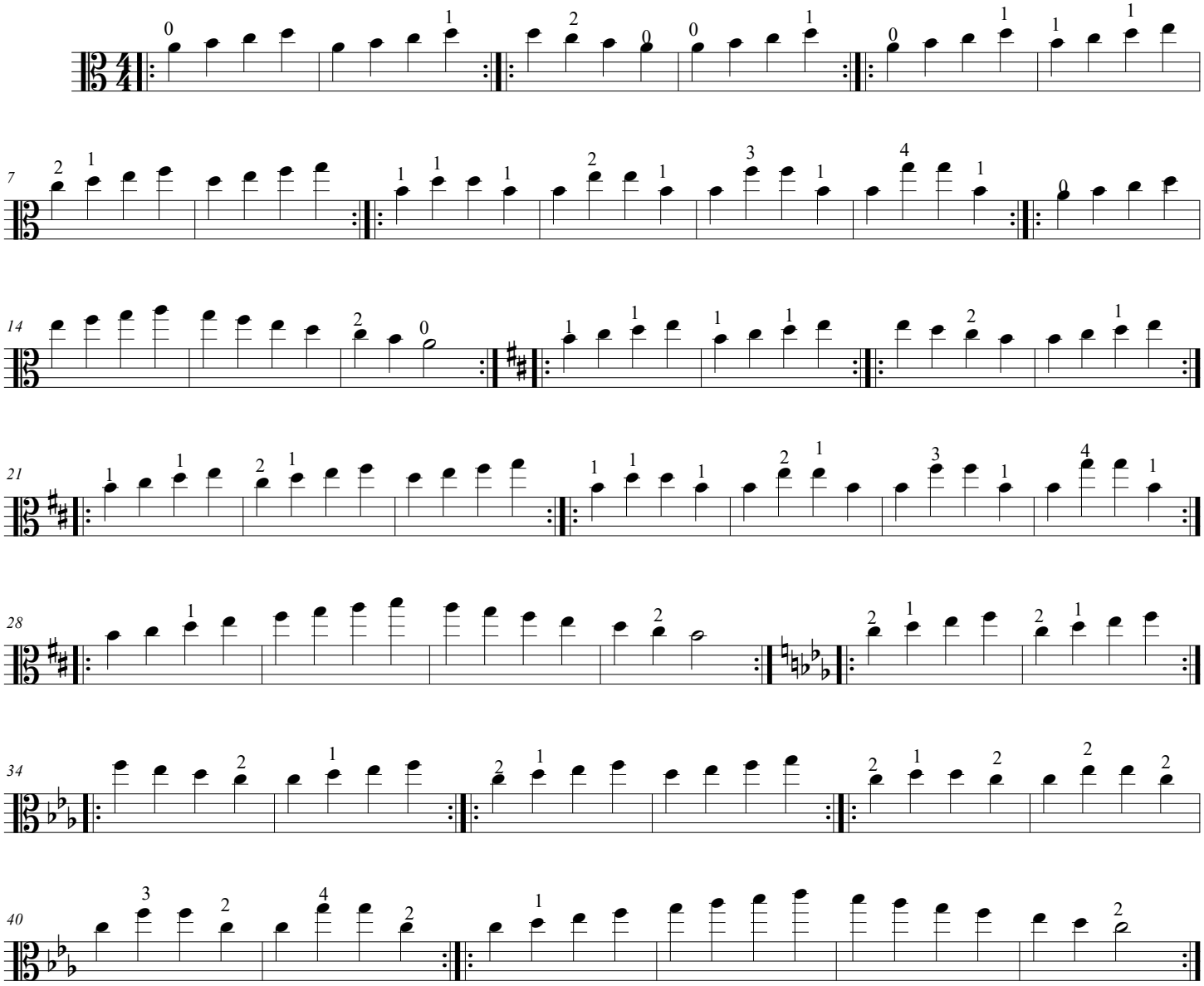
Study No.7

Position Shifting to and from 3rd Position on the D String



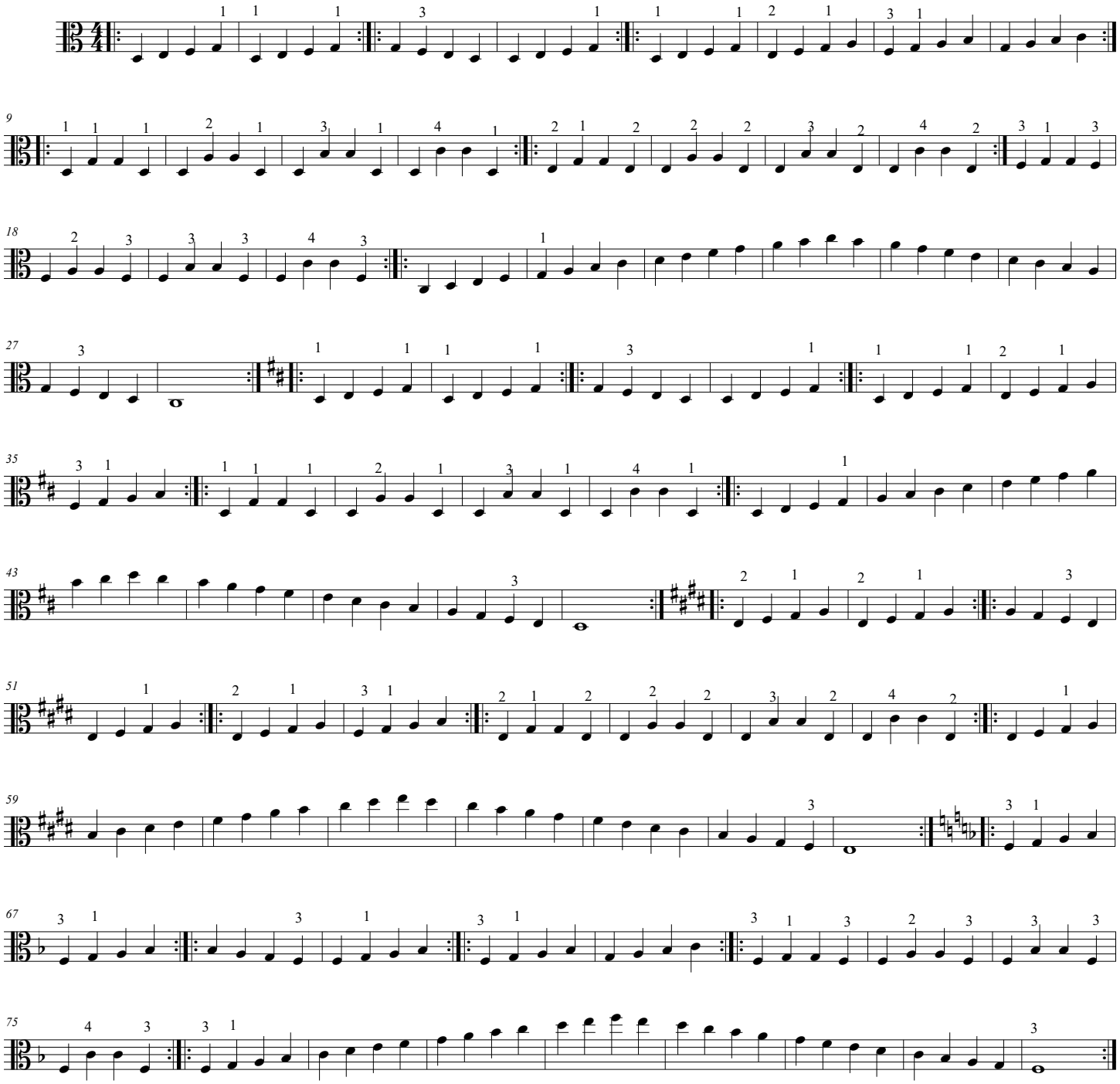
Study No.8

Position Shifting to and from 3rd Position on the A String



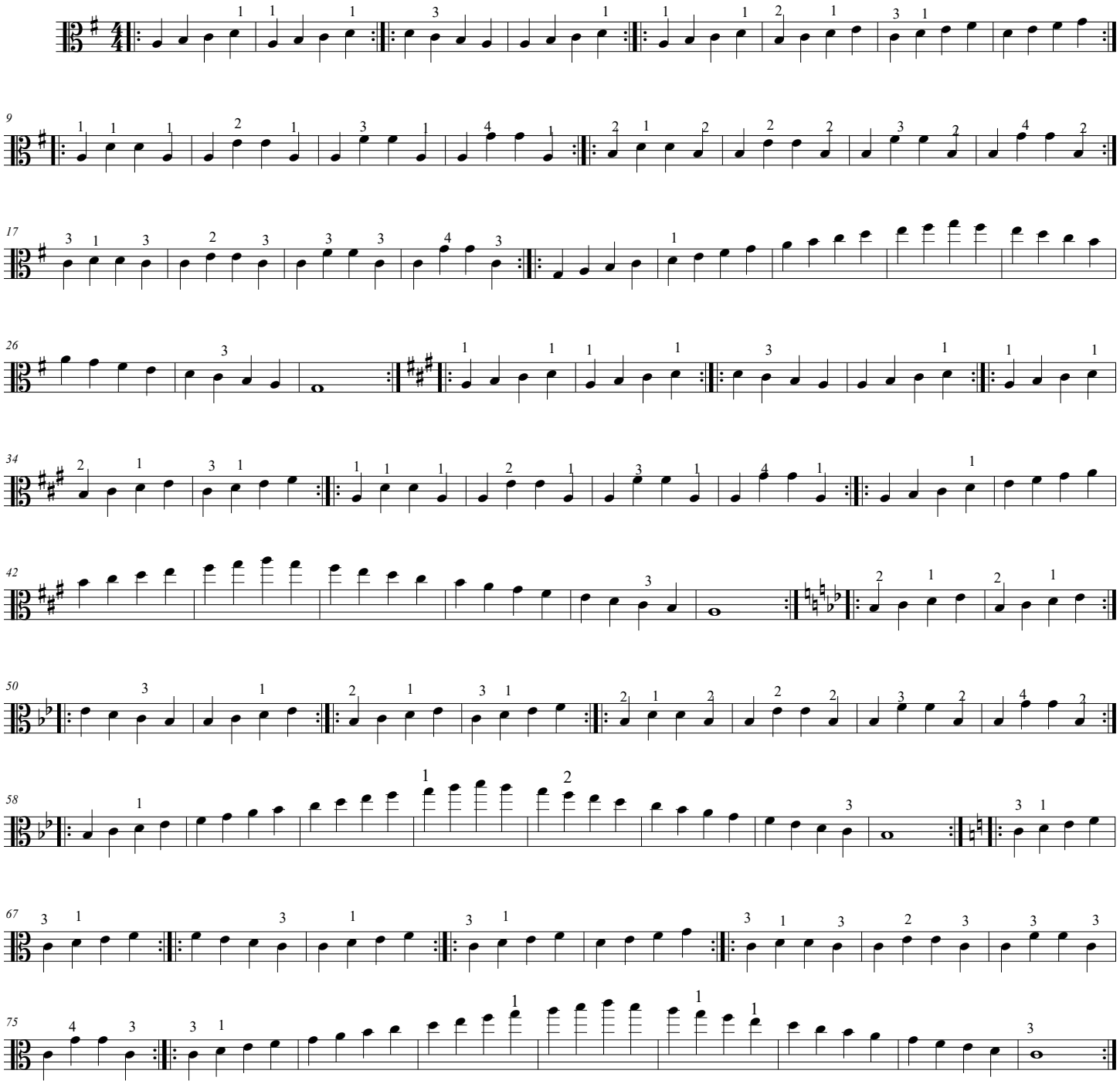
Study No.9

Position Shifting to and from 4th Position on the C String



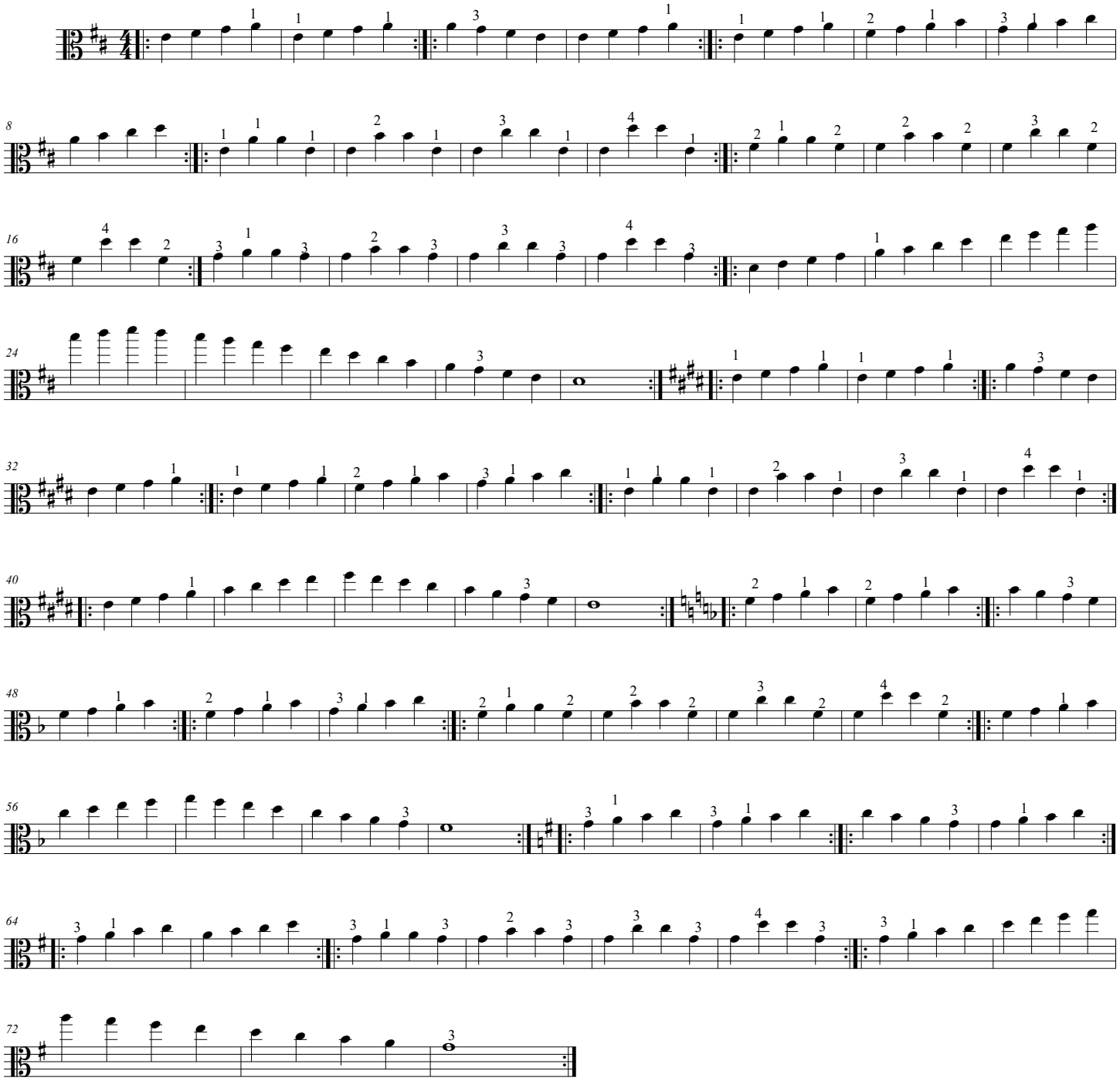
Study No.10

Position Shifting to and from 4th Position on the G String



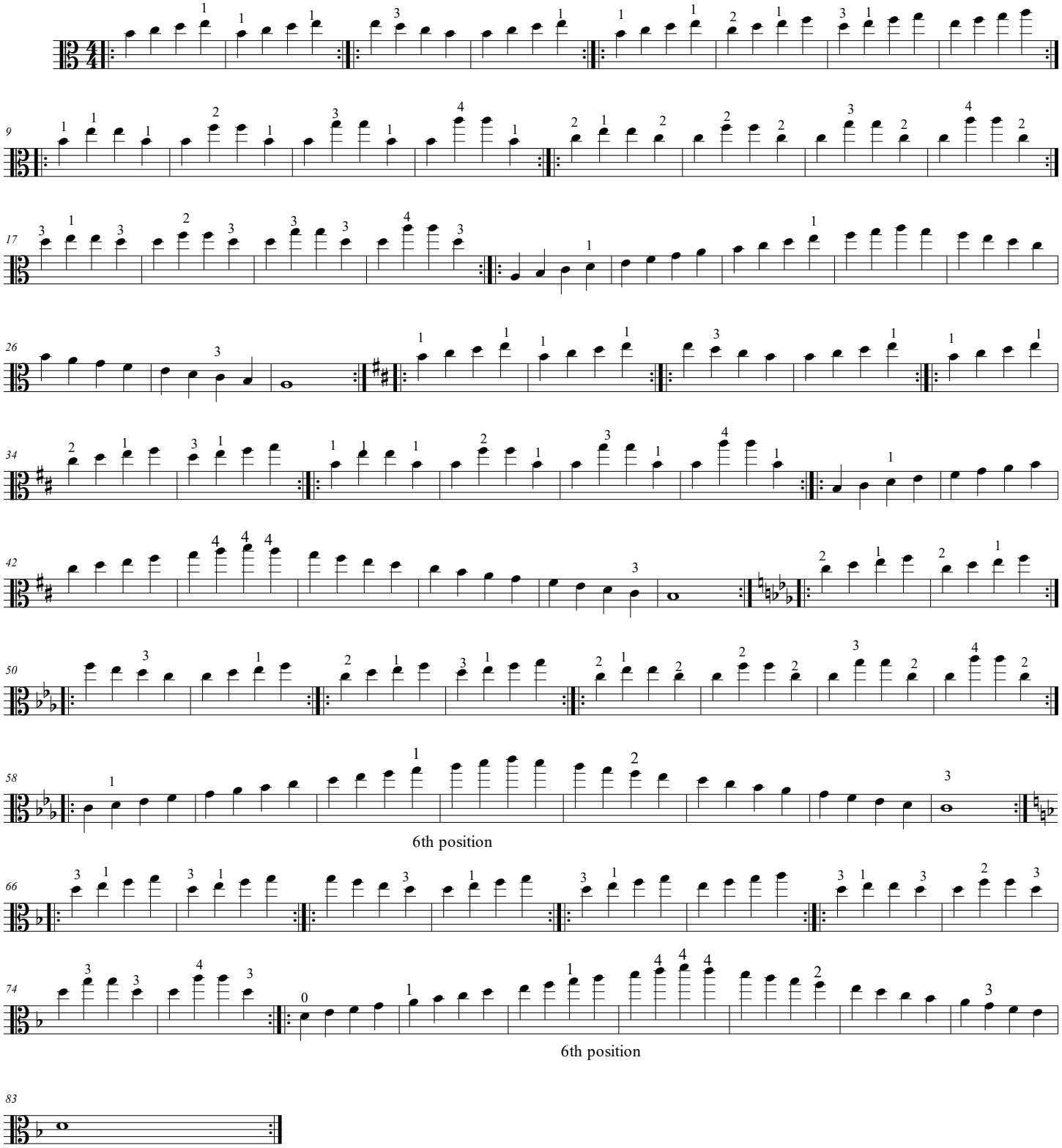
Study No.11

Position Shifting to and from 4th Position on the D String



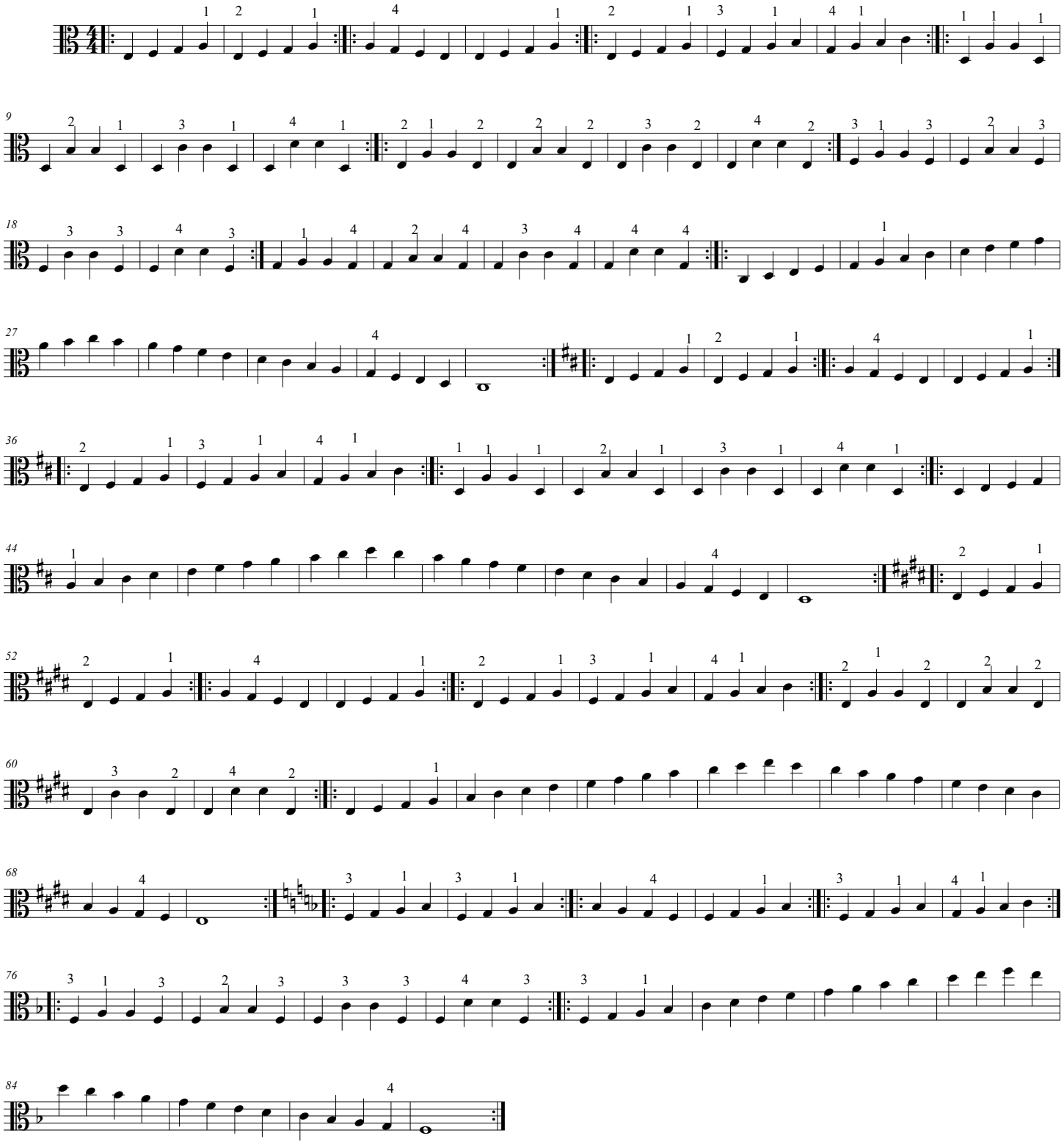
Study No.12

Position Shifting to and from 4th Position on the A String



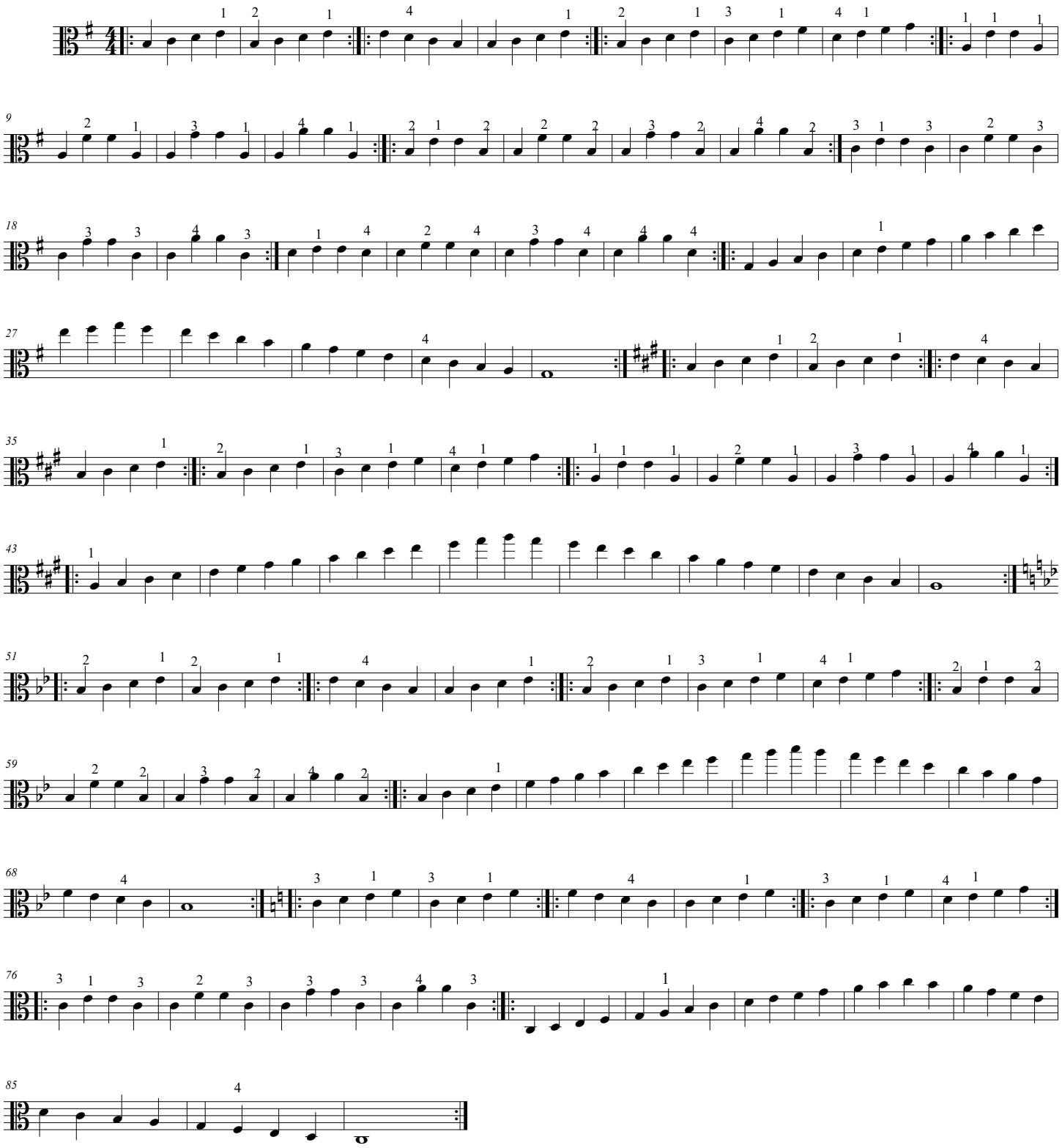
Study No.13

Position Shifting to and from 5th Position on the C String



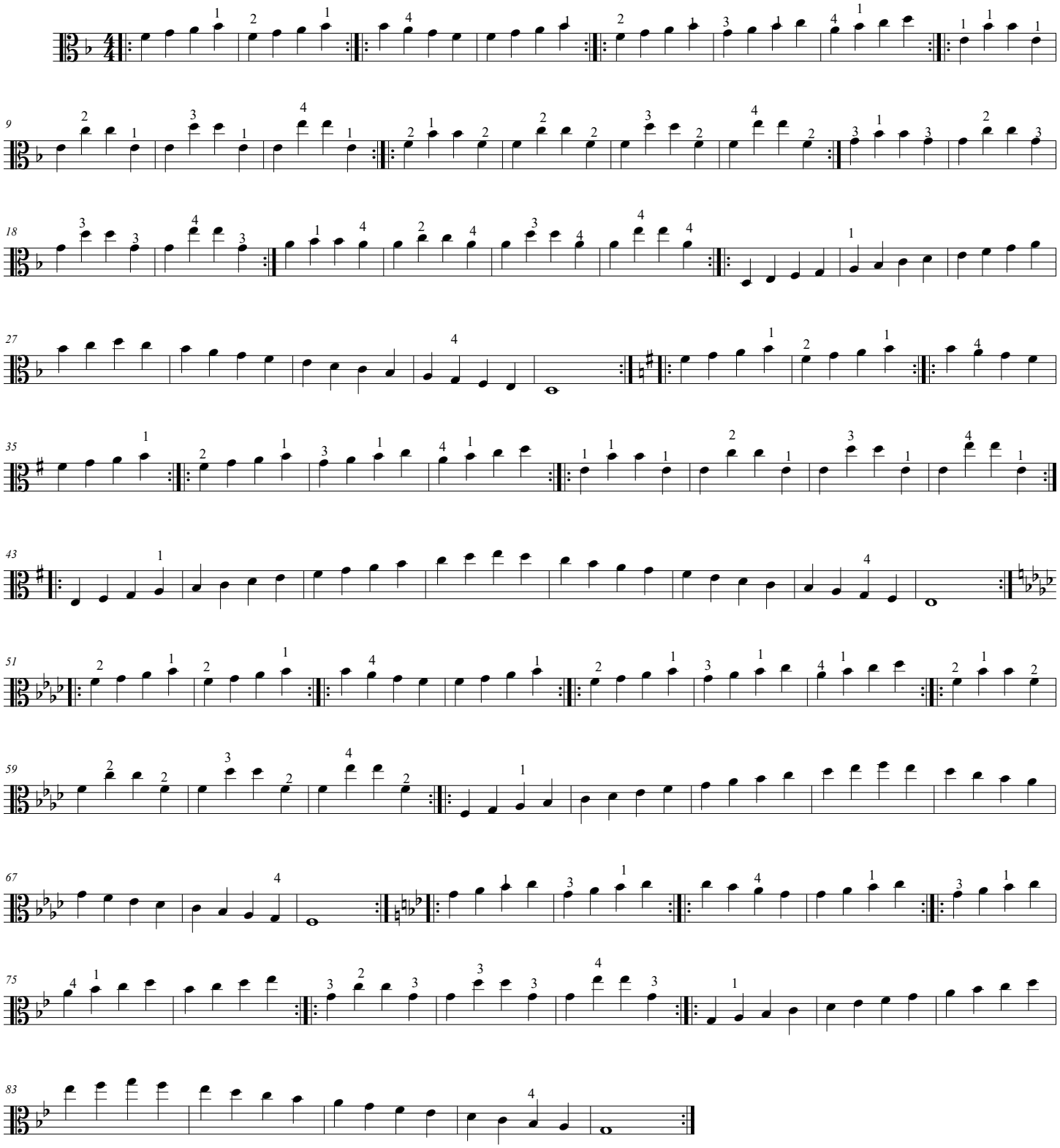
Study No.14

Position Shifting to and from 5th Position on the G String



Study No.15

Position Shifting to and from 5th Position on the D String



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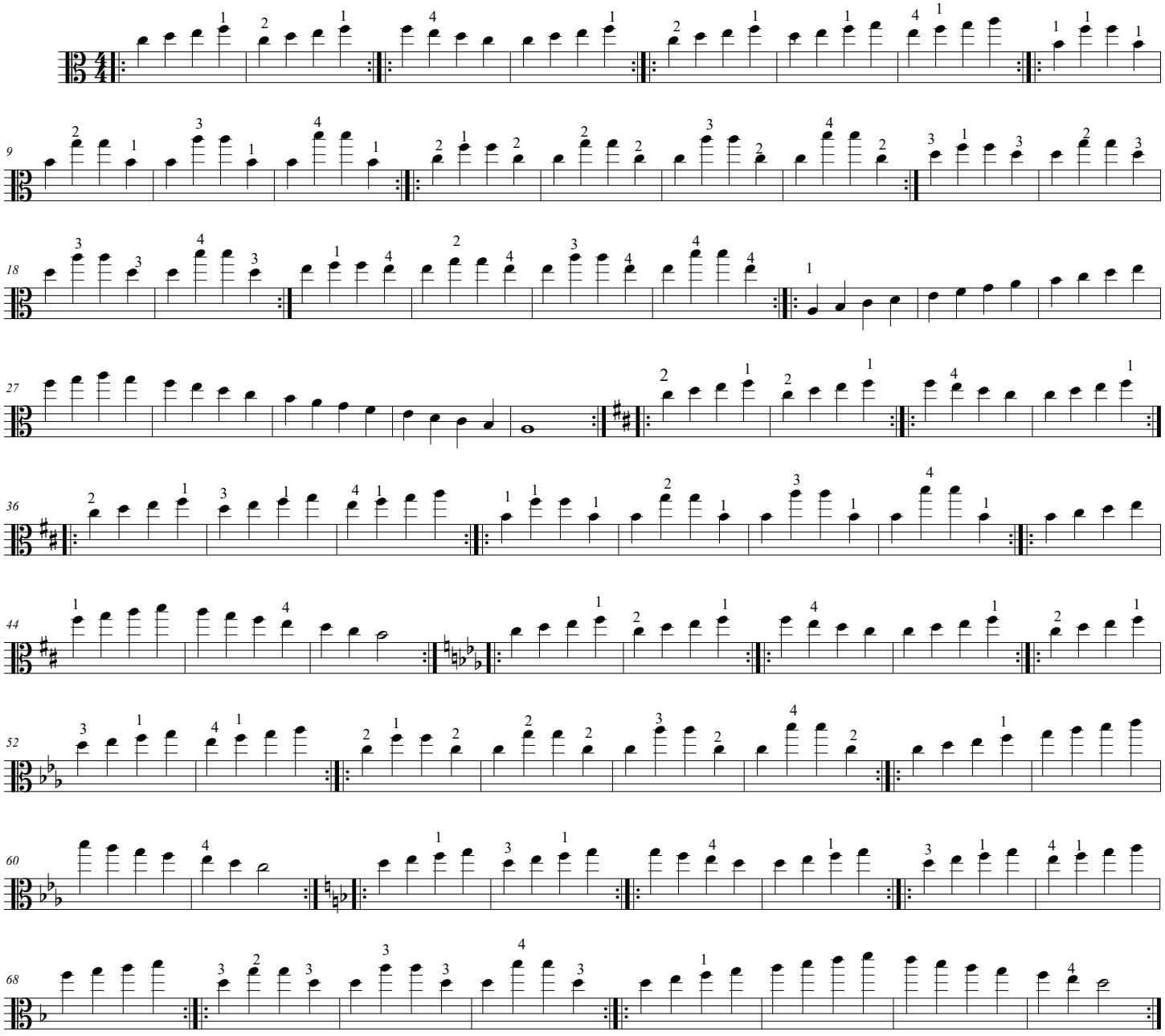
Position Shifting to and from 5th Position on the A String