

Rules and Shortcuts for Marking Music



EVERY MARKING MUST BE MADE IN PENCIL ONLY. Markings should be light, neat, and should be legible to anyone reading your music (including you the next time you rehearse that spot!). It is unprofessional to use highlighters or pens in music, especially since most music played by a professional is rented or otherwise not theirs to keep and must be erased. If you need colors to draw your attention to something, use brightly colored sticky-notes (bonus...they can be removed once you “get it!”).

The following markings are designed for efficiency, but still take the time to write clearly. If the conductor continues with rehearsal and you are still not finished marking...finish! Don't give up because you feel like s/he is waiting on you. If s/he asks you to mark something, or you take the initiative to mark something on your own, then it must be important! ***Your job is to mark your part!***



Eyeglasses - Watch closely here for tempo change



Hold the tempo; don't drag! It can also mean to accelerate a section (*accelerando* or *accel.*)



Hold the tempo; don't rush!



Speedbump! Drag these notes to slow down (*ritard.*, *rall.*, *allarg.*, etc.)

V.S.

Volti Subito - turn the page now! Make this marking underneath the measure during which you should turn the page; depending on tempo, this is not always the last measure on the page.

1, 2, 3...100

Number all of your measures. If a piece is really long, number every other bar or the beginning of each system (line).

,

Breath mark. This can indicate a bow lift, but most commonly means to add a breath or slight, gentle break in the sound.



Arrow UP or DOWN is a reminder to tune a note a little higher or lower.



Use SHARP or FLAT or NATURAL symbols ANY TIME you miss a note or accidental, even if it was an honest, simple mistake. You don't want to make the same goof in a concert!

X

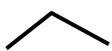
Mark problem spots with an “X” at the end of the line(s) that give you problems. This makes it easier to find the areas needing the most practice and gives a good idea of potential test spots.

//

Cesura (often called “Railroad Tracks”). This marking means “STOP!” and wait for the conductor to continue. Sometimes it can be used to remind you to cut off a note.



Con Sordino. Put on your mute. This shape represents the original string mutes used, like an M. Draw it upside down when it is time to take the mute off (or at the end of a piece).



Half Step. Connect two note heads with this bracket to indicate that the notes are a half step apart (the fingers will often touch for violins and violas)



Whole Step. Connect two note heads with this bracket to indicate that the notes are a whole step apart and need a little more space.

General Guidelines on Marking Music

- **Always bring a pencil to rehearsal.** Mechanical pencils are recommended for their consistent, dependable sharp point.
- **Write on a firm surface.** Usually, this is a music stand. Be sure to hold it stable so it doesn't spin away from you, or have your stand partner help.
- **Two players on a stand:**
 - If you are using your stand partner's music, keep your own music out next to your chair and mark it as well.
 - The inside player traditionally turns pages and marks parts, but this is negotiable.
- **Mark your fingerings,** but do so sparingly. Work toward minimal finger markings, unless a passage is particularly fast or awkward, or if there is a large amount of music and you need fingering reminders.
- **Mark beats or write in the counting** for particularly difficult rhythmic passages.
- **Mark the conductor's beat pattern.** "In 2" or "In 4" will help make sure you are counting accurately.
- **Circle it!** If the conductor consistently reminds you of the same issue, neatly circle the issue or give it a star. This will focus your attention to the issue and can help avoid future mistakes.
- **Neatly circle key changes.** Circling multiple times only tends to distort the key change, often covering up the necessary information (i.e. an added sharp).
- **Focus on your Friends.** If the violas have the melody (and you don't), write "VA" over that part of your music so that you remember to back off and let them shine. You can also write in with whom you share a part (i.e. w/ VC). Common string abbreviations are: Violin = VN; Viola = VA; Cello = VC; Bass = DB
- **Have fun with your markings!** But be sure that any drawings or comments you write are appropriate for all audiences. Also, be sure your "artistry" doesn't affect rehearsal time.

Bow Markings

- **Mark the bow location** you should be using, especially on an entrance:
 - Frog = FR, Lower Half = LH, Middle = MB, Upper Half = UH, Tip = Tip or Pt
- **Mark bowings occasionally,** just to be safe, even if it seems unnecessary. A good check point is to have at least one bow marking every two lines, or after a rest. It also serves as a good rehearsal reference when you need to start in a random spot.



Down Bow. Take time to draw these concisely and with the corners. Otherwise, it can look like a slur.



Up Bow. Take time to draw a nice point.

Articulations and Vocabulary

- **Staccato and Tenuto markings (dots and dashes).** Maybe the most common articulations, these are used to indicate short/stopped or long/connected bow strokes, respectively.
- **Slurs.** These can often be long, linear items to write. Take your time, stabilize the music stand, and make them very clear. Slurs should connect note-head to note-head, not stem to stem.
- **Crescendos and Diminuendos.** Again, these can be long, linear items to write...take your time. You can emphasize these words (*cresc.* or *dim.*) by drawing out the symbol for one to two measures.
- **Simile or sim.** Use this to continue using the same style or bowing. This can prove a great time saver so you don't have to write the same thing repeatedly (like a staccato dot on 50 notes).
- **Translate.** If you don't know that "leggiero" means "lightly," then write it neatly in English. A great online resource is <https://dictionary.onmusic.org/>