10 Steps to Producing Better Materials

If you are a composer who prepares your own parts, it's pretty likely you are using computer software to typeset your music. The two most commonly used programs are Sibelius and Finale. I would like to offer some tips on how to prepare materials that are elegant and readable for your performers, so you won't receive the dreaded call from the orchestra librarian “there are some serious problems with your parts.”

1. Proofread Your Score
It may seem self evident, but I seldom receive a score from a composer that has been professionally proofread. Don't trust the playback features of your software; they are helpful tools, but they can't substitute for careful visual examination of the music.

Be sure to print out the final score and carefully go through it. Proofreading onscreen is like scuba diving for treasure without a light; it's pretty hit or miss what you will find. Pay particular attention to the extremes of the page and/or system (the end of one system, the start of the next). Be organized, and don't try to read the music and imagine it in your head. Instead, try to look at the musical details and check everything for accuracy. Check items for continuity. If it says pizz., did you remember to put in arco? If the trumpet is playing with a harmon mute on page 10 and you never say senza sord., it will be that way for the rest of your piece, or the player will raise their hand in rehearsal and waste valuable time asking “do I ever remove this mute?”

2. Make a Copy of the Score and add Cues
Wait a minute, you say. My program has this nifty “dynamic” (linked) parts feature. It's all automatic. You push a button and just like a bread machine, the parts pop out. That might work for commercial music where the music is simple and speed outweighs care and planning of the parts. But your score might have 2 instruments sharing a staff, or divisi string parts on a single staff that need to be written out in the parts. You might have put in labels and reminders in the score that need to be in different places in the parts. There are lots of things that should be different in a part, that are difficult to do with “dynamic” parts.

I recommend making a copy of your score file and adding all the cues, preparing it for part extraction. This can be the master file you use for your work, preserving the original corrected file you created after step 1 for printing for the conductor.

Finale and Sibelius have plugins that will search for appropriate spots to insert cues. Generally, if a player rests for more than 8 bars, they need some kind of cue before they come in again. If they rest a long time (say 50 bars or more) they will need “landmark” cues along the way (think road trip, cross country) so they don't get lost.

Cues must be obvious and clear. The 3rd Trumpet player might not be able to hear the violas playing beats 2 and 3 of the waltz movement when they change from F-G to G-A, or something subtle like that. But they will hear when the entire string section enters after sitting out for 40 bars. Cues are sledge hammers, not tweezers.

3. Extract One Part
Extracting parts is a technical process, and things can (and do) go wrong. I recommend extracting one part (preferably in the middle of your ensemble, rather than at the top of the score).
4. Proofread the Sample Part
Print that part out and check all the global elements to make sure they appear, and are in the
right place. Things drift; sometimes they are “attached” to the wrong spot, and sometimes (in
Finale, primarily) people don’t code them so they will extract properly. Your job at this stage is
to find all the problems and fix them before you extract the parts. It will save a lot of time and
grief later.

5. Correct the Cued Score
If you find any mistakes, go back to your cued score and figure out what went wrong and fix it.
Extract another part and make sure it works correctly. You want to be sure the process is going
to work smoothly.

6. Extract the Parts
This is where you do get to just push a button. But pay attention to the filenames you use for
your parts. Both Sibelius and Finale allow you to number the parts so they display correctly in
dialogue boxes, etc. It’s helpful to have the title in the filename too, and of course the
instrument name as well.

7. Go Through Each Part for Layout
The first thing you want to do is decide where the page turns will be. Your software will have
an option to do it automatically, but it doesn’t do the task as well as you can by actually
looking at the music. A 2-bar rest might be adequate in a flute part (at a moderate tempo), but
in a bass part the same rest might not afford enough time to make the turn. And a 2-bar rest in
a trumpet part, where they must also insert a mute, is a terrible page turn. Remember that the
printing convention is odd-numbered pages are always on the right, so those are the pages that
must have a good page turn. You can always insert a blank somewhere if you need to.

After you’ve made the big decisions about good page turn spots, look over the part for major
sections. Try to make them start a new system. Is your piece in movements? Try to make those
start a new page. Do any of them run “attacca”? Don’t put a page turn at that spot then, unless
they don’t play at the start of the next movement.

8. Edit the parts
Now that you’ve done the big work, the next step is what typesetters call “walking the lines.”
You go through the part, on screen, and look at every line, every bar, step by step, and correct
collisions and other problems.

9. Proofread the parts
I recommend printing out all the parts and checking them carefully. We look closely at problem
spots, such as instruments that were “separated” (e.g. flutes 1 and 2 shared a staff in the score,
but are 2 separate parts when extracted). Mistakes can happen when splitting them apart.

10. Correct the parts
The last step is to correct the parts and then print them for the players.

You might be wondering, “do I really have to do all of this work”? The automatic parts look
o.k., and I’m sure the Chicago/New York/Idaho Symphony/Philharmonic/Tuba Octet can read
them. I would urge you to make the effort to create parts that are clean and easy to read.
Rehearsal time with the musicians is a scarce (and rapidly vanishing) resource. You don’t want
to squander it.

—BILL HOLAB
BILL HOLAB MUSIC
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Bill Holab is the owner of Bill Holab Music, a firm that provides essential services to composers and publishers. Some of the composers that are represented include: Mason Bates, Kenji Bunch, Richard Danielpour, Jake Heggie, Pierre Jalbert, Gabriel Kahane, Cindy McTee, Kevin Puts, Michael Torke, and others.

Bill Holab Music has provided high-quality music engraving, typesetting, and design to the industry for over 30 years. Besides preparing complex, detailed concert works, we have supervised Broadway shows, film scores, and jazz works including the first largescale jazz work engraved with computer typography software, Charles Mingus’s Epitaph.

Specializing in contemporary opera, we have prepared over 30 operas for performance and publication, including: Adamo Lysistrata, Glass Appomattox, Kepler, The Sound of a Voice, Waiting for the Barbarians, Catan Il Postino, Gordon The Grapes of Wrath, Portman The Little Prince, Golijov Ainadamar, Heggie Moby-Dick, LaChiusa Send, Rodriguez La Curandera, and Bernstein West Side Story.

Holab has served as Director of Publications for G. Schirmer/Associated Music Publishers, Director of Production for Universal Edition, Editor for C.F. Peters Corporation, and Director of Publishing for Schott Music Corporation. He brings decades of experience as both an editor and autographer to the relatively new area of computer note setting.

As a consultant, Holab has worked with Sibelius, Ltd., MakeMusic Inc. (FINALE), San Andreas Press (SCORE) and wrote the technical documentation for SCORE. He is a composer and studied at the University of Michigan and the Juilliard School.
MUSIC PREPARATION GUIDELINES

The following guidelines pertain to book design for music publications. They are a good starting point for most pieces, but the specific details of a work and its instrumentation will dictate the choices one must make.

Orchestra Scores
11 x 17" or 11 x 14" (for smaller ensembles)
Staff size 4 mm. to 6 mm.
Margins: sides .75"; top/bottom .5"
First page of music should have a copyright notice centered on the bottom of the page

Front Matter:
Title page:
- Title
- Composer
- Lyricist (if applicable)
- Short instrumentation (e.g. “for Orchestra”)
- Description (e.g. “(full score)"
- Name of publishing company (centered on the bottom).

Notes page:
- Full instrumentation (for orchestra works) including doublings and percussion instruments
- Duration
- Commissioning credit
- First performance

Piano/vocal Scores
9 x 12", 7 mm. staff
Margins: sides .75"; top/bottom .5"

Choral Scores
8.5 x 11", 5 mm. staff
Margins: .5" all around

Chamber Scores
9 x 12", 7 mm. staff
Margins: sides .75"; top/bottom .5"
Solo instrument(s) with piano, make the solo instrument staves 60% of the standard size (7 mm.)
Parts
9 x 12", 7 mm. staff
Margins: sides .75"; top/bottom .5"

The first page of each part must have the instrument name
All subsequent pages must have a small header at the top indicating the instrument name. 
*Please don’t forget to do this—we have printing problems if you don’t include this information.*

All odd-numbered (righthand) pages must have page turns
If a part begins on page 2 (for page turns) please include a title page as page 1.

In some cases we do 11 x 14" parts when we have to accommodate music that has serious page turn problems.

In some cases we do foldouts, but only as a last resort.

Page Numbering
Odd-numbered pages on the right (recto)
Even-numbered pages on the left (verso)
*There are never any exceptions to this rule.*

In music, we do not count the front matter (pages before the music starts). The first page of music is page 1, and the rest of the book should continue sequentially. The convention is to put page numbers in the top "outside" corners; odd numbers on the right, even numbers on the left.

If you have a large number of pages in the front matter (e.g., more than 4-6 pp.), they are numbered with lower-case roman numerals, centered at the bottom of the page.

The first page number is never shown (e.g., page 1 or page i).

Typefaces
- Tempo indications (above the staff) are in a serif font like Times, bold, 11-12 pt.
- Tempo alterations (like rit. and accel.) are the same size, but italic
- Measure numbers should be stated at the start of every system, at the top, in italic. It is not necessary to number every bar, number every 5 or 10 bars, or to use rehearsal letters in addition to measure numbers
- Title, composer, lyricist. These are usually in a different font, usually a serif font, like Garamond, Goudy, or Caslon. Whichever font you use, that same font should be used for page numbers, header text at the top of pages, and for the front matter.
- Page numbers on large-format scores (11 x 14 or 11 x 17) should be 12 pt. so that they are visible when we print smaller study scores
- Text above the staff (Technique text) is roman, same font as tempo indications.
- Text below the staff (Expression text) is italic.
SUGGESTED RESOURCES

SELECTED READING
Teach Yourself The Art of Music Engraving & Processing by Ted Ross
CD-ROM $24.95
[Printed edition is currently out of print, but used copies can be located]

Music Notation by Gardner Read

Music Notation in the Twentieth Century, (A practical guidebook) by Kurt Stone
Hardback - 357 pages. W W Norton & Co. – 1980 $45.95

Handbook of Instrumentation by Andrew Stiller
CD-ROM $39.95
Printed Version $64.00

The Technique of Orchestration and CD Recording by Kent Kennan and Donald Grantham
~$75.00

Best source for these and other books on Music Notation: www.npcimaging.com

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www.finalemusic.com [the official Finale site]
www.finaletips.nu [Finale tips]
www.tgtools.de [the most comprehensive plug-in package for Finale]
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www.scoremus.com [the official SCORE site]

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