

# Sheet Music Rehearsal and Performance Markings

*Toward a more standardized system of marking parts in rehearsal*

There are many markings used by professional musicians and writers which may not be commonly seen. Most of these markings are intended to clarify potentially confusing notation and/or to indicate a performance change. Ultimately our goal is to make music; any markings we read or write must always be support this aim.

The goal of marking your music during rehearsal is to assist in interpreting the music. To that end, all marks should be clear, easy to understand, and quick to write. There is no standardized system of markings, but over time we have developed a shared vocabulary known to most in the music world. The following markings are reasonably common among professional musicians, and those few that are not so commonly seen I hope are easily understood in context.

**N.B.** Unless the music is your own personal property, all markings should be made with a dark, soft pencil (B or HB) – these markings can be easily seen and (perhaps equally importantly!) easily erased. It is a courtesy to erase marks before returning borrowed music; if the parts have been rented (as is often the case with musical productions) there may even be a charge made if parts are not erased.

Correction of printed errors: If the printed music is in error, make the correction as neatly as possible so that future readers will not need to re-do the correction.

- 1) **Accidentals:** in printed music, an accidental used as a reminder is placed in parentheses, e.g. ( $\sharp$ ). In rehearsals not only is there often not enough time to do this, there may not be enough space. It is permissible to write the accidental in front of, above, or (as a last resort) below the note head without using parentheses.
- 2) **Changes** in dynamics, speed, etc. can be marked in the usual way (e.g. F, PP, faster, cresc., etc) but care should be taken that the marking is in a logical position. You might put a pair of glasses (meaning “watch out”) to draw your attention to problem spots. You can also mark special fingerings, or even write instructions (“lighter”, “bring out”, etc.):



Figure 1

- 3) **Omissions:** to indicate that a printed marking is to be ignored, or a single note or a few notes omitted, CIRCLE the note or rest. The convention is that a circled note is replaced by an equal valued rest; in other words, don't play the note, rest instead. Don't cross out the note, as this tends to cause counting mistakes. Additionally, it's much easier to correct if you want to undo the change:



Figure 2

To indicate omitting a large section, use the word “tacet” (literally, “silent”) with or without start and end marks as in transposition.

- 4) **Repeats:** To make those “hidden” repeat signs more obvious, add angles to the double dotted bar line:



Figure 3

If you are asked to play a repeated section only once, you may need to add “1X only” (play first time only) or “2X only” (play second time only). You may also need a marking such as “4X” meaning play a total of four times.

- 5) **D.S. al Coda:** sometimes the sign (⌘) is hard to find – to highlight its position put a pair of glasses or an arrow above or beside it. If the sign is a long way back, you might write a bar number or rehearsal letter beside the “D.S al Coda”.
- 6) **Page Turns:** If you have a fast page turn to make, the symbol “v.s.” is used at the end of the last bar on the first page (“volti subito” = “turn quickly”). If it looks as though you have to v.s. but you actually have rests on the next page, I often extend the last staff by adding a “many bars” symbol with the number of bars rest coming up.



Figure 4

- 7) **Transpositions:** to indicate that an entire passage is to be transposed (typically by an octave up or down) use a marking like this:  $\neg 8vb$  over the entire passage:

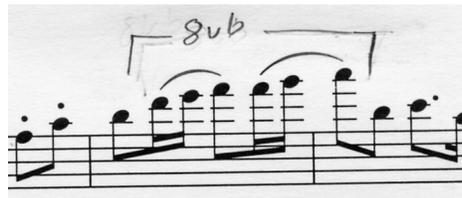


Figure 5

If the passage is several lines long, you don’t need to mark the whole passage, just use  $\neg 8vb$  at the beginning and  $\neg$  over the last few bars. Note:  $8vb$  means transpose down one octave;  $8va$  means transpose up one octave. Other transposition can be noted as +1 (up one tone), -1/2 (down one semitone), etc

- 8) **Pitch adjustments:** if you need to “shade” a note up or down use an arrow pointing in the desired direction. As a reminder just to watch the tuning, I prefer to use a double headed but vertical arrow: (↕)
- 9) **Vamp:** the term “vamp” is interpreted as “repeat until x” where x indicates an action on stage, some line of dialogue, the conductor’s cue, etc. One of the most famous (and challenging) vamps is found in the musical My Fair Lady at the beginning of “Madame Librarian”. The bass clarinet plays a repeated figure under dialogue for 2-4 minutes before the song actually begins.
- 10) **“Repeat ad lib.”:** means much the same as “Vamp” but there is an implication that the number of repeats may vary from one performance to the next (often used during scene changes to allow for delays/problems)

I hope these comments will help you to mark your parts clearly, and enable you to continue producing beautiful music. Please share these suggestions with other musicians in the interests of improving our interpretation skills.

I welcome your comments and ideas for other markings—please send me any suggestions you have for this document . Don't forget to erase your marks before you hand in your parts!

Musically yours,

*Dallas*

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