

Guidelines for Parts Preparation

By David Vayo

Both the cover and the first page of the part should have the name of the instrument in the upper left corner. Any information that appears on the inside cover of the score should also appear on the inside cover of the part, unless it's completely irrelevant to that instrument.

In chamber music the pianist typically plays from the score. However, the larger the ensemble, the more page turns there will be, so sometimes a pianist will ask for a separate part.

In chamber music and choral music, vocalists typically read from the score. In music for voice with large instrumental ensemble (opera, orchestral song cycles, etc.) vocalists work in rehearsal with a piano reduction of the ensemble's music; it's the composer's responsibility to prepare this.

A transposing instrument must of course have a transposed part. Remember to transpose any cues as well. Make sure to delete any meaningless key signatures your notation software might create in transposed parts (this is a common problem).

Every part must contain every tempo, every rehearsal letter, and every symbol or phrase from the score that affects tempo or timing: accelerandos, ritards, fermatas, caesuras, etc. Multimeasure rests are standard in parts but must be broken up when needed to show this information.

8 ½ X 11 (letter) paper works fine for most parts, though 8 ½ X 14 (legal) or even 11 X 17 (tabloid) can be used if they make page turns more feasible, and/or if the player's part will be situated relatively far away and thus needs to be printed larger than normal (this happens often in multiple-percussion setups). Professional orchestras usually use parts that are slightly larger than 8 ½ X 11.

Letter-size parts typically have 8 or 9 lines of music; more tends to create vertical crowding, which makes the part harder to read. Horizontal crowding results when too many measures are on one line, compressing all of the musical symbols and making reading difficult. A well-formatted part looks spacious and guides the eye easily.

A page of a part can have fewer than 8 or 9 lines, or even none, if that facilitates a page turn.

When the player needs to make a physical change (put in or take out a mute, change mallets, etc.), give the instruction for the change at the earliest possible moment and confirm it at the moment when it's directly relevant (for example, "insert cup mute" and, later, "cup mute").

If an instrument doesn't play at all during a movement, put "TACET" under the name of the movement. If the instrument plays in the early part of a movement but then rests until the end, rather than putting in lots of rests you can simply put the phrase "TACET TO END" where the rests begin, unless there isn't a break between that movement and the next one.

A cue should be provided when an instrument hasn't been playing for, roughly, more than 12 to 15 measures (depends on tempo, meter, etc.) If an obvious tempo change, fermata etc. happens shortly before the player comes in, that can function as the cue. Verbal cues are also possible in some situations ("recorded electronics begin"). However, most of the time, a cue shows what another instrument is playing just before the player reading the part is supposed to enter. Choose a musical line for the cue that the player will clearly hear; start it far enough in advance and include enough of it that the player has time to recognize it and prepare to play. Cues are written in two layers: one layer for the cue itself, the other layer being a whole rest for the instrument relevant to the part. The cue itself should be labeled with the name of the instrument that is playing; cue notes should be smaller than normal and should have stems going in the opposite direction from normal. It's best to keep the cue in a clef that the part's instrument reads in; feel free to use 8va or 8vb (even 15ma or 15b) to facilitate this.

Proportional notation can necessitate putting full or partial score systems in a part, since the player may need to see what others are playing in order to coordinate their playing with the others'. This is a type of cue.

Page turns take place at the ends of odd-numbered pages, since these are on the right side in bound music. An effective page turn exists when a relatively lengthy rest is placed at the end of a line of music. (Exception: don't set up a page turn during a dramatic silence.) If only a short rest is available for a page turn, write "V. S." (volta subita, or "quick change") above the rest. If there's only a short rest before the page turn but (unbeknownst to the player) more rests continue on the next page, put the word "(time)" above the staff, to indicate that the player doesn't need to panic.

Starting a part on page 2 (a left-hand page) rather than page 1 (a right-hand page) can sometimes be the best arrangement for page turns. When all else fails, you can either experiment with larger paper and/or use foldouts. It's not unreasonable for a player to have a total of four open pages on the stand, two of which are foldouts. Here's a suggested example of page-numbering a foldout: "9a (foldout)", a foldout that attaches to page 9.

Despite all of your care in preparing good page turns, your players might either not bind their parts, printing them one-sided and sliding them over on the stand as they play, or use a tablet computer and foot pedal to read the part and change pages. But until and unless tablets (or page-sliding; doubtful) become universal, parts need to include effective page turns.