Section 1.10

Summary of Notation Guidelines

Disclaimer  This is only an introduction to standard notation practice. For exhaustive guidelines, see the affordable and excellent book The Essential Dictionary of Music Notation by Tom Gerou and Linda Lusk (Alfred Publishing, 1996).

Staves  Guidelines for clefs and staves:
1. Lines and spaces are numbered from bottom to top. Lines: 1 to 5; Spaces: 1 to 4.

System  2. The plural of staff is staves. One line of music in a score is a system, which may have many staves for the individual musicians.

Clefs  3. The treble clef always circles around the "G" line (2nd line).
4. The two dots in the bass clef always surround the "F" line (4th line).
5. The center of any C clef always indicates middle C (C4).

Noteheads  Guidelines for noteheads and accidentals:
6. Noteheads should be as tall as 1 space.
7. Noteheads should be oval and slightly slanted (see figure).
8. Whole notes are oval but do not slant.

Accidentals  9. Normally, accidentals immediately precede the notehead to which they apply.
10. If a chord requires 2 accidentals on notes closer than a sixth, write the upper accidental directly to the left of its notehead, and the lower accidental by its notehead staggered to the left (see 10 below).
11. For > 2 accidentals, stagger them as shown in figure 11 below.
Guidelines for **stems** on notes:

12. 3rd line and above - stems down; below 3rd line – stems up. If two parts are in one staff, use stems up for the higher part, down for the lower.

13. Stems down go on the left of the notehead, stems up on the right of the notehead.

14. Stem length is normally one octave.

15. Stems for notes using ledger lines extend to the 3rd line, regardless of how high or low they are.

16. When notating seconds, the higher pitch goes on the right. If the stem goes up, it connects to the lower pitch. If the stem goes down, it connects to the higher pitch. However, if there are two voices on one staff stating a 2nd, the higher pitch’s notehead goes on the left (see the last example for item 16 below).

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Guidelines for **beams** on notes:

17. For beamed notes, stems should go up or down based on the note farthest from the middle line.

18. Beam notes in the same beat together (see also item 22, next page).

19. Beams should be about twice the thickness of stems and may slant slightly if the notes ascend or descend.
Rhythm and meter

Guidelines for **rhythmic notation** and **meter**:

20. Observe the usual position of rests within the staff (may be adjusted when there are two parts in one staff).

21. Dots for dotted rhythmic values are never placed on a staff line. If the notehead itself is on a staff line, the dot is put to the right of the note but in the space above it.

22. Always attempt to use rhythmic notation to clarify the placement of beats in the meter. Use ties if needed.

Key signatures

Guideline for **key signatures**:

23. Key signatures must be written correctly for the given clef.