

Ornaments & articulation

The notes tell a player what to play. These small marks tell them *how* — whether to decorate a note, cut it short, lean on it, or join it to the next. They are the difference between correct and alive.

ORNAMENTS · DECORATING A NOTE

SIGN	NAME	PLAYED AS	NOTES
	Trill	Rapid alternation with the note above	Start on the upper note in Baroque and Classical music; on the written note after that.
	Mordent	Note, the one above, note again	A single flick. Fast and on the beat, not before it.
	Lower mordent	Note, the one below, note again	Same flick downwards — the vertical stroke through the sign is the only difference.
	Turn	Above, note, below, note	Four notes curling around the written one. Placed after a note, it decorates its ending.
	Grace note	A tiny note squeezed in before	Written small with a stroke through the stem. Takes its time from the note it leans on.
	Tremolo	The note repeated as fast as possible	Strokes through the stem. Two strokes means quavers, three semiquavers.

ARTICULATION · SHAPING A NOTE

SIGN	NAME	PLAYED AS	NOTES
	Staccato	Short and detached	A dot above or below the notehead. Roughly half its written length — the gap is the point.
	Staccatissimo	Very short and sharp	A small wedge. Shorter than staccato, and usually harder.
	Tenuto	Held for its full length	A short line. Gives the note weight and time without making it louder.
	Accent	Attacked, then settling	Louder at the start than the notes around it.
	Marcato	Accented and short	The strongest of the marks. Use it sparingly or it stops meaning anything.
	Slur	Joined smoothly, no re-attack	A curve over notes of <i>different</i> pitch. Singers give it one syllable; string players one bow.
	Tie	One note, held across	A curve between notes of the <i>same</i> pitch. Add the values together and play once.
	Fermata	Held longer than written	The pause. How much longer is the performer's decision.

SLUR OR TIE?

Look at the two pitches. Same note, it is a tie and you play once. Different notes, it is a slur and you play both — smoothly.

WHERE TO WRITE THEM

Articulation marks sit opposite the stem — stem up, mark below the notehead. Ornaments always go above the staff.