Score-reading spotter

A full score tells you everything at once, which is why it looks impossible. It isn't: the page is organised, always the same way, and once you know the order you can find any fact on it in seconds.

TOP TO BOTTOM — SCORE ORDER NEVER CHANGES

Woodwind at the top, then brass, then percussion, then any keyboard or harp, then voices, and strings along the bottom. Within each family the highest instrument sits highest — flute above oboe above clarinet above bassoon. So if you want the cellos, look near the foot of the system; if you want the piccolo, look at the very top.

THE FIVE FACTS TO FIND FIRST — BEFORE YOU READ A SINGLE NOTE

1. **The instrument names** down the left edge of the first system. Later systems abbreviate them, or drop them altogether.
2. **Which staves are transposing.** A name with a key after it — *Clarinet in B♭*, *Horn in F* — does not sound what it reads. Everything else does.
3. **The clefs.** Cellos, bassoons and trombones read bass, and sometimes tenor; violas read alto. A clef can change mid-piece, so check every system.
4. **The concert key.** Read it off a non-transposing stave — flute or strings — never off the clarinet.
5. **The tempo and metre** at the top left, and the bar numbers or rehearsal letters you will use to talk about it.

WHERE THE WORDS GO — AND WHO THEY BELONG TO

ON THE PAGE	WHAT IT IS	WHOSE IT IS
Above the top stave	Tempo, expression, rehearsal marks	The whole orchestra
Below a stave	Dynamics and hairpins	That one instrument
Above a stave, in italics	Playing instruction — *pizz.*, *con sord.*, *a2*, *div.*	That one instrument
Between the string staves	Nothing — strings keep their own marks	Read each stave separately

READING DOWN A CHORD — THE ONE SKILL WORTH PRACTISING

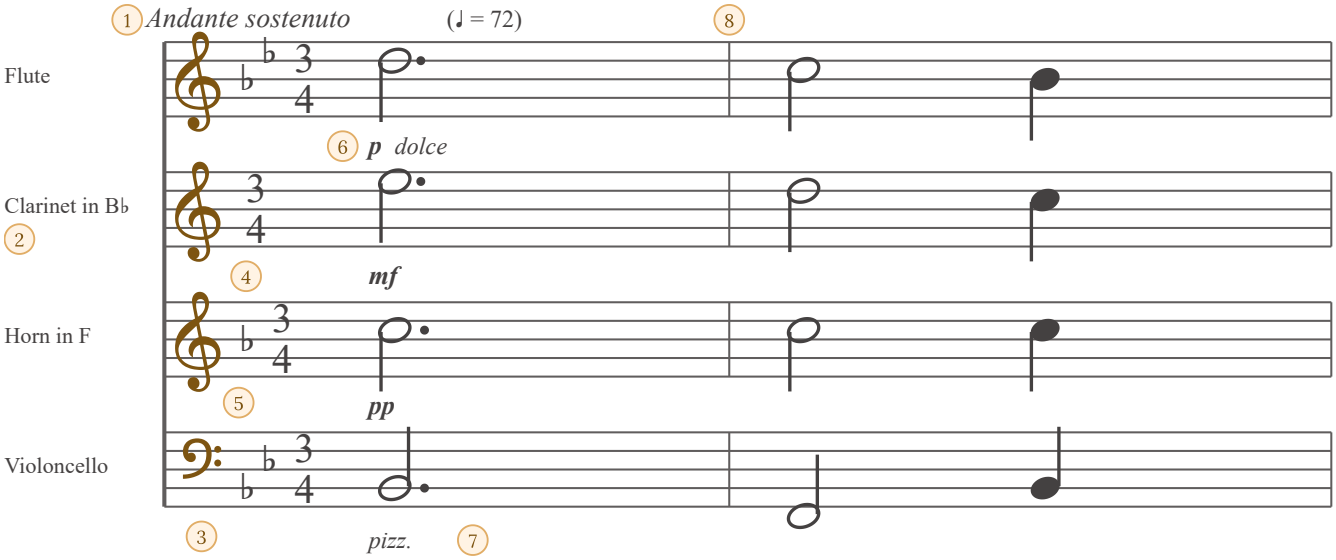
Pick a beat and read straight down the system, turning each transposing stave into concert pitch as you go. Write the letter names in a column in the margin, lowest to highest, and you have the chord. Do that for the first beat of every bar and you have the harmony of the passage — which is how conductors learn a score, and how markers expect you to answer.

The trap. The lowest-sounding note is not always on the lowest stave. A double bass sounds an octave below its written notes, so a bass written above the cello may still be sounding below it. Transpose first, compare after.

Spot it on the score

Answers overleaf

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____



1 tempo and its beat
2 a transposing label
3 the clef at the foot
4 a stave with no key signature
5 one flat only
6 a dynamic and a term
7 a playing instruction
8 the barline

A · READ THE FACTS OFF THE PAGE

ONE OR TWO WORDS EACH

1 How many beats in a bar, and what kind? _____

2 Which two staves are transposing? _____

3 What is the concert key? _____

4 Which stave did you read it from? _____

5 Which clef is at ③? _____

6 The clarinet's written key? _____

7 Which stave has no key signature? _____

8 Which instrument plays quietest? _____

9 What does the cellist do at ⑦? _____

10 What does *sostenuto* ask for? _____

11 How many bars are printed? _____

12 Which family sits lowest here? _____

B · WORK IT OUT

A SENTENCE EACH

13 Name the three concert pitches the flute plays, in order.

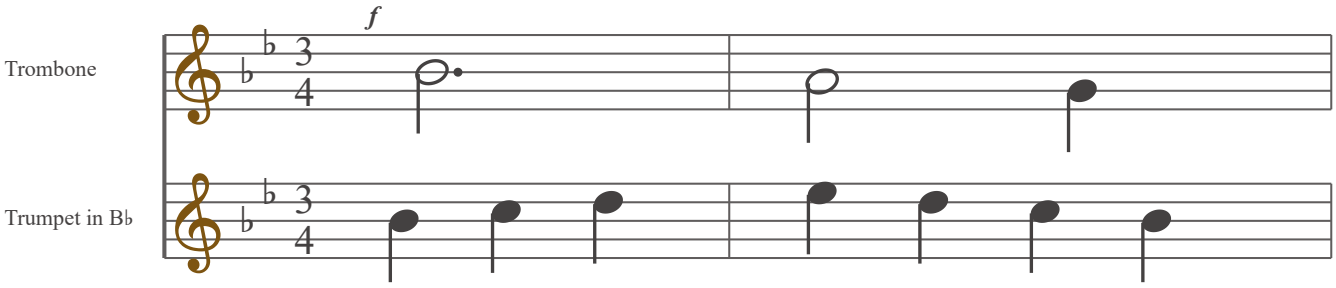
14 The clarinet reads E, D, C. What does it sound, and what does that tell you about the two lines?

15 The horn has one flat where the flute has two. Explain why that is correct.

16 Read down the first beat and name the concert chord, lowest note first.

C · five things wrong

Concert key B♭ major, 3/4 · circle each fault and number it



17 Two faults are about the trombone stave. Name them.

18 One fault is in the trumpet's key signature. What should it be, and why?

19 One bar cannot be played as written. Which, and what is wrong with it?

20 One fault is where a mark is printed. Which mark, and where should it go?

ANSWER KEY

TWENTY POINTS · ONE EACH

A · OFF THE PAGE

1 Three crotchet beats — 3/4. 2 Clarinet in B♭ and horn in F. 3 B♭ major. 4 The flute or the cello — the two non-transposing staves. 5 The bass clef. 6 C major, no sharps or flats. 7 The clarinet's. 8 The horn, at *pp*. 9 Plucks the string instead of bowing. 10 Sustained, held tone — full length on every note. 11 Two. 12 The strings, at the foot of the system.

B · WORKED OUT

13 D, C, B♭ — a step-by-step descent onto the tonic.

14 It sounds D, C, B♭ — a tone below what it reads. The clarinet is doubling the flute at the unison in concert pitch, even though the two staves look a tone apart.

15 The horn transposes up a perfect fifth, so concert B♭ major becomes F major on its part — and F major has one flat.

16 B♭ in the cello, F in the horn, D in the flute and clarinet: a B♭ major chord in root position, spread over three octaves.

C · THE FIVE FAULTS

17 **Score order** — the trombone is printed above the trumpet; the higher brass goes on top. **Clef** — the trombone is written in the treble clef; it reads bass, or tenor for high passages.

18 **Key signature** — the trumpet in B♭ carries the two flats of the concert key. Transposed up a major second, B♭ major becomes C major: no key signature at all.

19 **Bar 2 of the trumpet** has four crotchets in 3/4 — one beat too many.

20 **The *f*** is printed above the trombone stave. An instrument's dynamics belong below its own stave; above the top stave is reserved for marks meant for everybody.

MARKING

16–20 fluent · 11–15 solid, check the transposing staves · under 11 work through page one again with a real score open beside you.