Tissimo

MUSIC THEORY · HANDOUT 389

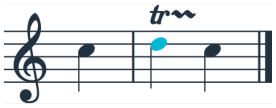
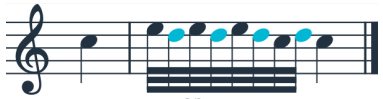
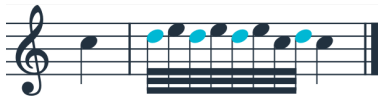
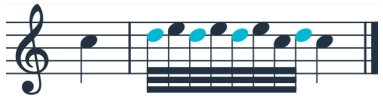
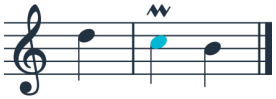
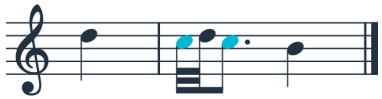
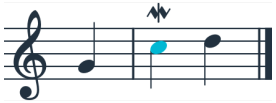
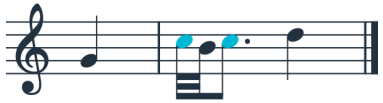
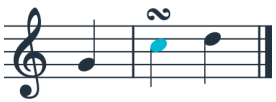
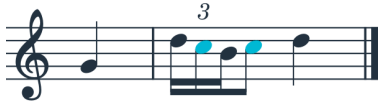
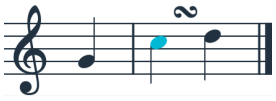
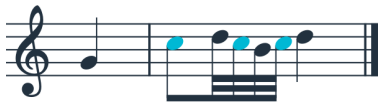
Ornaments through the eras

The signs have barely changed in 300 years. The way players turn them into notes has.

LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/ornaments-through-the-eras

So read a sign **together with the date** of the music. Each row prints one sign, then writes it out the way each era played it, on the same short tune. **The barline is the beat:** notes just after it are on the beat; notes squeezed in before it come early. The written note is **cyan** (in a chord, its top note). A box that spans several eras means the reading did not change.

1 · SHAKES AND TURNS

The sign	Bach's time Baroque, to about 1750	Mozart's time Classical, about 1750–1800 (Haydn too)	Beethoven's time about 1800–1830: the changeover	Romantic & today from about 1830: Schumann, Brahms…
Trill shake · *tr*, often with a wavy line after it		 Starts on the note above, on the beat; at a cadence you may hold that first E a little longer. Often ends C–D, into C.	 or  Both starts are heard, and scholars still disagree. Let the line decide.	 Starts on the written note: Hummel's new rule (1828). A small note printed before the trill shows another start.
Short trill upper mordent · inverted mordent · Pralltriller: the short wavy line, no stroke		 Bach's own table calls this sign a trill (Trillo): from the note above, on the beat. D already sounds, so hold it.	 Shorter and snapped: hold D a moment, then one quick C–D–C (C. P. E. Bach's "Pralltriller").	 Main–above–main, starting right on the beat: two quick notes, C–D, then the written C. The D is struck, not held over: the written note now comes first.
Mordent lower mordent: the wavy line with a stroke through it		 Main–below–main, quick and on the beat: C–B–C. In the 1700s a long note could take a longer one: C–B–C–B–C. Names vary: some books call the sign without the stroke a mordent, and a few 1800s methods (Hummel's, Spohr's) even drew the stroke on the short trill. Go by the stroke, and check the edition.		
Turn over the note gruppetto · Doppelschlag. Upside down, it starts on the note below		 Above–main–below–main, D–C–B–C, starting on the beat, in every era: three quick notes, then the written note.		
Turn between notes the same sign, printed after the note		 The written note first; near its end the turn, D–C–B–C, leads into the next note. The same in every era.		

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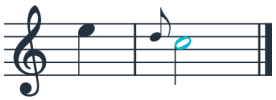
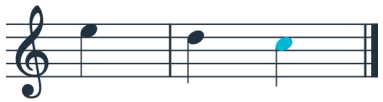
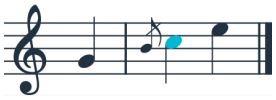
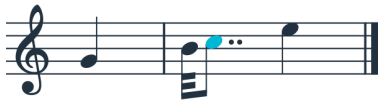
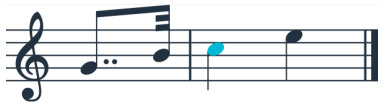
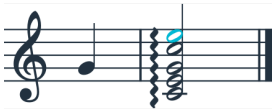
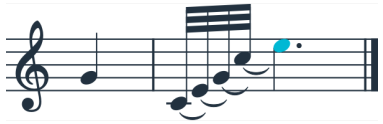
Ornaments through the eras, continued

The small notes and the rolled chord, then how to choose a reading for your own pieces.

2 · SMALL NOTES AND ROLLED CHORDS

The sign	Bach's time Baroque, to about 1750	Mozart's time Classical, about 1750–1800 (Haydn too)	Beethoven's time about 1800–1830: the changeover	Romantic & today from about 1830: Schumann, Brahms…
Long small note appoggiatura: a small note without a slash, before a long note			On the beat, leaning: the small note takes half the main note (two-thirds of a dotted one); the written note follows, softer. From Beethoven's time long ones were often written out in full-size notes.	 Long appoggiaturas are now written out; a small note is usually short.
Short small note grace note · acciaccatura: a small note with a slash through its stem			No slash yet: before a short note, quick, and usually on the beat. It takes almost none of the written note's time.	 Now slashed. Quick: on the beat with the bass, or just before it, as here.
Rolled chord arpeggio: a wavy line beside the chord			From the bottom up, starting on the beat; hold every note. Harpsichordists often spread chords a little even without the sign.	 Players differ: on the beat, or early so the top note lands on it, as here.

3 · HOW TO CHOOSE

1. **Find the date.** When was the piece written? Read the sign the way its own time did.
2. **Look for help in the print.** A small note before a trill shows its first note; small notes after it, the ending. Good editions often write ornaments out in a footnote.
3. **Listen to the line.** Don't strike a key twice in a row: if the note before is the note above, hold it into the shake; if it is the written note, start above.
4. **Keep the beat.** The ornament fits in around the beat; the beat never waits for it. An even, slower shake beats a fast, lumpy one.

Write them out: Exercise 79.

Chopin, the exception

In the Romantic column, Chopin (1810–1849) kept older habits. His pupil Karol Mikuli wrote (1879) that he **mostly began trills on the note above** and wanted them even rather than fast, and that he held up the great Italian singers as models for turns and appoggiaturas. Edward Dannreuther wrote (1895) that Chopin's pupils remembered him as strictly old-fashioned about ornaments; in his music a short grace note usually goes **with the chord, on the beat**. He played Bach all his life.

Try it Find these bars in your pieces. **Minuet in G minor** (Handout 381), bar 9, the short wavy line on A after B♭: play it the old way, holding the B♭ into beat 2, then A–B♭–A–B♭–A (just A–B♭–A at a quick tempo); then the later way, A–B♭–A right on beat 2. Which one joins the B♭ to the A more smoothly? **Mozart, K. 545** (Handout 379), bar 25: start the trill on the note above, B–A–B–A…, and let the two small notes, G–A, lead to G. **Minuet in G** (Handout 238), bar 5: the mordent C–B–C, the same in every era.

Sources: J. S. Bach's table (1720) · C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch* (1753) · L. Mozart (1756) · Türk (1789) · Hummel (1828) · Czerny (1839) · Mikuli's Chopin preface (1879) · Dannreuther, *Musical Ornamentation* (1893–95)

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