Stem Rules

which way do stems point? — the middle-line rule, plus stems to draw yourself

Stems are not decoration — they follow one strict rule, and knowing it makes your reading faster and your writing professional. The dividing line is the **middle line of the staff** (line 3): low notes reach UP into the staff, high notes reach DOWN into it, so stems never poke far outside. Study the rule, then finish the stemless notes below.

THE RULE IN ACTION



Below the middle line: stems UP (right side). On or above it: stems DOWN (left side).

The middle-line rule

Notes **below line 3**: stem goes **UP**, attached on the notehead's **right**. Notes **on or above line 3**: stem goes **DOWN**, on the **left**. (Line-3 B may go either way — printers usually choose down.) Stems are about one octave long — roughly the height of the staff minus one space. In a beamed group the note farthest from the middle line decides (Handout 393).

YOUR TURN — DRAW THE STEMS



These noteheads lost their stems. Draw each one: check the note against line 3, pick the side, and keep it straight and one octave tall.

Check Grade yourself against the rule: F, G (below line 3) → stems up-right; B, D, E, G-above (on/above) → stems down-left; low C → up. If you drew a stem on the wrong side it will look subtly "backwards" — your eye already knows the rule from every piece you have read. Bonus: find one up-stem and one down-stem in any song in your book.

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