# Tips for producing a MusicXML file prior to importing into braille music translation software

31 Jan 2018, SAZ

## Introduction

Braille music can show all that appears in stave notation but is not a transliteration. It has its own conventions. Braille music is a linear code whereas stave notation is graphical. Both systems use a variety of discrete formats.

The notes to follow consider the creation and mark up of a MusicXML file prepared by a sighted person from a stave notation print or electronic copy. The creation will use a stave notation package with an automated MusicXML export. At no stage is it anticipated that editing is done with the MusicXML file. The person undertaking this work needs to understand stave notation but does not need to know braille music.

## Accurate stave notation

1. Whilst the electronic version may look identical to the original print score, checks need to be made that any feature around, rather than on, the stave have been correctly cateogorised. An example is checking that Tempo text has been entered as such rather than just stave or system text.

#### What to do: Hover over the feature to see the properties. If needed, re-enter the information under the correct tag.

1. Check any feature in the music notation which has a literary meaning, for example, a breath mark as a tick or a comma, has been put in as music notation not text.

#### What to do: Hover over the feature to see the properties. Re-enter the information under the correct tag, if necessary.

1. Check that the placement of all features around the stave have been linked to the relevant note. It is easy for these symbols to move away from their note in altering the layout of an electronic score (especially when working on a print score where the parts are physically close.) Some packages have the option for “setting” positioning. An example is checking that a crescendo hairpin starts and ends on the appropriate two notes. A further example is checking that fingering in chords has each finger attached to the appropriate note.

#### What to do: Hover over the feature to see to which note(s) it is attached. If wrong, delete and replace with correct locations. This usually means highlighting several notes and then adding the feature.

1. Check that unusual features (signs for unusual section repeats, unusual ornaments, sticking signs for percussion, harmonics, arpeggiated chords) all have attributes correctly described. This includes elements forming one sign, as in accidentals applied to ornaments and in figured bass.

#### What to do: Hover over any unusual sign and check that it is described accurately. If not, note this in the mark up as it is unlikely that braille music transcription software will pick up the element.

1. Decide whether or not the original system and page layout needs to be maintained in the braille copy. For some types of scores, such as orchestral scores, this is rarely a factor (and the resulting braille is unlikely to have more than two bars per braille page). For other purposes such as for a teacher who is a braillist working with a beginner pupil playing from the print copy, then knowing where the pupil is is important.

#### What to do: Either consult with the end user or, if a general resource, make clear what decision has been made.

1. Check that in piano music where music moves from one stave to another the notes remain in the intended part. This concerns beaming.

* **What to do:** Check that the beginning and end, along with moves between staves through the passage, are attached to the relevant notes. Check that beaming across the staves has been used where relevant.

### Preparation for braille music (general)

1. In braille music, where a crescendo or diminuendo (or other features) starts or ends part the way through a note, braille requires the duration of the note to be altered to show where this point is. An example: a minim (half note) may have a crescendo hairpin starting half way between it and the next note.

#### What to do: Mark up the need to edit manually on the hardcopy or note the location on a list of alterations to be made in the braille copy.

1. In braille music, where there is more than one voice in a part, all parts need to be complete bars’ long. In print, rests are often omitted to make the music look clearer. Stave notation packages enable the voices to be complete bar by bar using “hidden” rests.

* **What to do:** Either alter in the file or note for checking post translation any bar where there are hidden rests.

1. In braille music, where there are chords in one part the direction of reading needs be set. This is usually done in the options set up before undertaking translation. There may, however, be some bars where, say, in the print an inner voice has been attached to the outer part for part of a bar. This may be better separate in the braille.

#### What to do: Either alter in the file or note for checking post translation any bar where the part writing needs to be restored.

1. In vocal pieces in braille music, the score is not arranged in bars but in phrases. Currently no braille translation package automates this, not least as it is a balance between musicality and practicality – phrases with cells in a line.

#### What to do: Mark up or note potential line breaks.

1. In vocal pieces decide what braille code is to be used for the lyrics and how additional verses are to be presented.

#### What to do: Have reasons for the choice made!

1. In lead sheets, a variety of notation is used for chords, including shapes. There are equivalents for these using expressions such as “aug””sus”.

* **What to do:** alter chord symbols to literary letters and numbers.

To see how the mainstream approach this area with one particular music notation package (MuseScore), please see:

<https://musescore.com/shoogle/scores/3434266>

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