Guide to Choosing MusicXML Files suitable for Music Braille Transcription

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# Introduction

This document is a simple guide for agencies and/or end users to choosing ideal (or good-enough) MusicXML files suitable for braille music transcription. Sighted and blind users will check the files differently, so guidance is given for both user groups.

Why is this guidance needed? Because not all MusicXML files available on the internet are suitable for conversion into music braille. Some are really only suitable for viewing the printed score on-screen or in ink print, and do not have enough structure and detail stored inside the file to convert it into effective music braille. If you try to convert a poor file like this the music braille file will probably contain serious errors or omissions.

# Score Resources

A good list of websites where you can find MusicXML files, or files which can be exported to MusicXML is:

* MusicXML.com:  
  <https://www.musicxml.com/music-in-musicxml/>

Among these sites, some pointed here have reliable MusicXML files (other sites have not been tested):

* Project Gutenberg Sheet Music: <https://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:The_Sheet_Music_Project>
* Open Score Project:

[https://MuseScore.com/openscore](https://musescore.com/openscore)

Note, it is preferable that the original source is a standard music notation file, such as created by Finale, Sibelius or MuseScore. This ensures that the MusicXML file exported from that file will be the best it can be, ready for conversion into music braille.

# 1. Checking the file if you are sighted

Sighted users can choose and check MusicXML files quite simply. Just download the MusicXML or Finale/Sibelius/MuseScore files, and open them using appropriate music notation software, to see if everything looks correct, or compare it to the original print score. A quick listen can also be helpful, for finding wrong notes.

You should check to see if everything is correct: e.g., whether notes are correct, whether voicing is correct, whether articulations, dynamics, slurs, symbols, lines and texts are all there, whether all staves and instrument combinations are exactly the same as the original, and so on.

To open MusicXML files, it’s recommended to use Finale or MuseScore, which give the best result. Sibelius has many limitations when opening MusicXML files. If there are no serious errors or only a few missing things, simply correct them and export to MusicXML again, and this should be ready for braille transcription.

Also, we recommend that agencies get MusicXML or even original source files from the publishers, which will give minimum errors. However, due to different preferences the engravers may have, or due to the limitation of certain software’s export function, the files still need to be checked before going into braille. The main things to check are piano hand changes, voice distributions, placement of slurs, lines, dynamics, pedals and texts.

# 2. Checking the file if you are blind

Since blind users can't check the scores visually, they have to use other checking methods.

First, after downloading the score, open it using appropriate music notation software and listen to the music. if there are many wrong notes, the score is not ideal. If the notes are correct or with very few errors, the score is ideal to go to the next step.

Second, if using Sibelius or MuseScore, navigate in the software to see if there are dynamics and texts. Then export a PDF and convert it to text to confirm if there are texts, in case some of the dynamics or texts are hidden for playback purposes.

After these steps, the score is basically good enough for braille transcription. If sighted assistance is available, it’s highly recommended to have a simple check against the original score to see if everything is here. If the score is downloaded from MuseScore site, it’s necessary to make contact with the file uploader to confirm the authenticity of the resource. The main questions are: Is the score a faithful production from the original (thus all notes, articulations, dynamics, symbols, lines and texts are copied)? Is the pagination the same as original (this is less important)?

Lastly, if none of the ideal notation files are available, blind musicians can search for Midi, and import to notation software for a general listen. This is the last choice of music learning, and is not feasible for braille transcription.