

# ORNAMENTATION

**Ornamentation** or **embellishment** is the practice of adding notes to a melody to allow music to be more expressive. An ornament is an **auxiliary** note, or set of auxiliary notes associated with a main note. Before an ornament can be performed, it must be **realized**. To realize an ornament, the notes of an ornament and their time values must be precisely specified.

Ornaments can be written in one of three ways: 1] as an auxiliary note in small print ahead of the main note, 2] as a special sign over the main note, 3] as a series of additional notes in small print known as a **fioritura** played against a series of accompaniment notes.

The image shows a musical score with two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has three flats. The first measure shows a trill ornament over a dotted quarter note, with the trill notes written in small print above the main note. The second measure shows a fioritura ornament, which is a series of sixteenth notes written in small print above the main note. The score includes performance instructions like 'tr' and '(delicatiss.)' and a measure number '48'.

**Except for the trill, all ornaments have been realized the same way in all eras.**

## ORNAMENTATION IN THE BAROQUE ERA

In the Baroque era, the performer was free to invent an unlimited number of configurations around the melody. This practice, known as **free ornamentation**, was expected of performers – especially on repeated material in an effort to add interest to the music.

The most basic of all ornaments is the **long appoggiatura** which is always written as a small auxiliary note preceding a main note. The auxiliary note is usually written as an eighth note and is played *on the beat of the main note* with emphasis (louder), borrowing its time from the main note to which it is slurred. The long appoggiatura takes half the time of the note that follows or two-thirds of the value if the main note is dotted.



The modern “acciaccatura” or “grace note” ♪ with the cross-stroked eighth note that appears in some editions of Bach’s music is not accurate and was never used in his time.

Two examples of the long appoggiatura and their realizations are shown below.

The image shows two examples of long appoggiatura notation and their realizations. Each example consists of a 'Written:' part and a 'Played:' part. In the 'Written:' part, a small eighth note is written before a larger eighth note. In the 'Played:' part, the two notes are slurred together, and the first note is played with more emphasis. The first example shows a quarter note with a small eighth note preceding it. The second example shows a dotted quarter note with a small eighth note preceding it.

The small notehead was used in spite of the fact that musicians of the time knew the long appoggiatura took part of the duration of the main note. Its purpose was to let musicians know that it was in fact an auxiliary note so they wouldn’t add another ornament to the ornament. Putting the auxiliary note in small print let the performer know that the main note was clearly part of the harmony while the auxiliary note created dissonance and was meant to be emphasized. If the two notes were the same size and time value, the second note might be mistaken for a passing tone.

In 1720, J. S. Bach made this ornament table for inclusion in a book of music he made for his eldest son:

The **trill** symbol shown in Bach's table can also be written longer  or indicated as . Any of these signs may indicate a long or short trill. All trills begin on the beat and start on the auxiliary note. The number of repercussions in a trill depend upon the time value of the main note, the tempo of the work, and the skill and taste of the performer. The minimum number of repercussions in a short trill is two.

Written: Played:


The **mordent** (from the Latin word "mordere" which means to bite) shown in Bach's table is played on the beat and moves downward quickly to the lower note and returns instantly to the main note. The mordent should be played as rapidly as possible.

The **trill and mordent** in Bach's table requires a minimum of two repercussions for the trill (although Bach's table shows three) with the suffix (mordent) containing the usual two notes.

For the **turn** in Bach's table play the upper note, then the main note, descend to the lower note, and finish by playing the main note again. This is a combination of an upper appoggiatura followed by a lower appoggiatura. The note values of a turn are generally divided equally, but in performance beginning ones may be hurried along so there is time to hold the last note.

When a turn is placed between two notes, the turn is played after the principal note has been sounded. The rhythm of the turn must then be determined by the amount of time available for it.

Written:      Played:



The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. On the left, a single note is written with a trill sign (a squiggle) above it. On the right, the same note is shown being played, with a trill consisting of a series of eighth notes. The trill is divided into three sections: the first section has two notes, the second section has three notes, and the third section has five notes. Brackets below the notes indicate these groupings.

The **ascending trill** as shown in Bach's table indicates to approach the trill from below the main note, play the main note, then ascend to the upper auxiliary note and continue to trill with at least two repercussions as usual. The **descending trill** indicates to approach the trill from the upper auxiliary note, play the main note, then play the lower auxiliary note, return via the main note and continue to trill as usual.

The **ascending trill with mordent** as shown in Bach's table indicates to play the note below the main note, play the main note, then ascend to the upper note and trill for a minimum of two repercussions, then follow with the lower auxiliary and finish with the main note. The **descending trill with mordent** indicates to play the upper note, then the main note, descend to the lower note, return via the main note to the upper note, and continue the repercussions until descending again to the lower note and finishing on the main note.

For the **appoggiatura and mordent** as shown in Bach's table, the auxiliary note will take half of the time value of the main note while the mordent fills the remaining time value with the main note, lower auxiliary, and main note repeated.

For the first **appoggiatura and trill** shown in Bach's table, the upper auxiliary note will take half the value of the main note as usual. The upper auxiliary note also acts as the first note of the trill to follow. The trill employs the remaining eighth-note value. This sign is not used in present-day editions.

In playing the second **appoggiatura and trill** in Bach's table, the long stroke means to linger on the first note of the trill (the upper note). This ornament contains exactly the same notes as the previous example. In many writings of the period, it is stated that the first note of the trill is to be strongly emphasized in dynamic and length.

## ORNAMENTATION IN THE CLASSICAL ERA

Ornamentation in the Classical era is realized in the same way as the Baroque era although composers are beginning to write out ornamentation into the score rather than leaving it to the performer.

Classical era practice also emphasized that the auxiliary note of the long appoggiatura be printed in its actual note value rather than always using an eighth note. The slashed eighth-note symbol common to this period is simply an old way of writing a 16th-note. It is played on the beat for the value of a 16th-note.

Trills still begin on the beat with the upper auxiliary note like those of the Baroque period. However, they are most commonly completed with a turned ending (**termination**) whether or not the turned ending was printed in small notes, large notes, or not at all.

Written:                      Played:



The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. On the left, three notes are written, each with a trill sign (a squiggle) above it. On the right, the same notes are shown being played, with a trill consisting of a series of eighth notes. The trill is divided into three sections: the first section has two notes, the second section has three notes, and the third section has five notes. Brackets below the notes indicate these groupings.

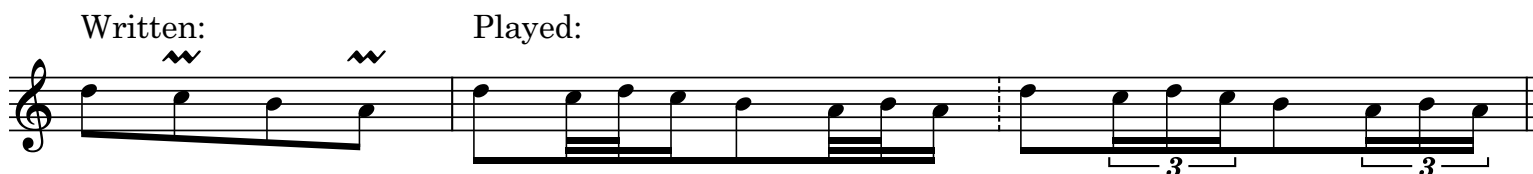
The **short appoggiatura** is written as a small 16th or 32nd note before a main note and is played very quickly, on the beat of the main note. In the same way the slashed eighth-note is really just a 16th-note, a double-slashed eighth-note is likewise a way of writing a 32nd-note. Either way, both are played on the beat with their time value subtracted from the following note.

## ORNAMENTATION IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

The trill in the music of **Beethoven, Chopin, Field, Schubert, and Weber** generally begins on the upper auxiliary note with a termination added whether indicated or not. The trill may begin slowly and increase in speed. When the trill is played legato with a preceding upper or lower 2nd, it can begin on the main note.



A small note on the same line or space as the trilled note indicates that the trill begins on that note (the main note). The trill sign  $\text{tr}$  is frequently used to indicate a short trill beginning on the upper auxiliary. The same sign can indicate a passing or transient trill, especially in rapid, descending passages.



Classical era composer Johann Nepomuk Hummel proposed that trills be played beginning on the main note rather than the upper auxiliary reasoning that the melody is more apparent when the trill begins this way. His ideas powerfully influenced **Brahms, Grieg, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Schumann**. The trill in their music of generally begins on the main note usually with a termination added whether indicated or not. The trill may begin slowly and increase in speed. A small note on the line or space a second higher than the trilled note indicate that the trill begins on that note (the upper auxiliary). This applies to all other composers from the Romantic era to the present.

The **acciaccatura** (*a-CHACK-a-too-ra*), from the Italian “to crush”, is often mistakenly played as a short appoggiatura but should be played almost simultaneously with the main note. The term **simultaneous appoggiatura** is preferred.



## ORNAMENTATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

Most composers indicate their intentions precisely so that realizing ornaments is no longer left to the performer. Trills are performed as in most music of the Romantic era. The short appoggiatura (also known as an “acciaccatura” or “grace note”) is generally played ahead of the beat. The long appoggiatura, turn, and mordent are no longer written as ornaments but are written as ordinary notes.