

# PART I: PREPARATION

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# 1. Background

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The first version of Sibelius was released in 1993. Later that year George Benjamin's *Antara* became the first Sibelius-engraved score to be published,<sup>1</sup> showcasing just how flexible Sibelius was even in its earliest incarnation – it included nonstandard time signatures, tuplet fragments and various gradations of microtones.<sup>2</sup>

Sibelius was notable for being a “What You See Is What You Get” or WYSIWYG program, in which users would make edits directly on the score. This was vastly different to the workflow of SCORE, a notation program first released six years prior that is still considered by many to be the best.<sup>3</sup> In SCORE everything is entered as code, rather than clicking notes onto a stave. The workflow more closely resembles the process of engraving by hand. Wikipedia demonstrates how to input three bars of Bach:



To create the staff:

```
IN 1      Input staff at vertical level 1
0 200 1   Sets the left end of the staff at position 0,
           the right end of the staff at position 200,
           and uses staff level 1 (this staff) as the basis for spacing
```

The five passes of data entry:

```
Notes    TR/K3F/4 4/R/C5/BN4/C5/G4/A/C5/B4/C5/D/M1/G4/C5/BN4/C5/D/F4/G/A/G/F/M1/E/MD1;
Rhythms  E/S//E///S//E///S//E//S//Q/S//H;
Marks    FE 20/MP .74;
Beams    2B;
Slurs    1 +2/6 +7/11 -12/15 -17/18 -19;
```

from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SCORE\\_\(software\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SCORE_(software))

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<sup>1</sup> Engraved by the fantastic Richard Emsley, who was involved in the development of the software. He has worked on some truly remarkable scores including Thomas Adès' *Piano Quintet*, as well as providing the examples for Elaine Gould's notation bible *Behind Bars*.

<sup>2</sup> A perusal score can be viewed online for free at [www.fabermusic.com/music/antara-765](http://www.fabermusic.com/music/antara-765)

<sup>3</sup> Sadly SCORE is no longer supported on modern machines; hardcore fans cling on to computers from 20 years ago just to continue using it.

More time-consuming and more specialised, certainly, and you may consider yourself lucky that you can point and click. There is an advantage in the SCORE workflow however: you are forced to consider how the music will look *before you begin*. This is the most important, most essential step for getting good results out of any notation software: know exactly what a good result looks like. Not sure what that is? There are plenty of resources to help you!

*[10. Recommended reading]*

## 2. Before you open Sibelius

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It is important to remember that Sibelius is primarily a music *notation* program, not a music *composition* program. Writing music in Sibelius is a little like running a national Test and Trace system in Excel - it's *technically* possible, but there are other methods you should also consider.<sup>4</sup> This guide assumes you intend to engrave a finished composition, rather than write a new one. If you *are* using Sibelius to compose then this guide will still be of benefit, but try to limit yourself to just inputting raw notation, and leave layout and formatting until the piece is finished – any changes you make to the music during the composing process are simply *guaranteed* to mess up your perfect engraving!

As is necessary for using SCORE, knowing how the finished sheet music should look is important to using Sibelius effectively. Let me repeat: *knowing how the finished sheet music should look is important to using Sibelius effectively*. This is not limited to just how many systems should fit on a page or what stave size to use, but every little detail and every drop of ink that will be printed. Sibelius is not a blank canvas; a default, “empty” score still has a set of spacing rules, engraving rules, magnetic layout rules, symbol designs, note-head designs, all of which can (and many of which *should*) be adjusted. Imagine it is 1980 and you are about to produce a neat score in pen and ink – every mark you make will be deliberate. Sibelius’ role should be to automate much of the process, not make decisions on your behalf.

Don’t panic – we’ll explore all the properties you can adjust later on in this guide.

There is one more thing you can do before you open Sibelius (if you want): head back over to [www.notationcentral.com](http://www.notationcentral.com) and pick up a new music font. I think *November 2* looks pretty sweet, and *neueweise* is very sleek and modern. The font I recommend you pick up, though, is *Norfolk*. It’s a free (but you can donate if you want to) recreation of Dorico’s *Bravura* font designed to work in Sibelius, and it’s really, really nice. Download it now if you fancy a change from the default Sibelius symbols (you should) and we’ll use it later (you could also pick up a *Scoring Express* package too while you’re there!).

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<sup>4</sup> I am not particularly interested in arguing over the single best way to compose, as there isn’t one; every person is different, and every piece is different, so write in whichever way works best for you. I merely point out that Sibelius was developed as engraving software – composing with it was an afterthought – and it is best suited to this.

## 3. Score setup

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Fire up Sibelius. There are many templates you can choose from in the **Quick Start** menu, under **New Score**; they are also all useless<sup>5</sup> and you can disregard them. The only “template” you need is **Blank**. Click it once<sup>6</sup> to progress to the setup page.

### 3.1 Document Setup

#### *Page size*

The first thing we’ll choose is our page size. In our digital age of PDFs and nkoda it is easy to forget that sheet music was, is, and will be (for a few more years at least) printed on a physical medium (paper!). The size of printed music is an interesting topic (I think so, at least) and if you are working for a good publisher you’ll be able to use one of many sizes. If you live in the US you’ll also have a choice to make between various sizes (9 × 12 is good!). In the rest of the world, however, you’re probably going to want either A4 or A3.<sup>7</sup>

You may already have *Letter* selected; if this is a size you are unlikely to ever use, head to the Finder bar<sup>8</sup> and open **Sibelius > Preferences... > Files**, and under **Default Page Size** you can choose **European sizes**. You could also make sure **Default measurement units** are in mm if you prefer these.

#### *House Style*

For now we’ll keep our **House Style** as (**Unchanged**). The House Styles feature in Sibelius is incredibly powerful, though all the presets are disappointingly poor; we’ll create our own later. [4.4 *Where things go – Creating house styles*]

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5 Unless you purchased a Scoring Express package from Notation Central – those are great!

6 If you double-click, you’ll skip the setup and find yourself with a blank document; while you can certainly work from here, it’s much more convenient to put your score in order first.

7 Neither of these are perfect – A4 is too narrow, and A3 is really only suitable for large orchestras. A piece for sinfonietta could really do with B4 paper, and an orchestral part 9½ × 12½. Nevertheless, a standard paper size is usually the best option simply because that’s what you’re able to print on.

8 On Windows you’ll have to wait until you have a score open, then go to **File > Preferences... > Files**.

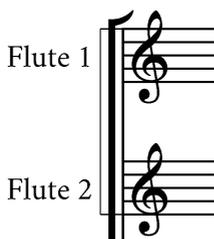
## Change Instruments...

### ADDING INSTRUMENTS

Now we can choose our instruments. If you are looking for **Common instruments** (like piano or harmonica or banjo) it can be helpful to select this category from the **Choose from** dropdown menu. If you want to be particularly adventurous (maybe you want an alto flute) it's easier to find things from **All instruments**, and use the search bar. It is very important to note that searching for an instrument will only search the category you have selected in the dropdown menu, so you won't find an Alto Flute if **Common instruments** is selected. Why? I don't know, but it's annoying. Double-click an instrument to add it to the score. Once it is added you can change its position or add extra staves.

### ADDING EXTRA STAVES

Adding extra staves to an instrument does not add instruments. If you are creating an orchestral score, for example, adding one flute with an extra staff below will just create one part with two staves; instead, add two flutes. Adding extra staves is useful for situations like string divisi - add an extra staff below your violins so you can divide them cleanly.



Adding two instruments



Adding an extra staff below one instrument

### STAVE SIZES

You will notice that there is an option to change the staff size. This is not like the global staff size setting we will find later, and should not be used as such. These staff sizes are all relative to the default 7 mm staff, and are used for things like cue staves in theatre scores, or the violin and cello staves in a full score for a piano trio (that the pianist will read from). Unless you want to

make one staff smaller than another in the same score, leave these all at **Normal**; we'll change the staff size properly later. [4.3 Lines – *Staff size*] Just like everything else we are doing in this setup stage, changing individual staff sizes can be done later on too, and we can even adjust how big they are in relation to the default (although you can only have up to four different sizes in your score).

## 3.2 Time Signature Setup

### *Time signature*

Choosing a **Time Signature** is fairly straightforward. There are plenty available to choose from already or you can make your own just as you would in the score, and if you change your mind you can choose a new one later easily. Add a **Pick-up (Upbeat) Bar** now if you need it (this can also be done later if you change your mind, but it's easier to do it now).

### *Tempo*

I tend to leave adding a **Tempo** until the notes are in, rather than during setup. [5.4 Text – *System text*] This may be because tempi are one of the last things I typically decide on, but there's also a good reason to skip this step: when created in this manner, Sibelius uses a different text style for the **Metronome mark** part. It's easily fixed by selecting it and using **Appearance > Reset Design**, but it means remembering to do that later.



Left: made in Time Signature Setup

Right: made in the score

In any case, if you add one now make sure to include an extra space after your **Tempo text** – Sibelius will only add one between it and the **Metronome mark**, and I think it looks rather squished.

### 3.3 Key Signature Setup

You don't need my help to choose a key signature. If you are writing without a key, make sure you choose **No key** and not **C major**, or your clarinets will be playing in D for no good reason.

A musical score for five instruments: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, and Bassoon. Each instrument is represented by a staff with a treble clef (except for the Bassoon which has a bass clef). The key signature is C major, indicated by a single sharp (F#) on the Clarinet in Bb staff. The staves are grouped together by a large bracket on the left.

A score in C major

A musical score for five instruments: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, and Bassoon. Each instrument is represented by a staff with a treble clef (except for the Bassoon which has a bass clef). There is no key signature indicated on any of the staves. The staves are grouped together by a large bracket on the left.

A score with no key

### 3.4 Score Information Setup

Rather infuriatingly, this only offers a small selection of the information fields available for a score – things like subtitles and dedications are missing. Nevertheless, you can fill these out now if you know them, or leave them blank if you want; we can add them later. Don't check **Create title page** yet though, as this will only add a single page, and title pages in Sibelius are a pain to deal with. We will create any title pages when the score is finished. [7.6 Title pages]