

# PART I: PREPARATION

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# 1. Background

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>5</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>6</sup>

Sibelius was notable for being a “What You See Is What You Get” (WYSIWYG) program, in which users would make edits directly on the page. To understand what this means, we’ll contrast it with SCORE, a notation program first released six years prior that is still considered by many to be the best.<sup>7</sup> In SCORE everything is entered as code, rather than clicking notes onto a staff.<sup>8</sup> 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))

<sup>5</sup> Engraved by Richard Emsley, who was involved in the development of the software, and later provided the examples for Elaine Gould's notation bible *Behind Bars*.

<sup>6</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>7</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.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, by the end of this guide you won't be clicking notes onto the staff either – there are better ways!

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*. Notice how slur directions aren't automatic in SCORE? You have to know whether they should go above or below the staff. Barlines aren't automatic either, so watch out you don't add too many notes (or too few!).

As the engraver, you have to have a clear vision of what you want to achieve. Luckily, SCORE will let you achieve almost anything. Even more luckily for you, so will Sibelius! Sure, Sibelius has more semantic knowledge – it knows how many beats should go in a bar of  $\frac{4}{4}$ , which way a slur should curve etc. – and usually this will help you (as will being able to see the score and make direct adjustments to it, rather than looking at code), but sometimes you need to break these rules, and to do that you need to know the difference between what Sibelius is doing by default, and what the finished score should look like.

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*] Once you know what you're aiming for, it's just a matter of cajoling the software into doing it for you – let's get started!

## 2. Before you open Sibelius

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It is important to remember that Sibelius was primarily designed as a music *notation* program, not a music *composition* program. If you want to compose in Sibelius too, go for it! But for the purposes of this guide, we'll be treating Sibelius as purely notation software.<sup>9</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 *guaranteed* to mess up your perfect engraving!

As with SCORE, knowing how the finished sheet music should look is critical to using Sibelius effectively. You *must* know what you want to achieve! This is not limited to just how many systems should fit on a page or what staff 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, notehead designs, all of which can (and many of which *should*, in my opinion) 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. Make Sibelius work for you, not the other way round!

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

One practical matter before booting up Sibelius, particularly if you're on a Mac, is to plug in your headphones/speakers first – in recent versions, headphones plugged in once the program is already running won't be recognised, and you'll have to close and restart to get the sound where you want it. The problem seems to be fixed now, but if you're still running an old version it's worth bearing in mind.

Speaking of sound, and as alluded to earlier, consider picking up Note-Performer from <https://www.noteperformer.com/> (not sponsored!). I know, we're not really discussing playback in this guide, but if you do use playback to help proofread pitches then you'll appreciate the much improved sounds over the standard Sibelius sample library. The free trial requires restarting

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<sup>9</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. Despite being a professional Sibelius-er, I compose best with pencil and paper.

Sibelius every hour (which admittedly can get annoying) but it's indefinite (just sign up for a new one after 30 days), and if you decide you like it the price is very reasonable.

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. You might like the look of *November 2*, or *neueweise*. The font I strongly 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)<sup>10</sup> and we'll use it later (you could also pick up a text font like *Nepomuk* too while you're there!).

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<sup>10</sup> We'll explore this in a bit, [4.2 *Fonts*] but the basic idea is Sibelius' default fonts are a) not particularly good in my opinion, and b) terribly overused by non-professional engravers producing low-quality scores. Choosing a better font is a very simple way to show at a glance that you take your work at least a bit seriously (that is, assuming it really is a better font!).

## 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 generally useless<sup>11</sup> (unless you just happen to need that specific ensemble) and you can disregard them. The only “template” you ever really need is **Blank**. Click it once to progress to the setup page. If you double-click you’ll skip the setup and find yourself with a black document; while you can certainly work from here, it’s much more convenient to put your score in order first.

### 3.1 Document Setup

#### *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!)<sup>12</sup>. The size of printed music is an interesting topic (if you are a big nerd like me) and if you are working for a good publisher you’ll be able to use one of many sizes. If you live in North America you’ll also have a choice 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>13</sup> You probably also want portrait, unless you’re working on a piece for organ, jazz band, or musical theatre.

You may already have *Letter* selected; if this is a size you are unlikely to ever use, head to the Finder bar<sup>14</sup> and open **Sibelius > Preferences... > Files**, and under **Default Page Size** you can choose **European sizes**. Though un-

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<sup>11</sup> Unless you purchased a Scoring Express package from Notation Central – those are great!

<sup>12</sup> The topic of engraving for tablets has been cropping up more and more in recent years, as increasing numbers of performers are ditching their old paper copies in favour of iPads. The most obvious improvement these bring is hands-free page turns, when paired with a pedal. While this is certainly useful, and you might be tempted to make use of this fact when you know your client uses a tablet, I still recommend engraving as though the part will be printed – you never know who’ll be playing it next.

<sup>13</sup> Neither of these are perfect – A4 is too narrow for nice parts, and A3 is really only suitable for large orchestras. A piece for small orchestra 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. Good luck finding B4 paper in the UK!

<sup>14</sup> On Windows you’ll have to wait until you have a score open, then go to **File > Preferences... > Files**.

likely, you can of course do the reverse if necessary. You could also make sure **Default measurement units** are in mm if you prefer these.<sup>15</sup>

## 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<sup>16</sup>; we'll create our own later. [4.4 *Where things go – Creating house styles*] After using this guide, you'll begin to populate this with your own custom house styles, which of course you should use!

## Change Instruments...

### ADDING 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** drop-down 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. 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. 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 necessarily add instruments. If you are creating an orchestral score, for example, adding one flute with an extra staff below will, by default, just create one part with two staves; you may want to add two flutes instead. Adding extra staves is useful for situations like string divisi – add an extra staff below your violins so you can divide them cleanly.<sup>17</sup>

Sibelius recently gained the ability to name individual staves, in addition to an instrument name, and made it easier to separate these out into individual parts. With this feature we can create one flute in the document setup and

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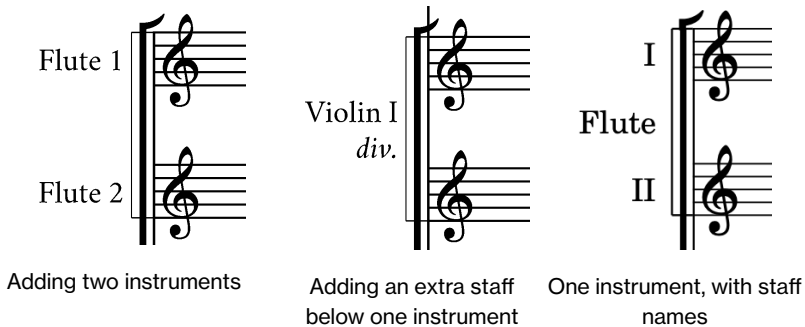
<sup>15</sup> We will be using measurements in millimetres throughout this guide.

<sup>16</sup> If you have bought one of the Scoring Express packages from [notationcentral.com](http://notationcentral.com) you'll have those house styles available; if so, feel free to use one that's appropriate. If you've selected one of the Scoring Express templates then its default house style should already be selected.

<sup>17</sup> When splitting out string divisi I often use hidden instrument changes to change the name in the margin to include div. – some publishers do this, others don't bother.



add an extra staff (as if it's *divisi*), then once inside the score double-click to the left of the top staff (if you have hidden objects visible you should see a light grey dashed box) and type 1 or I (depending on preference). Repeat for the second staff. Of course, you could add as many staves as you need to. We'll discuss splitting this out into individual parts later. [8.1 *Dynamic parts – Creating parts*]



#### STAFF 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

When you add a tempo in the setup phase, Sibelius will by default make the word bold but the metronome mark regular and smaller. If you create the same tempo mark in the score it will all be bold and the same size. Whichever style you choose is a matter for you and your publisher/client to discuss, but do bear this in mind if you add your initial tempo now. If you want it to match your other tempo marks later just select it and use **Appearance > Reset Design** (⇧ ⌘ D / ctrl+shift+D). There's also nothing wrong with skipping this step for now.



Left: made in Time Signature Setup

Right: made in the score

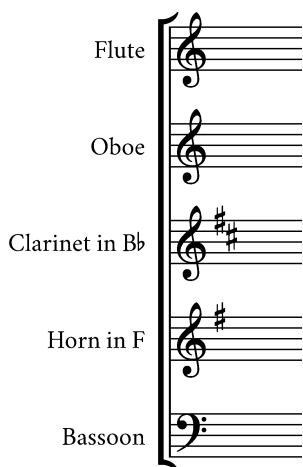
I often find the space between tempo text and metronome mark is inadequate, especially when the metronome mark isn't in parentheses to separate it from the text, so I usually add an extra space after the text so it's not so squished. That's what you can see in the examples above!

## 3.3 Key Signature Setup

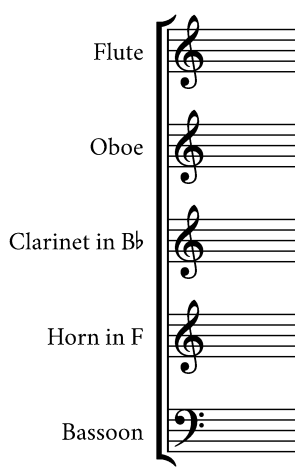
This is mostly straightforward, except if you are writing without a key: make sure you choose **No key** and not **C major**, or your clarinets will be playing in D for no good reason. If you truly need some instruments in different keys (i.e. for polytonal reasons, not just regular transposing instruments), pick the most common key signature and we can add new keys for individual staves later. [5.5. Other Things – Key Signatures]

Choosing an enharmonic key signature (E minor instead of G major, for example) shouldn't make any difference to the way Sibelius works, but if you

navigate using the timeline you might prefer to see the “correct” label. It’s not that big a deal on the first one though.



A score in C major



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.<sup>18</sup> In recent versions of Sibelius, adding information here will actually change the value of the associated wildcard, rather than adding a “dumb” text object to the score; we’ll go into the importance of wildcards later. *[5.4 Text – Wildcards]*

Don’t check **Create title page** yet though, as this will only add a single page, and title pages in Sibelius are cumbersome to deal with. We will create any title pages when the score is finished. *[7.6 Title pages]*

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<sup>18</sup> With that said, it can be helpful to at least add placeholder text if you aren’t sure yet – this will create the text objects in the score and you can edit them later, which is marginally quicker than creating them from scratch.

## 4. Things to change immediately

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### 4.1 An important philosophy for making changes

There are many ways to change things in Sibelius. It is easy to get impatient and make surface-level changes – perhaps you want a different font for your title, so you click it and change it in **Text > Format**. The problem with changes like these is their isolation; you’ve only changed that one text box, and if it gets deleted and you make a new one you’ll have to change it again. Plus, all of your other text hasn’t changed.

If “know what you want to achieve” was our first Golden Rule, let me introduce our second: instead of making many one-off changes, you should always look to *make adjustments at the highest level that you can*. Rather than changing the font for just one text box, change it for the entire text style (or as we’re about to do, change it for *every* text style) in one go. [6.3 *Text – Designing text*] Rather than dragging individual notes around<sup>19</sup> and praying they don’t get respaced by something else later, adjust the **Note Spacing Rule** so Sibelius will do it automatically for you.<sup>20</sup>

This is perhaps the most important concept to understand if you want to use Sibelius effectively and efficiently; the more you employ it, the faster and more reliable your work will become.

### 4.2 Fonts

Head over to the **Text** tab and click the little arrow to the right of **Format** to open the **Edit All Fonts** dialog. This is where we’re going to change all the fonts in the score at once.

#### *Text typefaces*

Your **Main Text Font**<sup>21</sup> is most likely either *Palatino* or *Times New Roman* right now, depending on which version of Sibelius you’re using. These are both fine, capable typefaces, but default typefaces become tired very quickly –

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<sup>19</sup> This isn’t to say you must *never* make one-off manual adjustments; sometimes you should! Context is key.

<sup>20</sup> The default note spacing in Sibelius is generally pretty good; the most important adjustments will be addressed later, but if you want even more control you should read the official reference guide. [4.4 *Where things go*]

<sup>21</sup> Does it annoy me that Sibelius calls it a *font* when it’s really a *typeface*? Yes!

why do you think *Times New Roman* looks so boring? Because you've seen it everywhere! The same goes for any default typeface; the more default Sibelius scores you see, the more you'll come to associate these typefaces with lazy engraving.<sup>22</sup> Change it now to instantly "improve" all your text.<sup>23</sup>

Not all typefaces are created equal. Choose one that is plain and easily legible. If you're unsure, study some scores you think look good and copy those. Many engravers today use *Minion Pro* (me included) and regard it as a safe alternative to *Times New Roman*. *Crimson* is a fairly close free alternative (this guide is set in *Crimson*) that also includes **semibold** and SMALL CAPS, which may be useful in your scores. *Century* and its variations are widely seen in a variety of scores. When engraving an old Italian opera I might reach for *Bodoni*. Have a look at what's out there! And you don't have to pick just one; we'll explore changing individual text styles later. [6.3 Text – Designing text]

If you are a massive nerd you should read Robert Bringhurst's book *The Elements of Typographic Style* first. [10. Recommended reading]

I always stick to serif typefaces, at least for the majority of text. While sans-serif typefaces can look very sleek and modern, particularly on computer screens, serif typefaces are generally considered marginally easier to read when printed, and you want to make techniques and expressions and lyrics as easy to read as possible. Sans-serif typefaces work best for text that the player doesn't necessarily need to read quickly while performing, like titles, bar numbers, rehearsal marks, copyright information etc. Of course, it doesn't really make a huge difference – choose whichever typeface you like!

## Music fonts

Now onto your **Main Music Font**. It's probably *Helsinki Std* by default, and while it's an improvement over the old default *Opus Std* it still has an air of

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<sup>22</sup> With that said, some publishers insist on *Times New Roman*. It can be quite fun (if you are a big nerd) to look at various publishers' style guides and see which fonts they use.

<sup>23</sup> I know this sounds dumb – you've come to me for Sibelius advice, and I'm telling you to pick a cool typeface? That won't improve your engraving! Except it will, kind of; the typeface you use has a huge impact on the look of your score, and subsequently the confidence you inspire in the musician who has to play from it. Would you trust an engraver who uses *Papyrus* for their dynamics, or would you question every decision they made? Show that musician you take your work seriously!

default-ness about it. Unlike your text typeface you won't have a huge selection of music fonts to choose from already on your computer, although you can find more online. *Maestro* and *Sonata* are both pretty good, but if you were paying attention earlier, this is where your copy of *Norfolk Std* comes into play. If you installed it properly you'll be able to select it now, and though you may not see much of a difference yet (you haven't written any notes yet!) you can be comforted in the knowledge that, when you do begin typing, everything is going to look so much better.

Last in this dialog is your **Music Text Font.**, which is used for any specifically stylised text like dynamics, as well as including accidentals, rhythms etc. in text (for transposing instrument names, metric modulations etc.). It probably just changed to *Norfolk Text Std*. You should leave it at that.

## 4.3 Lines

### *Staff lines, leger lines, barlines*

Lines have properties and you should consider changing them. Let's start with staff lines; in 2020 Sibelius increased the thickness of most default staff lines slightly, from 0.1 spaces<sup>24</sup> to 0.13.<sup>25</sup> Some old house styles will still use 0.1. If you want to change this, head to the **Appearance** tab, go to **Engraving Rules > Staves** and look for **Staff line width**. It's possible to change your staff size here too, but you should probably wait; we'll discuss the various different ways to change staff size in just a moment. [4.3 Lines – Staff size]

The ideal staff line thickness will depend on a variety of factors, like page size, music font etc. I think 0.1 is much too thin, 0.13 is an acceptable minimum for most pieces, and (depending on the project) will sometimes increase it to 0.16. Try printing some samples to help you decide.

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<sup>24</sup> While staff size, margins and text positioning are measured in millimetres (or inches or points, depending on your preferences), you'll find most other measurements in Sibelius are given in "spaces" – that is, the space between two staff lines. By doing this, the size relationship between objects remains the same if you change the staff size, which is essential for things like clefs, noteheads etc. that should always appear the same size relative to the staff.

<sup>25</sup> The values you can choose for anything measured in spaces seem strange at first; Sibelius allows these to be adjusted in increments of  $1/32$ , rounded to the nearest two decimal places. Sounds fine on paper, but often (as is the case here) you'll be dealing with very small measurements where in-between sizes might well be preferable. I'm hoping this will be changed one day, but for now we're stuck with choosing the closest to ideal values that we can get.

Now you're happy with how your staff lines look, but barlines and ledger lines are supposed to be thicker than staff lines. If you need to change these, while still in **Engraving Rules** go to **Barlines**; if you've just put staff lines up to 0.16, increase everything here that's currently 0.16 to 0.19. You'll find the settings for ledger lines under **Notes and Tremolos > Leger lines**.

According to Behind Bars [10. *Recommended reading*], stems should be a little thinner than staff lines. As we now know, Sibelius doesn't allow very fine adjustments in these settings, so you may find leaving them the same width looks acceptable. It's possible that putting them down a notch will look okay too. If you need to change them, look under **Engraving Rules > Beams and Stems**.

### *Staff size*

A reminder about how Sibelius treats staff sizes: you are able to select from one of four options, one main size and three increasingly smaller sizes for cue lines, ossia's etc. The smaller sizes are all defined by their relation to the main size. By default, all staves will use the main size, and in many scores you won't ever have to worry about the smaller sizes.

There are three places where you can change the staff size of your score. We have just been in **Engraving Rules > Staves**, where it is possible to change it under **Staff Design**; this is not generally recommended as the smaller staves will not change automatically with it, throwing off the proportions (unless this is what you need!).<sup>26</sup> The second place is in the **Document Setup** menu (⌘D / ctrl+D), but this obscures the screen, instead displaying a preview of the current page in the window. The third, easiest way is to use the box on the left of the **Layout** tab. Change it to something sensible before you forget.<sup>27</sup>

If you need to use the smaller staff sizes there are two main ways to access them. If you want to change an entire instrument's staff, go to **Home > Instruments > Add or Remove** (keyboard shortcut is simply "I") and select something from **Staff Size** on the right. If you just need to change a system, make a selection and head to the **Inspector (View > Panels > Inspector**, or ⌘I / ctrl+shift+I) where you'll find options under **Bars > Staff Size**.

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<sup>26</sup> You can use this to change the smaller staff sizes in relation to the default size if necessary.

<sup>27</sup> Traditionally there were specific staff sizes for different situations (when physical tools were required). Much like modern metronomes, today we can choose any value we like – but I prefer to stick to the classics. As a general rule of thumb, most orchestral parts will be at least 7 mm.

## Slurs and ties

There are a lot of settings for slurs but we're just going to focus on the most important. To improve the default spacing open **Engraving Rules > Slurs**, look over to the left for **Ends**, and under **Slur near note stem** set both values for **Vertically** to -1.5. Come out of **Engraving Rules** and head to **Layout > Magnetic Layout Options** (the little arrow to the right of **Magnetic Layout**), choose **Beam** on the left and change the **Minimum distance around object Above** and **Below** values to 0.25. What this does is put stem-end slurs in double-stemmed writing a little closer to the noteheads.

I like to increase the **Outline width** (under **Engraving Rules > Slurs**) to 0.1, as it gives the ends of slurs a little more presence on the page. Depending on the fonts you use, you may want to also consider increasing the Middle thickness slightly.

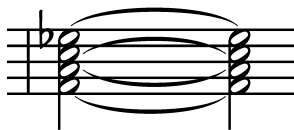


Without line adjustments  
(Helsinki Std)

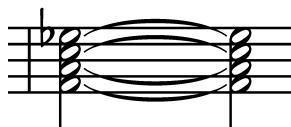


With line adjustments  
(Norfolk Std)

Head back into **Engraving Rules**. Under both **Ties 1** and **Ties 2** there is a checkbox for **Use on chords**. I recommend you untick both of these; by default Sibelius draws outer ties on chords differently to inner ties, and while this is technically acceptable it can cause problems in some circumstances. I also think uniform ties look better and clearer. Under **Ties 1** you could also increase the **Outline width** to 0.1 if you've done the same to your slurs.



Default appearance of ties



Checkboxes unticked, out-  
line width 0.1



## *Why we do this*

You may be asking, “why do you keep trying to make everything thicker?” That’s a good question. There are two reasons, in my opinion. The first is practical – it’s simply easier to see thicker lines, particularly if lighting isn’t good or you’re far from the music stand or the music has been printed too small. I have seen orchestral scores that have been reduced to A4 for study purposes where note stems became so small they didn’t print at all. Even if your music is printed out at the correct size, thicker lines are still easier to read – just look at the slur examples again and compare the flat symbol. On the left is Sibelius’ default *Helsinki* font, on the right is *Norfolk Std*. I think you’ll agree Norfolk is a lot more obvious, thanks to its thicker lines.

The second reason is aesthetic; remember that computer engraving is a very recent invention, and for centuries every musical symbol was, at some point, a physical object. Someone at some point in time presumably decided that computer-engraved music would look cool and futuristic if everything was very thin and sleek, but lines can’t get as thin on an engraved metal plate as they can in a laser printer, and many musicians will still subconsciously prefer the look of traditionally engraved music to that which is obviously computer-engraved.<sup>28</sup>

## *Other things*

The ability to **Auto-Optimize Staff Spacing (Layout > Staff Spacing)** can be useful and you may find it works well for your score, but you may prefer to take (quasi-) manual control over layout; if so, disable it and use **Optimize Staff Spacing in Selection** on each page individually as necessary, once you’ve finished note input and pagination, so you can see exactly what happens and make adjustments. [*7.5 Fixing spacing – Staff spacing*] Of course, ideally you won’t need to do this at all, as your staff spacing settings should be good enough on their own for most scenarios. Also consider switching off

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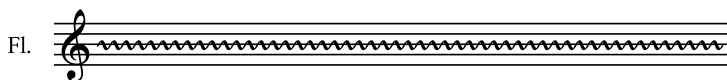
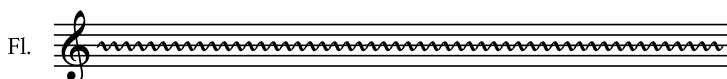
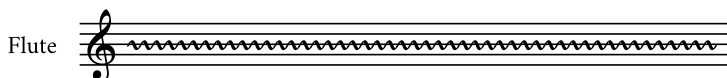
<sup>28</sup> Traditional engraving was a highly specialised field and, as the tools were usually found only in the hands of experts, the quality was usually consistently high. Though Sibelius was an incredibly powerful new tool for engravers, its availability allowed many amateurs to produce low-quality sheet music in the belief that the computer would take care of everything – an unfortunate byproduct of all the lofty claims made about the software – thus giving obviously-computer-engraved music a poor reputation. With that said, I have heard musicians complain now of handwritten parts, even very well-copied handwritten parts, because they seem out-dated and untrustworthy. There is a very small sweet spot where you should aim to operate!

**Transposing Score (Home > Instruments)**, particularly if you're still composing; I have witnessed far too many rehearsals fall apart due to incorrectly transposed parts, but this won't happen if you enter music exactly as it will be read.<sup>29</sup> Of course, if you're copying out from a composer's manuscript, it's probably best to stick to however they wrote it, transposing or concert pitch – just be aware the option is there, and make sure you've got it set how you need it before you start working.

Finally, take a look at the options available in **Appearance > Instrument and Staff Names**. If you are writing a piece for solo instrument you shouldn't include its name at the start of every system. If you are writing a piece for small, standard ensemble and the layout doesn't change (e.g. string quartet) you might want to hide instrument names after the first system to free up a little horizontal space. Just use your common sense.

## Title

*for solo flute*



What instrument is this piece for again?

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<sup>29</sup> Some genres are traditionally notated in C, most notably (pardon the pun) film music; I still believe it's safer to notate in written pitch first, as switching between transposing and concert pitch can leave funky enharmonic spellings if you aren't careful. If you're engraving a film cue you probably don't have much time to manually tidy everything, so your focus should be on parts first and score second – a conductor will cope with strange enharmonics far better than an instrumentalist sight-reading.

## 4.4 Where things go

Lastly, we'll improve where Sibelius puts things. Start with accidentals: go to **Appearance > Engraving Rules > Accidentals and Dots** and tick **Prefer top accidental at right**.<sup>30</sup> You should probably untick **Restate accidental when note is tied across a system break**,<sup>31</sup> then come out of **Engraving Rules** and head into **Appearance > Note Spacing Rule**. Under **Minimum Space**, increase **After start of bar** to 0.5 – this is so accidentals at the start of a bar don't get squished into the barline.

While we have **Note Spacing Rule** open, look at **Space around grace notes** and **Extra space after last grace note** – in my opinion, Sibelius spaces grace notes too widely by default. You can alter that spacing here if you agree.

I find setting these to 0.3 and 0.5 respectively generally produces superior results. You may want to experiment, as your choice of music font, line thicknesses etc. may influence your decision.



Grace notes too widely spaced



Better grace notes

## Creating house styles

A **House Style** is essentially what Sibelius labels a collection of settings, from lines to text styles to document setup – everything that makes a score look the way it does before you start manually adjusting things.

There are plenty of other adjustments you can make to Sibelius' many menus of settings, and when you have the time I encourage you to explore all the options available. Detailed above are just the settings that I believe are essential to producing an acceptable score, and should probably come as defaults. You can make them almost defaults by going to **Appearance > Export**

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately Sibelius' accidentals placement is less than perfect no matter which settings you choose, so if you're writing chords be prepared to make some manual adjustments. At least in my experience having both these options ticked gets you closest to acceptable positioning.

<sup>31</sup> Some publishers may require you keep this on. I don't like it, but I'm not paying your invoice.

**House Style;** in future you can choose this house style when setting up a new score and all these adjustments will be carried over. Give it a sensible name though, as you'll probably create quite a few house styles – different genres, composers, publishers will all require slightly different settings, so it makes sense to have generic house styles for each of these that you can then tailor to the specific project. It's also handy to include the date in the name of your house styles, as it makes updating them much easier when you can see which is the latest.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> You might want to wait until you've finished a score before exporting a new house style, to make sure you've made every adjustment you want.