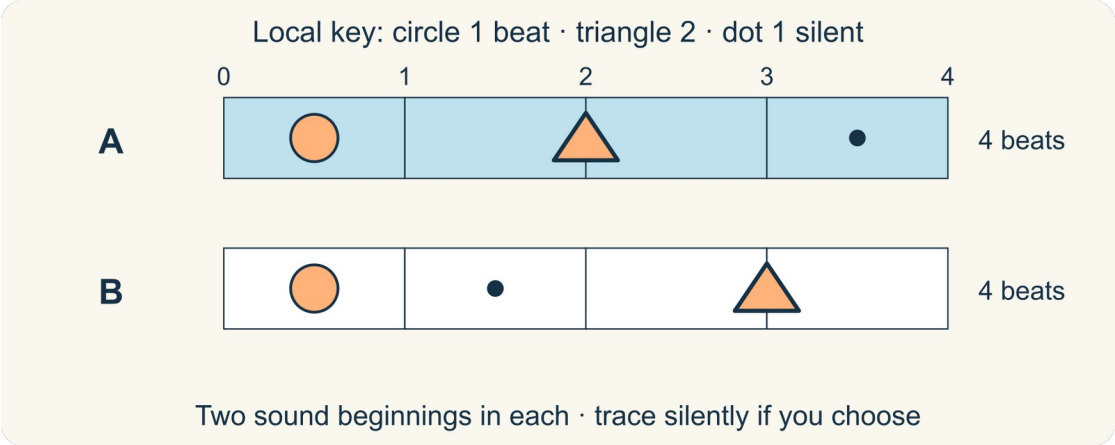
Write a graphic score legend

What must a reader know before a symbol becomes a musical instruction?

Give three symbols exact time meanings, then check whether someone could follow your score without guessing. Listening or making a sound is optional.

Make | 15–25 minutes, or one comparison | Paper and a pen or pencil, The supplied model; no purchase, account or internet connection needed

Start here Copy the symbols ○, △ and ·. Give ○ one beat of sound, △ two beats of sound, and · one beat of silence.



A local key gives exact timing

1 Write a complete key

Read left to right. A symbol begins when the previous one ends. Both sound symbols can use the same imagined quiet tone; pitch and loudness are not specified by their shapes.

2 Trace the supplied score

Read ○ △ ·. Mark boundaries at beats 0, 1, 3 and 4: circle from 0 to 1, triangle from 1 to 3, then silence from 3 to 4. No performance is needed.

3 Change one instruction

Try ○ · △ using the same key. It still lasts four beats, but the silence moves to 1–2 and the triangle now lasts 2–4. Explain the difference by pointing, drawing or writing.

4 Check what remains open

Choose one detail your key leaves free, such as the imagined sound. If exact agreement matters, add one instruction and check the score again.

One key two four beat scores

This is an original local notation, not a standard musical convention.

• A: ◯ △ · means sound for 1 beat, sound for 2 beats, then silence for 1 beat: 1 + 2 + 1 = 4. It has two sound beginnings.

• B: ◯ · △ also totals 4 beats. Its silent beat falls earlier, so equal total duration does not mean identical timing.

• A reader can trace either score silently. The key does not claim that a triangle always has this meaning in other music.

What this example can show A precise timing key need not specify every sound quality. Our diagrams do not record an actual performance.

A different way

Use only a circle and a dot, or point through the supplied trace while someone writes the beat boundaries. Silent comparison is a complete activity.

If you want to go further

Add a symbol lasting half a beat. Write a new score totalling four beats and show the addition before claiming it fits.

Something to notice

Which information came from my key, and which detail did I leave for a reader to choose?

Read or explore more

Horizon topic Graphic Scores

https://launchhorizonhq.com/learn/graphic-scores/

Horizon topic Musical Form

https://launchhorizonhq.com/learn/musical-form/

Horizon topic Music

https://launchhorizonhq.com/learn/music/

The Open University, OpenLearn Week 1: Understanding the principles of musical scores

https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=26857&printable=1&section=3

MIT OpenCourseWare Week 1: Basic Musical Terms Definitions

https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/21m-011-introduction-to-western-music-fall-2024/pages/week-1-basic-musical-terms-definitions/