

Chapter 7

Octave Marks

7.1 The Importance of Octave Marks

Almost any voice or instrument can produce a range of many notes. To make music accurately, the braille reader must therefore know more than the simple name and time value of the note. The standard 88-key piano keyboard, for example, has eight Cs. If asked to play C, which of these should the braille reader choose?

The answer is provided by the octave mark, one of the most ingenious aspects of braille music. The octave mark is brailled in the right-hand side of the cell, immediately before the affected note. No symbol ever intervenes between the octave mark and the note. If the note has an accidental, the accidental precedes the octave mark.

The octave mark is the only mechanism that tells the braille reader where the note is to be sounded within the range of the performing instrument or voice. The accurate marking of the octaves is crucial.

7.2 Octaves of the Piano

In braille music the entire musical scale is divided into "octaves" of seven tones each, always starting with C and including all the notes through the next B above. There are seven of these C octaves in the piano scale. For purposes of music braille, these octaves have number names: first octave, second octave, etc. Each of the seven octaves is represented by a special braille character or sign called an octave mark.

The compass of the octave is always from the C to the B above, regardless of the key signature or accidentals in the music. The designation of the octave is determined by the written form of the note, not by the absolute pitch. For instance, third-octave C-flat is in the third octave; second-octave B-sharp is in the second octave. The seven octave marks are as follows:

First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh
⠠	⠡	⠢	⠣	⠤	⠥	⠦

Occasionally you may encounter notes at the extreme ends of the musical scale, below first-octave C or above seventh-octave B. Two-character symbols are used to mark such notes. The octave below first-octave C is

called the "sub octave"; the octave above seventh-octave B is called the "super octave."

The following chart shows how the octaves of braille music are related to the piano keyboard and the standard printed bass and treble clef staves. For quick reference remember that "middle C" on the piano is fourth-octave C in braille music.

Example 7.2.1

The diagram illustrates the relationship between piano keyboard octaves and Braille notation. It is divided into two sections: the lower section for the bass clef and the upper section for the treble clef. Each section shows a staff with notes and their corresponding Braille symbols below. Lines connect notes on the staff to their Braille symbols. Labels above the staff indicate the octave for each note: 'sub octave', '1st octave', '2nd octave', '3rd octave' for the bass clef; and '4th octave', '5th octave', '6th octave', '7th octave', 'super octave' for the treble clef. The Braille symbols consist of various combinations of dots 1-5, with some notes having a dot 6 to indicate an octave shift.

Interestingly, the numbering of the octaves was not invented by Louis Braille. Throughout music history there have been many systems for identifying the octaves. The most commonly used system is based on the notes of the piano. Octaves 2-5 are in the middle range of the piano. These are the octaves that you will routinely encounter in braille music.

7.3 Octave Marks for Melodic Direction

The first note of any piece of braille music must always have an octave mark so that the blind musician will know where to start. For all subsequent notes the direction of the melody is shown by the presence or absence of octave marks according to crucial, very specific rules. To avoid disaster, the transcriber and the braille reader must scrupulously observe these rules so that the melodic direction of each note will be absolutely clear.

Rule 1: The octave is not marked for the second of two consecutive notes if the interval between them is less than a fourth. In other words, the octave is not marked for the interval of a second or third, even when the notes move between octaves.

Example 7.3.1

Rule 2: The octave is always marked if the interval is greater than a fifth. Thus the octave is marked for the interval of a sixth, seventh, or greater, even when the notes are within the same octave.

Example 7.3.2

Rule 3: For an interval of a fourth or fifth between the two notes, the octave is marked only if the two notes are in different octaves. For the transcriber and the braille reader, this rule is especially challenging because it requires keen and constant awareness of the octave for each of the two notes. The rules for smaller or larger intervals are relatively easy to apply; but whenever the interval is a fourth or fifth, at least a few extra seconds of thinking time may be required. There is no substitute for practice, practice, practice.

Example 7.3.3

7.4 Octave Marks for Beginnings

As you have already seen, the first note in any braille music transcription must have an octave mark. The first note in any new line of braille music must also have an octave mark.

The first note after any double bar must have an octave mark.

Example 7.4.1

Whenever the numeric indicator appears in braille music, the next note must have an octave mark. For instance, an octave mark is required on the note where the music resumes after the numeral 4 has been used to designate a silence of four measures.

Example 7.4.2

7.5 8va and Other Special Mechanisms

The term 8va (meaning "ottava," the Italian word for "octave") is sometimes used in printed music to show that a note or group of notes is to be played an octave higher than written. The affected notes are bracketed with a dotted line. Normally, in braille music, such notes are transcribed according to the octave rules for the pitches at which the notes will actually sound. No indication of the "8va" terminology is included in the braille score.

Example 7.5.1

In the bass clef of a printed score, the term 8vb may be used to show that the notes are to sound an octave below the written pitch. The term “loco” may be used to cancel the 8va or 8vb indication. Again, such terms are generally not transcribed in braille. These mechanisms in printed music simply facilitate the reading of the score by minimizing the number of ledger lines.

For those rare situations in which a braille-reading student or teacher may need to know about such special indications, methods of transcription are listed in MBC-2015.

Example 7.5.2

8vb

loco

Braille transcription of the musical notation above, showing pitch and value information.

7.6 Proofreading

You have already learned to check the notes of your braille music transcription according to pitch (as shown in the upper dots) and according to value (as shown in dots 3 and 6 of the braille character). You should now add a proofreading step by checking the octave placement of each note. However tedious such a step may seem to be, it is time well spent.

7.7 Examples for Practice

Example 7.7.1

Braille transcription of the musical notation above, showing pitch and value information.

Example 7.7.2

Two staves of musical notation in treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and 4/4 time signature. The first staff contains four measures of music, and the second staff contains four measures. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes.

Braille notation for Example 7.7.2, consisting of three lines of Braille characters corresponding to the musical notation above.

Example 7.7.3

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef, key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb), and 6/8 time signature. The first staff contains four measures of music, and the second staff contains four measures. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes.

Braille notation for Example 7.7.3, consisting of three lines of Braille characters corresponding to the musical notation above.

Drills for Chapter 7

(Correct transcriptions of these drills are at the end of this chapter)

Drill 7.1



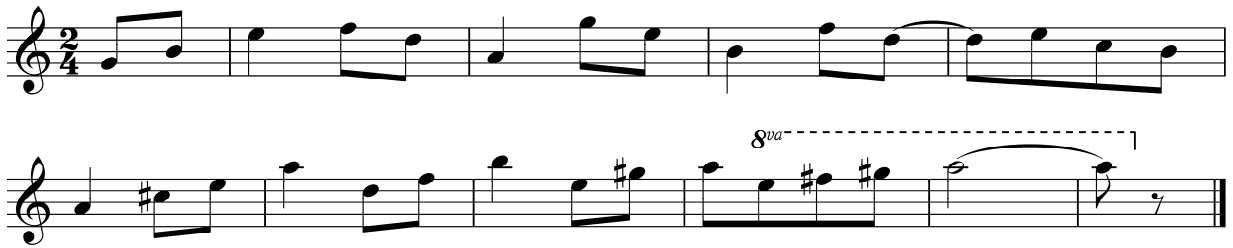
Drill 7.2



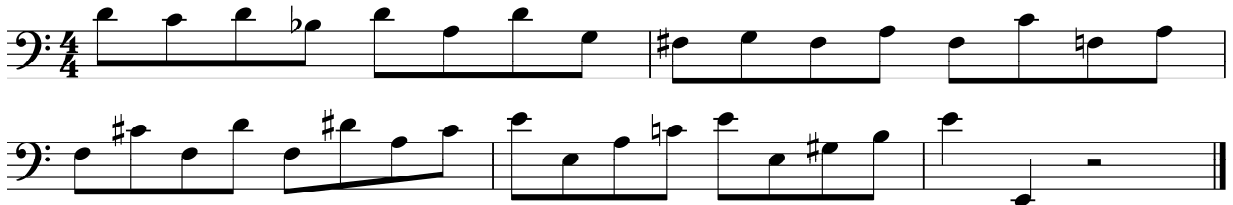
Drill 7.3



Drill 7.4



Drill 7.5



Exercises for Chapter 7

(Submit the following exercises to your instructor in BRF file format)

Exercise 7.1

Exercise 7.1 consists of three staves of music in 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a whole rest, then G4, A4, B4, C5. The second staff continues with quarter notes: D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a whole rest, then D5, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The third staff continues with quarter notes: C4, B3, A3, G3, followed by a whole rest, then G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 7.2

Exercise 7.2 consists of two staves of music in common time (C). The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab). The melody consists of half notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, followed by a whole rest, then G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The second staff continues with half notes: F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F2, followed by a whole rest, then G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 7.3

Exercise 7.3 consists of two staves of music in 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, followed by a whole rest, then G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The second staff continues with quarter notes: F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, followed by a whole rest, then G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 7.4

Exercise 7.4 consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a whole rest, then G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The second staff continues with quarter notes: F5, E5, D5, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, followed by a whole rest, then G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 7.5

Exercise 7.5 consists of two staves of music in 6/8 time. The first staff begins with a bass clef and a key signature of two sharps (F#, C#). The melody consists of eighth notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, followed by a whole rest, then G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The second staff continues with eighth notes: F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, followed by a whole rest, then G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 7.6

Exercise 7.6 musical notation, featuring three staves in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7. The second staff contains notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7, with an 8-measure rest indicated by a thick black bar. The third staff contains notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7, with a fermata over the final note.

Exercise 7.7

Exercise 7.7 musical notation, featuring two staves in 6/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff contains notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7. The second staff contains notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7, with a fermata over the final note.

