

What's the Score?

So what *is* the score?

A score shows what each person in an ensemble is doing in each measure. There's a separate line for each part. The measures of each part line up vertically on the page.

Who uses it?

Conductors, mostly. A conductor is the person who's in charge of the rehearsals and performances of large ensembles, including symphony orchestras, concert bands and wind ensembles, choirs, and the orchestras for opera companies and musicals.

Why do they need it?

The conductor has a lot of responsibilities. He or she must make sure that each individual musician in the group is playing the correct notes and rhythms, and that all of those individual parts are played together. The conductor also has the final say about how a piece is interpreted—How loud are the *fortes*? How fast is the *accelerando*? Where does one phrase end and another begin? What part is the most important when? To do this, the conductor needs to know the details of the music, as well as how they fit in the big picture. The score is an important tool that helps the conductor do all of this.

How do you read a score?

The table below is a lot like a score. Each row is a part and each column is a measure. You read across a row if you want to know what one particular part is doing. You read down a column to find out what all of the parts are doing in a particular measure.

	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
Part 1	Composed	by	George	Handel.
Part 2	Written	in	Dublin,	Ireland.
Part 3	Almost	three	hours	long.

If this “score” were performed, what would Part 2 say? That's right: “Written in Dublin, Ireland.” What would you hear in measure 2? Yes: “by,” “in” and “three.”

Now look at the marked page of the *Messiah* score. Each of the “rows” is labeled with the name of an instrument. Each of the “columns” is labeled at the bottom of the column with a measure number. Even though there are more rows and longer columns than the example above, the approach is exactly the same. If you want to know what the Violin 1 is playing, find the “Violin 1” label and read across that line. If you want to know what everyone is playing or singing in measure 2, find that measure and read down the column.

A—These labels identify the individual parts in the piece. Usually, the instrument names are written out on the first page of the score and abbreviated on the rest of the pages.

B—Do you see how this line starts at the top of the Oboe 1 part and runs all the way to Basso Continuo line? It is joining all the parts together, creating the measure “columns.” Each time there is a new score page, the first measure on that page will have this connecting line on its left side.

C—These brackets help the conductor quickly see the smaller sections within the ensemble. In this example, the top bracket groups the wind instruments, the second bracket groups the strings, and the third bracket groups the singers. Why might this be helpful? One reason is because the parts in each section are often similar, so rather than looking at all 13 lines, the conductor can focus on just one line from each group to get a sense of what’s going on.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the Hallelujah Chorus from Messiah by George F. Handel. The score is annotated with three main sections labeled A, B, and C, which correspond to the text above.

- Section A:** Labels for individual parts: Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Trumpet 1, Trumpet 2, Timpani, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Basso Continuo.
- Section B:** Labels for the title "Hallelujah Chorus from Messiah" and the composer's name "George F. Handel (1685-1759)". A tempo marking "Allegro" is circled and labeled "Tempo marking for the piece".
- Section C:** Brackets grouping the instruments into three sections: Wind instruments (Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Trumpet 1, Trumpet 2, Timpani), Strings (Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola), and Singers (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass).

Other annotations include a "Conductor" label pointing to the left margin, a "Measure number" label pointing to the number "1" at the bottom of the first measure, and a "VC, CB & BN" label at the bottom left. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (mf), articulation (senza rip., V), and measure numbers (1, 2, 3).

What's *That* Mean?

The score for “Hallelujah Chorus” includes a lot of familiar elements, or at least elements that will become familiar to you as learn about the score. But there are also a few terms that you probably don't recognize. Some of these are found only in the music of the Baroque period, and others are terms you likely won't encounter unless you participate in a music ensemble in high school or even college. So while it isn't necessary for you to memorize these, some are really interesting and, who knows, some day they might help you win on *Jeopardy!*

Basso Continuo (*BAH-so Con-TEE-nwo*) (The part name of the bottom line in the score)

It would be easy to think that basso continuo is an instrument. It's listed in a row of other instruments, right?! But it isn't an instrument. Back when Handel was alive—an era called the Baroque period—keyboard players were expected to improvise. They were given a part called the basso continuo, which included just a bass line with a *figured bass* (see below). This gave them directions for how to improvise a part on their instrument, which was normally a harpsichord. The basso continuo part was also frequently played on the cello, string bass, and even the bassoon. (Can you think of another type of music where the players improvise? That's right, jazz musicians improvise too.)

Figured bass (Basso continuo, measure 6)

Do you see the 6 below the last note in measure 6 of the basso continuo part? Or the 7 and 6 with a line through it in measure 11? These numbers are what make this part a figured bass. They help the musicians playing the basso continuo part improvise by telling them what other notes they should play in addition to the bass note that's given in the part.

Tasto solo (*TAHS-to*) (Basso continuo, measure 12)

This lets the musicians playing the basso continuo part know that they should only play the printed bass note and not improvise a harmony part.

senza rip. (Violin 1, measure 1)

Short for *senza ripieno* (*ree-pee-AY-no*), which means roughly “without reinforcements,” it indicates that this particular section of music should be played by only a few members of the section.


con rip. (Violin 1, measure 5)

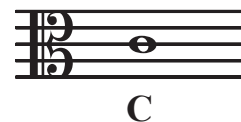
Con means “with,” and we just learned that *ripieno* means “reinforcements,” so this term means “with reinforcements.” Can you guess what that means to the conductor and musicians? You're right, it means everyone plays.

simile (*SEE-mee-lay*) (Soprano part, measure 6)

Can you think of an English word that sounds like *simile*? That's right, similar. And guess what, that's what *simile* means: play or sing in a similar manner. So if the music before was short and detached, or *staccato*, you should play the next section that way, even if the only mark is *simile*. You might also see *sim.*, which is the abbreviation for this term.

Alto clef  (Viola part, start of every line)

Clef signs are like decoder rings for the music staff. That's because they let you know the note name of each line and space. Just like the treble clef  tells you which line is G, the alto clef let's you know which line is C. And just like the treble clef is sometimes called the G clef, the alto clef is sometimes called the C clef.





Seek and Circle 1

In this activity, you'll be finding "things" in the score. It could be a symbol, note or term, or a particular spot in the music where something happens. After reading each description below, search for it in the score. When you find it, circle it and write the number of the description by the circle.

1. The symbol that lets the 1st Violins know they start playing this piece at a medium-loud volume.
2. The first quarter rest in the Viola part.
3. The first C in the Violin II part.
4. The first time the Tenors sing "Hallelujah."
5. The first time the Strings are instructed to play loudly.
 6. The first eighth rest in the Alto part.
 7. The first sixteenth note in the Bass part.
 8. The first *crescendo* in the Violin I part.
9. The first phrase (or breath) mark in the Violin II part.
10. The first word the chorus sings that *isn't* "Hallelujah."