

e-z Theory: Articulation

In this section, we shall look at *staccato* and *legato*, and how they are written.

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Staccato and legato

Sometimes, when we see music, we see small dots either over or under a note:



Can you draw a circle around all the dots in the example above?

These are notes that should be played **staccato**. This is an Italian term that means we play the notes very **short** and **sharp**. These are usually placed just **above** or **below** the **note head**, but sometimes can be placed over the **note stem**. You will find examples of such **staccato** marks as you progress with your instrument.

Sometimes, it is written out using the full word, and sometimes it is **abbreviated**:

staccato or ***stacc.***

Other times, the composer simply puts a dot.

Here is the example again. This time, draw a circle around the curved lines.



If the dots are used to make notes short and sharp, what do you think the curved lines mean?

These are called **slurs** and they are sometimes used to show that the music should be played **legato**, that is smoothly without any gaps between the notes.

There are other ways of making sure that music is played **legato**, though. Like **staccato**, the full word can be used, as can an **abbreviation**:

legato or ***leg.***



Some practice

It is very important that we draw **staccato** marks and **slurs** accurately.

On the melodies below:

1. Write a **staccato** dot over every F



2. Write a **staccato** dot on every D-flat



3. Write a **slur** from the first D-flat to the first B-flat



4. Make the first two notes **staccato** and add a **slur** from the first F to the A-flat in the second complete bar. Then, make the rest of the music **legato** with a slur.



Over or under?

Slurs can be difficult to draw and can make the music look untidy. It is important to draw them in the right place.

If most of the notes fall below the middle line, or the **phrase** begins on a lower note, we tend to put slurs **under** the notes.

If most of the notes are above the middle line, or the **phrase** begins on a higher note, we tend to put slurs **above** the notes.

