

Interpreting Written (and non-written) Articulation Notation

Notice that all of these examples talk about both the beginning of a note and (VERY important in jazz because of the rhythm section) the ending of the note. Also, articulations in jazz tend to be very percussive and therefore imply at the minimum an accent all the time unless notated otherwise.

EX 1: BASIC ACCENT



In jazz, this articulation (Ex1) is most often interpreted as a hard accent with a pointed tongue attack. It can be in the context of any dynamic, soft or loud, but it is usually associated with *mf* and louder. I tend to use a hard-edged “too” or “tah” syllable on this. The example above (Ex 1) would be interpreted by me as a full value note with a cut off on beat two.

GENERAL RULE OF THUMB: A note with or without an articulation mark followed by rests generally means that note is cut off on the downbeat of the rest directly after it. In other words, the note in Ex 1 would be cut off on beat two on the downbeat.

EX 2: BASIC ACCENT WITH EXPLICIT WRITTEN CUT OFF



The above example is more explicit. Some may think it overwritten notation-wise, but this says exactly what Ex 1 suggests. In other words, I would play both of these examples (Ex 1 and Ex 2) the same way. The line (or tenuto) marking here guarantees a full-value long note.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Whenever you see a minus sign preceding a number after a figure in jazz, (such as the “-2” in Ex 2) that is telling you where the cut off should be. As we have discussed “cut off” means the point where the note ends. In jazz, this almost always is done with a tongue stop.

Sometimes you will see a note length written with a tie to where it should be cut off. The meaning of this notation is to cut the note off on the beat of the rest following the note. While this shows up from time-to-time on older charts, I prefer the more specific minus sign with the number of the beat for the desired cut off (as in Ex 2)

EX 3: MARCATO



In non-jazz marcato can mean simply “play this note with more force than those not marked that way. In jazz, we do the same but also play it shorter. Not quite a staccato, but shorter than the notes not notated with this marking. In Ex 4, the first measure would be interpreted with the first two eighth notes being legato followed by a shorter accented beat two.

The second measure (Ex 3) is using an older notation for swing with the dotted 8ths and 16th figures, but it is still employed in modern jazz for a “sassy” effect the likes of which Quincy Jones might write. And in the case of Ex 3 measure 2, the dotted 8s are short and accented while the 16s are long and less accented. Once again, listening to this music will give you the sound. Notation can be lacking, but the more you check out recordings, the better job you will do with interpretation. And remember, if you are in a tutti section with lead trumpet, copy the lead trumpet!

EX 4: THAD MARCATO



Another use of marcato that has specific implications in jazz can be found in the music of Thad Jones. Specifically, consecutive 8th notes with marcato markings indicate “short and straight.”

EX 5: THE VANGUARD ROOFTOP



In the jazz tradition that is the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra (descendants of Thad Jones-Mel Lewis) this marking (Ex 5) can mean heavy attack and VERY full value. I would cut the note off on the “and of 2” (or wherever the lead trumpet player designates it) in that case.

NOTE: “The Vanguard Rooftop” is a term used by myself and my friends and is not a standard designation... unless all of YOU start calling it that!

EX 6: STACCATO



Ex 6 means “played short” in both jazz and non-jazz. Sometimes a jazz player will just say “short” rather than using the Italian “staccato,” but either one works. The only difference being that in jazz, we tend to put more of an accent on the short note. A typical syllable for a short note in jazz would be “dit” or “daht.” Shorter in duration than usual due to the marking, but still with a definite articulated beginning and—most importantly—an articulated ending. As we will see, the staccato in funk is MUCH shorter.

Sometimes the staccato articulation can be combined with a rooftop or something else. At that point...just go with whatever the lead trumpet player does! And if it is on something where you as the lead trombone player is leading the way...fielder’s choice! ☺

EX 7: LEAGATO



Generally speaking in jazz, 8th note lines are always legato unless notated otherwise. It is also implicit in Ex 7 that the “and of 1” and the “and of 2” are accented—even though it isn’t notated. This is an example of speaking in a “vernacular” and is learned by listening to the music:

Emulate, Assimilate, Innovate.

EX 8: NOTATED LEAGATO (BEBOP PHRASING)



In Ex 8 we see how Ex 7 is typically interpreted by a jazz player. In educational charts that I write, I include notation of this type so that young players are reminded how the accents work. I also play recordings of the music to the students so they can *hear* the language and imitate it. If a jazz player were to “scat sing” this phrase they might use these syllables: “Bah-do-Bee-Dee-DAHT.” Of course, as a brass player, I would probably use front end syllables that employ a “d” and end the C on the “and of 3” with a “T.” Therefore, that last note is often a “DAHT” –a note with an articulated beginning and a strong cut off percussive end.

I personally like to call this “Bebop” phrasing because it is historically employed by bebop (and “Hard Bop”) players such as Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt, Clifford Brown, J.J. Johnson, etc. and et al. As you will see in the annotated excerpts that follow, this bebop phrasing is a wonderful way to keep the time steady, the music swinging, and the syntax accurate.

EX 9: BEBOP PHRASING WITH A FAST FALL OFF



Now we are getting into what might be more accurately described as “ornaments” rather than “articulations.” Be that as it may, the “fall off” is pretty cool in jazz and the lead players “drive the bus” on its interpretation. In Ex 9 we see an explicitly notated set of instructions that says the fall off at the end of the C should be fast. Depending on the band and the lead player, this might be a fall with a VERY short duration played VERY fast. We sometimes called this a “rip.” Listen to lots of Count Basie and you will hear these fast fall offs all over the place. The fall off itself is heavily accented followed by typically a fast “with the grain” gliss.

EX 10: LONGER FALL OFF



Ex 10 is more typical of what you will see in a jazz chart as far as a fall off. Notice that there isn't much in the way of articulation or instructions. This is similar to seeing a paragraph of written prose and being told to read it with a Scottish brogue or a U.S. Southern accent. The words won't have many phonetic markings (typically) but you intrinsically know how to say them to sound a certain way. A jazz player with experience using jazz syntax and interpretation would likely play Ex 10 in the following way:

EX 11: A NOTATED VERSION OF EX 10



Ex 11 might be written this way for an educational chart, but a typically pro piece would be less cluttered and rendered like Ex 10. They would both be played in a similar manner except that the lead player would determine where the fall ends in Ex 10.

The fall itself is played by starting the Ab with a heavy accent, **playing that pitch full value**, then beginning the fall going against the grain and across the harmonics and ending with a tongue cut off that stops the air. As a lead trombonist, you will either be making the decisions when to begin the fall off and how to end it, or you will be locking in with the lead trumpet and following their decision if the brass is in tutti (playing together).

It is very important to hold the beginning note of the fall off for full value before beginning the fall so that the chord (called a "voicing") will ring. Also, on longer fall offs, don't use a pure gliss, fall through the overtones by playing against the grain.

EX 12: THE SHAKE



Ex 12 is very common in a straight ahead swing chart from all eras. It is an effect, or ornament that is associated with jazz and also used in all types of Latin music with brass as well as rock and funk. There is quite a bit of etiquette and tradition associated with this effect however. Here are the rules:

1. Follow the lead player for interpretation and accuracy!
2. If YOU are the lead player, make a consistent decision that is easy to follow.
3. The height and speed of the shake and the cut off are all important

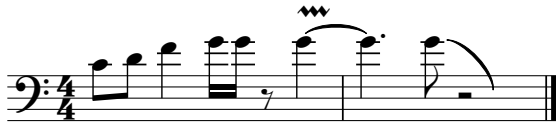
On the next page we'll take a look at how to do all of that...

How to Play a Shake

A shake is basically a rubato trill. Just like a trill you have a starting pitch, then a secondary pitch and you go back and forth between the two using a lip slur (let the AIR do the work!) Depending on how long the shake is, you can start it slower and then increase the speed up to the point of the cut off. In Ex 12 there is only two beats, so the shake would probably last only two counts and then a hard cut off on beat three. The height of the shake (from F to G, or F to Ab, F to C, etc.) depends on the lead player and the musical moment. A shake can turn into a rubato moment outside of the pocket, but it must return to the groove with strict time and together as an ensemble. Thus, the cut off is (once again) all-important.

I usually choose a secondary note that is “against the grain” or something in the next position on the slide. A tall shake (F to C for example) can be done in the same position. As with all things in this music, do LOTS of listening to learn the effect (*Emulate, Assimilate, Innovate*) There is a deep and exciting tradition and history for you to explore as you develop your style and understanding.

Ex 13: LOTS TO UNPACK!



As the title for Ex 13 says, there is LOTS to unpack here! First of all, if we look at what we’ve discussing previously, the following would likely be done:

- First two 8th notes played legato
- Beat two shorter with a marcato marking
- The two 16ths played long short (more on that next)
- Beat four would have a heavy accent

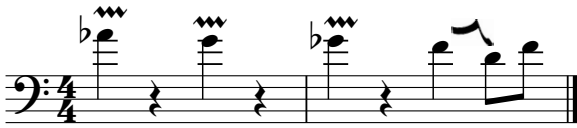
The shake would begin after establishing the pitch, probably the and-of-four. The height and speed of the shake would be determined by the lead player and—most importantly—the cut off would be a hard tongue stop on beat two followed by a heavy accent on the and-of-2 and a fast fall off. The explicit notation would look like Ex 14:

Ex 14: NOTATING THE BIG UNPACK



As you can see, the notation can quickly become cluttered and overwritten. In many charts that you will encounter as a lead player, the articulations will be minimal with a great deal of the interpretation implied. Thus, *listening* to this music continues to be our best resource and the best method for learning to play in this style.

EX 15: MULTIPLE SHAKES AND A FLIP



Ex 15 is typical of what you might encounter in a straight ahead swing chart such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, John Clayton, etc. If the tempo is moderately fast (quarter = 180 or so) there simply isn't enough time for exaggerated movement on the quarter note shakes. Probably four fast diatonic notes against the grain per quarter at best. Heavy accents at the beginning of each quarter.

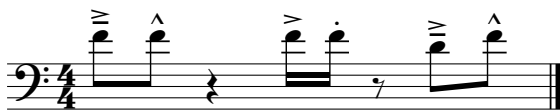
The notation between beats three and four on the second measure of Ex 15 is called a "flip" or "jazz flip" and sometimes a "turn." In the case of Ex 15, it can be interpreted like this:

EX 15 NOTATED



This above (Ex 15 Notated) is of course an estimation and not meant to be notated this way or played in a strict fashion, but it's close to how a flip is typically interpreted. Essentially, the flip is a cool short-hand notation method of putting some "stuff" between two notes. (academically speaking ☺)

EX 16 TWO EIGHTS AND A SPIT IT



In Ex 16, we see figures that most often come with implied notation, but in this case I have written it out so we can discuss how it is usually done. Any time you have two eighth notes together followed by a rest, play the first one long and the second one short. "Did It," Spit It," Do Daht" or "Be Bop" type scat syllables if you were to sing it.

Two sixteenths together followed by a rest is a "spit-it" or "did-it." Played long on the first 16 and very short and sassy on the second one with a definite tongue-stop cut off. Sometimes, a composer will choose to write the spit it as the first two notes of an eighth note triplet where the third note is a rest. I think the 16s look more sassy.

EX 17: THE DOIT



Pronounced "Doit" (not *do-it*) the doit is a super-cool onomatopoeic (sounds like it is spelled) effect used mostly in jazz. While a trumpet will often use $\frac{1}{2}$ valves for the effect, the trombone plays the doit against the grain going up through the harmonics. As with the shake, it is very important to establish the note before beginning the effect. So, heavy accent, full value, then lip slur up the harmonics against the grain. There are unspoken rules with the doit that are quite important... so dig:

Doit Etiquette

What-what? Yep. It's a thing. As a lead player, you have *carte blanche* (within moderate reason and approximating good taste...unless you are feeling VERY sassy) but as a section, or in a brass tutti, the following rules must be followed to sound tight and swinging (And to not start a fight with another lead player. Just sayin...)

Here are the simple rules:

- Follow your lead player for the height of the doit. Do NOT try to show off your range and start a gunslinger contest to see who can play higher. Let the lead player decide and follow that. Remember, you want to sound great as a section. Plenty of time to showcase that voodoo that yoodoo on a solo.
- Listen to the lead trumpet for the cut off and don't play beyond that.
- Use the rests after the doit to determine how long it should be. In Ex 17, you have lots of time for a tall doit (hmmm...good chart title) But if the music goes right into another figure after the doit, play it accordingly so you can nail the whole phrase.

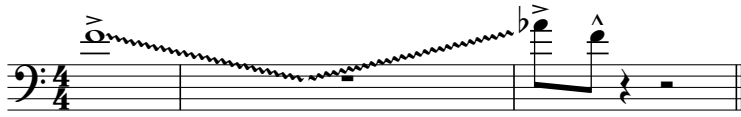
Ex 18: THE SCOOP



The scoop is a very cool texture that is often found in slower swing things, such as a Basie soft shout chorus. You can see the scoop notation above in Ex 18 on the half note that begins the second measure. The scoop is the unusual upside down slur mark over the half note.

The scoop is played during the duration of the note (in the case of Ex 18, two beats) Establish the pitch of the note, then bend it down to at least a half step below and then come back up—all within the length of the note notated with the scoop. Trumpets and saxes will use their embouchure to bend the note down and up or use a 1/2 valve (in the case of the trumpet.) But we trombonists—playing as we do the world's most perfect instrument—just use our slides. BAM! The actual execution of the scoop is rubato and slippery, but it MUST be done within the framework of the note involved. This is one of those approximations to interpret so once again—FOLLOW YOUR LEAD PLAYER. And if YOU are the lead player, set the effect in a confident manner so your section can follow you.

EX 19: THE LONG FALL OFF CLIMB BACK UP THING!



Here's a cray-cray one for ya! Not sure if it has an official name, but it shows up quite a bit. It's a fall off that lasts quite a while (in the case of Ex 19 it lasts around seven beats!) then goes back up to an ending figure. It is a wonderful effect, but to make it work, everyone needs to copy their lead player and NAIL the ending figure. The fall off itself tends to get softer, then crescendo into the ending figure.

EX 20: THE X-NOTE RIP



And finally, the "X" note rip. This is a fun and quite extroverted effect that is once again determined by the lead player. The process is to aim for an undetermined high note before the downbeat of the first actual "landing" note in the passage. Hit that "X" note with a very heavy accent and then "rip" down through the overtones to land on the landing note (in EX 20, the "C" on beat two) I almost always execute this by starting the rip in a longer position than the landing note and ripping through the overtones against the grain. The height, and bodacious nature of this one is a "fielder's choice" (the lead player) so copy the lead player. This is not a moment for individual bravado! And, most importantly, it must be accomplished with perfect time, right in the pocket.

These are just the basics in notated jazz articulations. The depth of creativity in this music is so vast, that there are many more variations out there. Jazz writers combine all of these and use them in all manner of ways, so it behooves all of us to be familiar with at least the ones that I've listed in the previous pages.

That being said, it all makes MUCH more sense in *context*... so, let's do THAT!

Here come the excerpts...