

Drum Notation Cheat Sheet

The standard drum-set key: 10 kit voices, the notehead and stem rules, and every symbol.

Learn these positions once and any drum chart becomes readable. Positions follow the Percussive Arts Society's standardised drum-set notation.

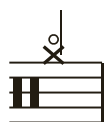
The drum key

One line or space per drum, top of the staff downwards.



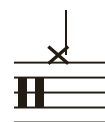
Crash cymbal

Ledger line above the staff



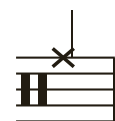
Open hi-hat

Space above the top line



Closed hi-hat

Space above the top line



Ride cymbal

Top line (5th line)



High tom

4th space (top space)



Mid tom

4th line



Snare drum

3rd space (middle space)



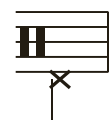
Floor tom

2nd space



Bass drum (kick)

1st space (bottom space)



Hi-hat pedal (foot)

Space below the bottom line

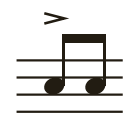
How to read a drum note

Four things on every note, plus the clef.

- Vertical position tells you which drum, not which pitch — read it against the key above.
- Notehead shape tells you the material: a filled oval is a drum, an x is a cymbal or hi-hat.
- Stem direction tells you the limb: up for hands, down for feet.
- Notes stacked in one column are struck together; two voices a position apart step sideways to clear each other.
- The clef is the percussion clef — two thick bars — and simply means "unpitched, read against a key".

Symbols: how to hit it

Position says what; these say how.



Accent

Hit this note harder than the ones around it.



Ghost note

Notehead in brackets: play it very quietly.



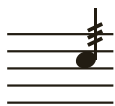
Flam

One grace note; both hands, almost together.



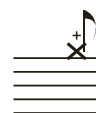
Drag

Two grace notes, played by the same hand.



Roll

Slashes on the stem: subdivide into a roll.



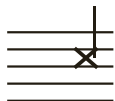
Closed hi-hat

A plain x above the top line.



Open hi-hat

A small o above the x: let it ring.



Cross-stick

An x in the snare space: quiet click.



Hand and foot

Stems point apart so they never collide.