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Drum Notation Cheat Sheet

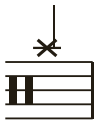
The standard drum-set key: 10 kit voices, the notehead and stem rules, and every symbol.

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

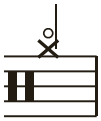
Scan to hear the key

The drum key

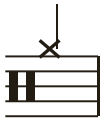
One line or space per drum, top of the staff downwards.



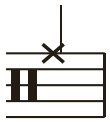
Crash cymbal
Ledger line above the staff



Open hi-hat
Space above the top line



Closed hi-hat
Space above the top line



Ride cymbal
Top line (5th line)

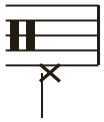
High tom
4th space (top space)

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

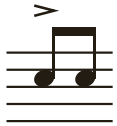
How to read a drum note

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".

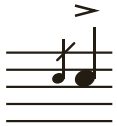
Symbols: how to hit it

Position says what; these say how.



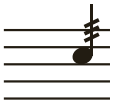
Accent
Hit this note harder than the ones around it.

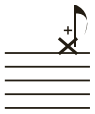
Ghost note
Notehead in brackets: play it very quietly.



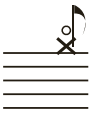
Flam
One grace note; both hands, almost together.

Optional classroom and studio packs help fund the free charts: noteatlas.org/packs/

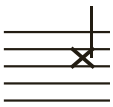
Drag
Two grace notes, played by the same hand.

Roll
Slashes on the stem: subdivide into a roll.

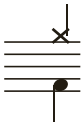


Closed hi-hat
A plain x above the top line.



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.