

Saxophone Quartets – Guidelines and Suggestions

*Selected notation, range, and arrangement
guidelines for student submissions to the
Noteworthy Scholars program and the
Boston Saxophone Quartet*

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Overview

- The Boston Saxophone Quartet welcomes student submissions from a few selected Boston-area high schools for saxophone quartet arrangements to be performed at the upcoming Boston First Night celebration.
- This presentation obviously cannot tell you all you need to know to write good saxophone quartet arrangements, but it includes several suggestions based on our experience with past student submissions.
- The slides below include guidelines for notating rhythms, using effective instrument ranges, and writing arrangements that are interesting and enjoyable for the musicians to play.

Basic requirements

- Instrumentation for the Boston Saxophone Quartet is soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone.
- Your submission can be an original composition or an arrangement in any musical style, no more than four (4) minutes long.
- Submit parts and score as PDF files.
- Parts must be transposed for each instrument.
- The score can be either transposed or concert.
- Include tempo indications, dynamics, and articulations on each part
- A computer-generated MP3 file is also helpful.

Layout and rehearsal marks

- Help players understand the form. Mark the beginning of each section in your score and parts with a double bar or rehearsal mark, or both.
- Rehearsal marks save time during rehearsals and allow for communication on the band stand. For example, use bar numbers such as [1] [17] [33], letters such as [A] [B] [C], or [A] - [A17], etc. Pick a style, and use it.
- Automatically generated bar numbers are fine to supplement, not replace, rehearsal marks. Include bar numbers at the beginning of each staff.

Using multi-rests

- Use multi-rests, except when you include chord changes for an optional solo. It is easier to read a labeled multi-rest than several consecutive single bar rests.
- To help outline the form, split multi-rests between sections or phrases. This should happen automatically if you use rehearsal marks and/or double bars at the start of each section.

Multi-rests and rehearsal marks

- Good and bad examples of rehearsal marks, multi-rests and double bars

Ex. 1:
Good -
Phrases
are clear

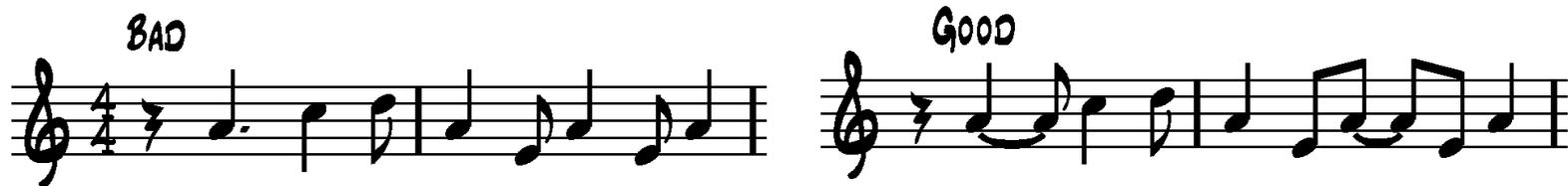
Musical notation for Example 1, showing good phrasing. The score is in 3/4 time. The first staff has rehearsal marks A and B, with multi-rests of 6 measures. The second staff has rehearsal mark C, with multi-rests of 4 measures. The phrasing is clear and well-defined.

Ex. 2:
Not good -
no phrase
indications

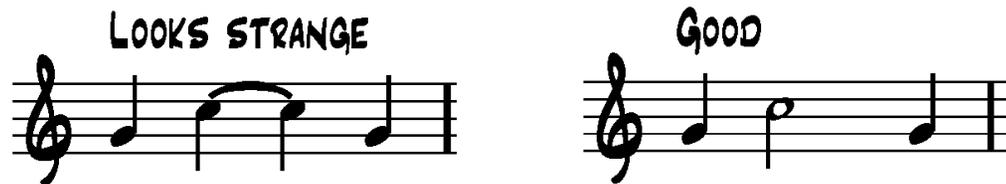
Musical notation for Example 2, showing poor phrasing. The score is in 3/4 time. The first staff has multi-rests of 6 measures. The second staff has multi-rests of 7 and 4 measures. There are no rehearsal marks, and the phrasing is unclear.

Notating rhythms for readability – the imaginary bar line

- Honor the imaginary bar line between beats 2 and 3.



- But don't overdo it. It's OK for a half note or dotted half note to cross the imaginary bar line.



Readable rhythms – half note rule

- Do not start a half note or dotted half on an off-beat. A half note or dotted half note should only start on the beat.



Readable rhythms – 6/8 and 12/8

- In 6/8 or 12/8, each beat is usually a dotted quarter. Make it easy to see where each beat starts. (This also applies to 9/8 if it is divided 3+3+3.)

BAD - CONFUSING, AND HARD TO READ



GOOD - EACH BEAT IS CLEAR



Rests – rules for placement

- In 4/4 time, follow these rules
 - Half rests should only start on beats 1 or 3
 - Quarter rests should only start on beats 1, 2, 3, 4
 - Eighth rests should only start on beats 1, 2, 3, 4 or on the “and” of 1, 2, 3 or 4.

EX. 1. RIGHT



EX. 2. WRONG



EX. 3. RIGHT



EX. 4. WRONG



EX. 5. RIGHT



EX. 6. WRONG



Room to breathe

- Saxophonists and other wind players need room to breathe.
- Even though wind players can often take a quick breath within an eighth rest or between staccato notes, over time this can be tiring.
- Try to include some half rests, whole rests or longer for wind players at least every 32 bars.
- Players of the baritone sax run out of air more quickly than smaller saxes.

Making your piece fun to play

- Try moving the melody and/or interesting counterpoint lines between different saxophones, not always in the top (soprano) voice.
- It is OK to include some repetitive rhythm patterns or bass lines in someone's part, but not for the whole piece. It is not fun to play an arrangement if your part is too tiring or repetitive.

Effective Use of Instrument Ranges

- For the best results when writing for saxophones, consider not just the highest or lowest notes on each instrument, but also details about how the sound of the instrument changes in its low or high ranges. Where is it more intense or shrill, comfortable, or low and dark?
- Charts on the following pages will show details about ranges on each of the saxophones.
- Consider how high a note is within the range of the instrument. For example, concert C an octave above middle C sounds more intense on tenor sax (near top of range) vs. soprano or alto sax (comfortable range).
- Consider reserving the higher, more intense parts of an instrument's range for climactic measures within a passage or the entire piece.

Soprano sax – range

- Transpose up a major 2nd

Transposed



FULL SOUNDING IN THIS RANGE,
BUT NOT AS AGILE. SLOWER TO
RESPOND IN STACCATO PASSAGES*

RESONANT AND
FULL SOUNDING,
LYRICAL

BRIGHTER, BUT
STILL LYRICAL

INCREASINGLY INTENSE
AND SHRILL



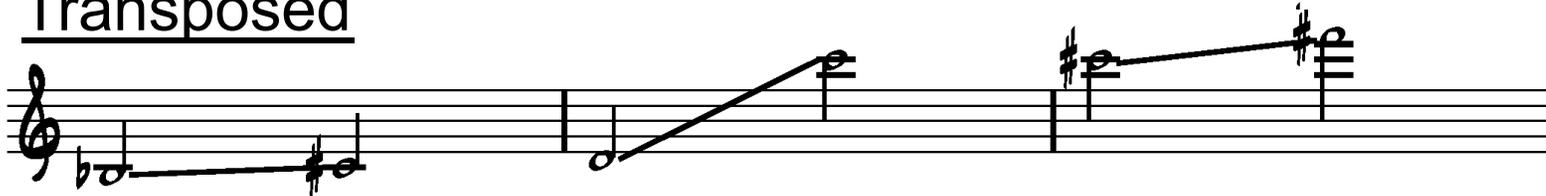
Concert

** Low Bb, B, C, C#, and Eb on the horn (Ab, A, Bb, B and Db concert) are operated by the player's pinkies – fingerings can be awkward.*

Alto sax – range

- Transpose up a major 6th

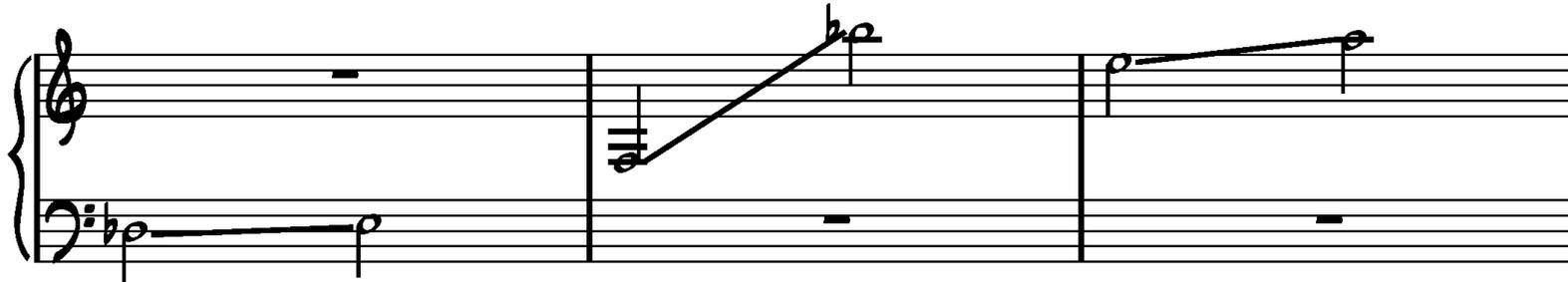
Transposed



LOW AND DARK IN THIS RANGE.
NOT AS AGILE AND SLOWER TO
RESPOND IN STACCATO PASSAGES.
.FOR SOME PLAYERS, HARDER TO
PLAY SOFT*

RESONANT & FULL SOUNDING,
IN LOWER NOTES, LYRICAL
THROUGHOUT, INCREASINGLY
BRIGHTER AND SOMEWHAT
THINNER IN HIGHER NOTES

BRIGHT, SOUNDS
HIGH, BUT CAN
STILL BE LYRICAL



Concert

* Low Bb, B, C, C#, and Eb on the horn (Db, D, Eb, E and F# concert) are operated by the player's pinkies – fingerings can be awkward.

Baritone sax – range

- Transpose up a major 13th

Transposed



Other Limitations for submissions to Boston Saxophone Quartet

Do not use extended saxophone techniques in your composition or arrangement

- No multiphonics
- No slap tonguing or flutter tonguing. (Of course, normal legato and staccato tonguing are fine.)
- No use of altissimo range. Use standard instrument ranges shown on previous pages
- No special fingerings for timbre effects.
(Avoid + and o notation.)
- Jazz articulations are fine, including glissandos, falls, scoops, doits, and bends