

Tidying Up Your Sibelius Scores

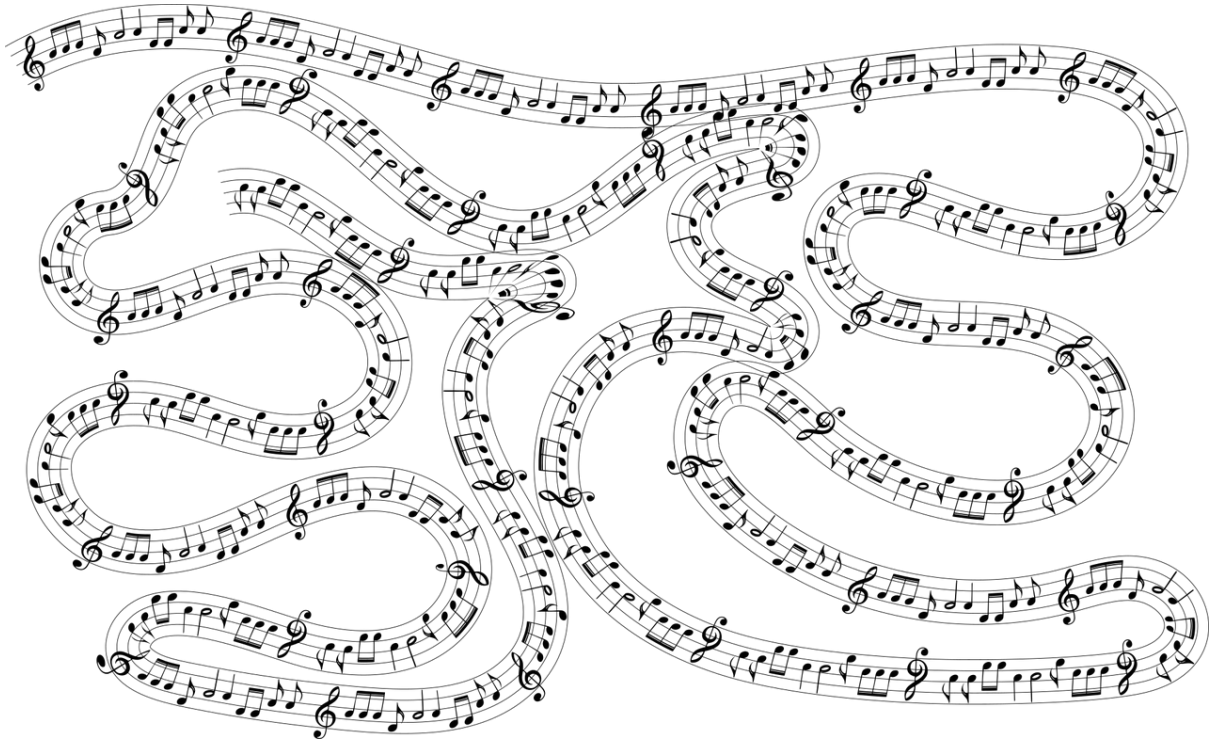


Image credit: Gordon Johnson from Pixabay

This blog is for musicians who have a reasonably good grasp of Sibelius but who would like to make their scores look even tidier. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to Sibelius Ultimate, but if you have an earlier version, you can either google to find out the relevant processes for your system, or get in touch!

Some of these suggestions will be familiar to you; others may not. I've selected these tips as they seem to crop up most often in the Sibelius settings I receive from clients, and in those I play from in my other role as a violinist in orchestras.

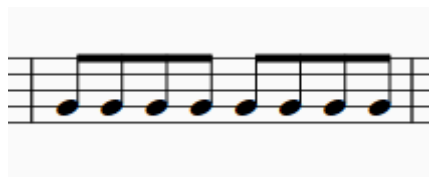
Setting up in advance

It's worth getting into the discipline of making some settings in advance. You have the option to do this anyway for certain things when you go through the usual preliminaries (key signatures, time signatures etc.) but do you remember to set up how you want your beaming to be regularised? And do you decide how you would like tuplets to look – bracketed? With or without numbers? Let's have a look at these things in turn, as well as some other small issues.

Beaming decisions

I think folk often forget to use this function when setting up, but it can save a lot of time later.

If, for example, in 4/4 time you wanted your quaver beams to always look like this:



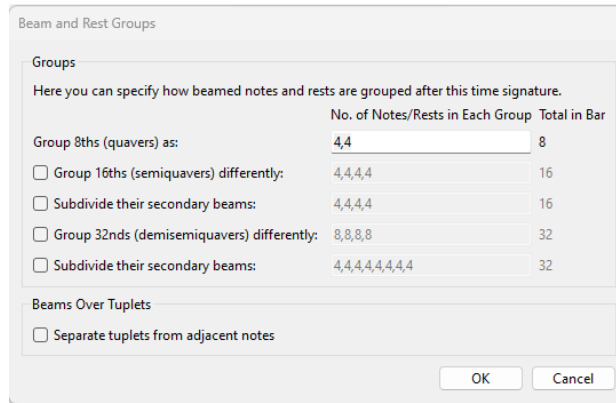
as opposed to this:



then when setting up your time signature from the outset, and also when changing time throughout the piece (shortcut T) do the following when accessing the time signature change pane:

More Options

Beam and Rest Groups



Here you can set up all sorts of beaming patterns as you wish.

Deciding how tuplets will look

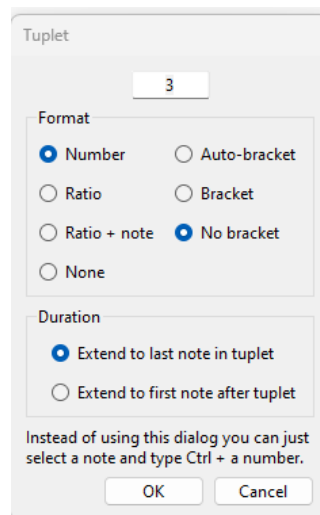
For the sake of simplicity I will first give you a column of go-to places that you just work down, starting with the tab required.

Note Input Tab

Note Input

Tuplets ↴

Other



Now you can type in how you would like tuplets to look globally, before inputting anything.

Reset where the tempo indication sits

Doesn't it rather annoy you when Sibelius insists on putting your tempo indications here, just left of the barline?



Sibelius has this position set by default. The easiest way to change that is the following process:

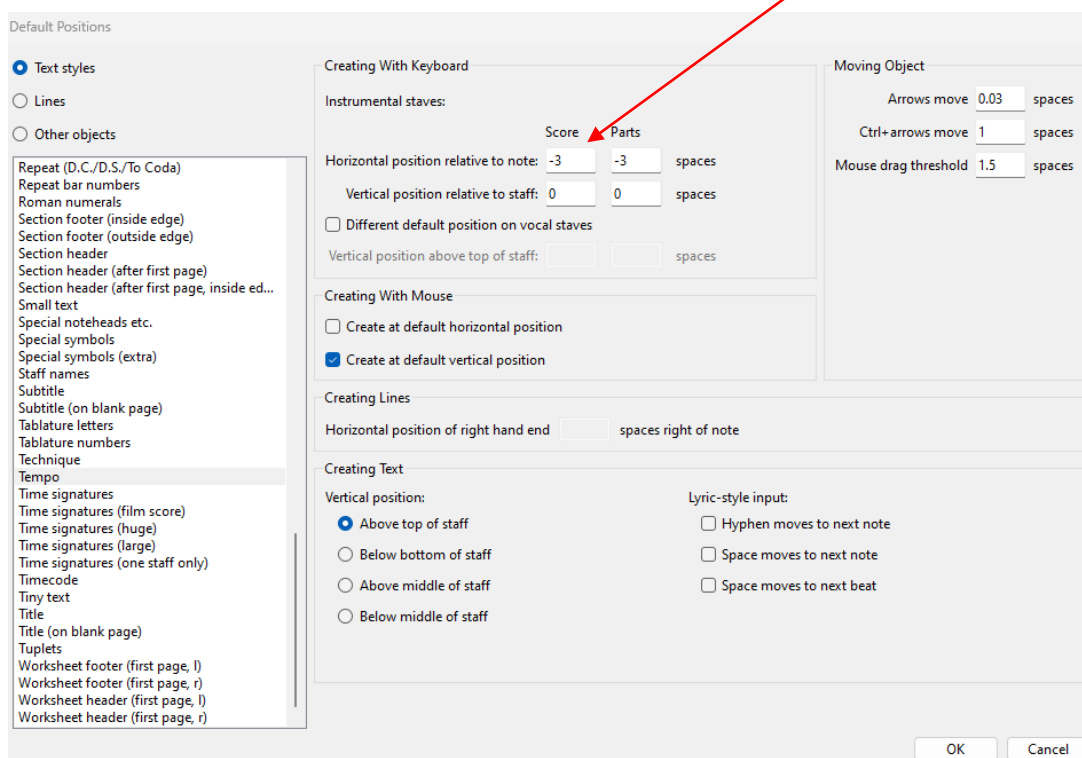
Appearance Tab

Design and Position ▾

In left-hand pane, select Tempo

Horizontal position relative to note – set this from -3 to 0 spaces

OK



You may have to reinput any previous tempo indications if they haven't moved as a result of the above, but you'll have a new default setting now for all tempo indication positions.

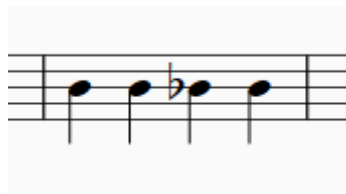
To be really accurate, tempo markings should align with a time signature, or the first note or accidental after a key signature. Elaine Gould's excellent book on notation *Behind Bars* has tons of useful information like this (see p.183 for tempo indications) and it really should be on your bookshelf if you are serious about setting music well.

Tidying and spacing

You may occasionally come across horrors like this:



and they are so easily fixed. Just select the bar; press Control + Shift + N, and hey presto:



('N' for nudge, if you want a handy mnemonic.)

I see the following all too often, even in the neatest laid out scores:



Now, that can annoy performers! Again, it's so easily fixed. Select both the lines, then press Shift + Alt + M (the SAM technique as I call it) in order for this to happen:



Note that the line with the least number of bars will be moved to the line with the most:



Doing the same process will get the identical result as the blue one above.

I'm sure you all know that clicking on a barline and pressing the return key creates a line break?

And that if you click Control + the return key, that creates a page break?

Well, if you didn't, you do now!

Formatting pages

I hope that when you come to make up parts you remember to think about page turns for the players. You need to have some bar rests at the bottom of each right-hand page. Juggling this can tax your ingenuity sometimes, especially if the composer

has written a lot of notes! (Good luck with minimalist music!) Using the SAM technique outlined above is ideal for this when moving lots of bars around the page. It's also good practice to 'lock' each page by creating a page break. This way, there shouldn't be any unwanted automatic reformatting from the machine. For this, it's helpful to have your layout marks turned on so you can see them as in the example below:

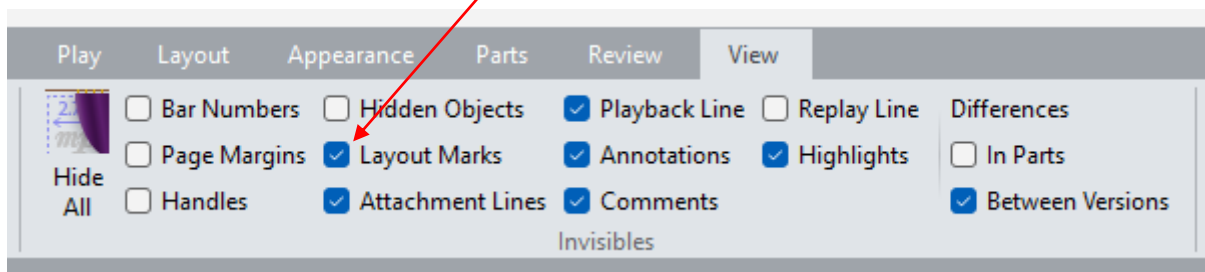


To switch these on, do the following:

View Tab

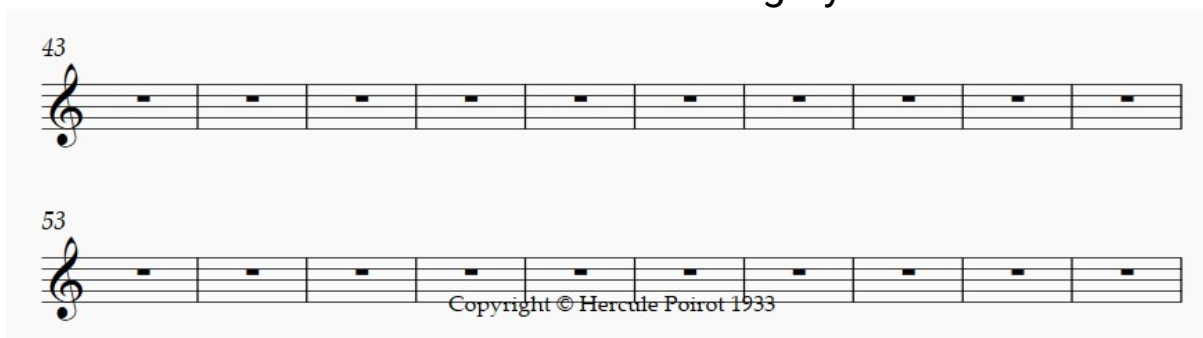
Invisibles

Tick the box against layout marks



Moving the lowest stave up

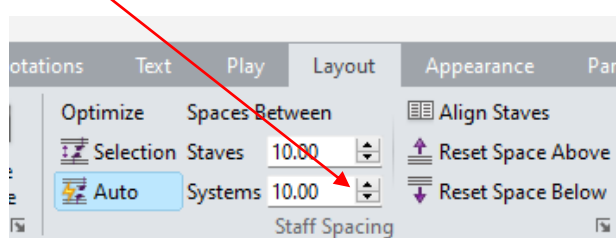
This can be a nuisance and tax the little grey cells...



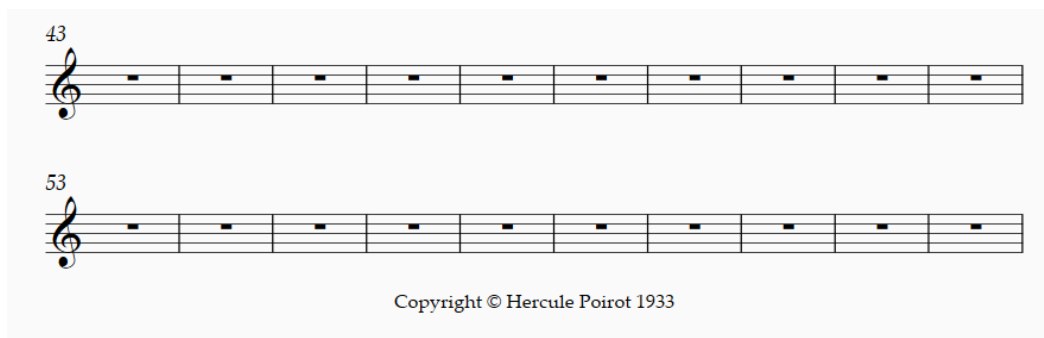
Just go to:

Layout Tab
Staff Spacing
Systems

Keep clicking the upward arrow until the spacing looks as you want it.



Et voilà!



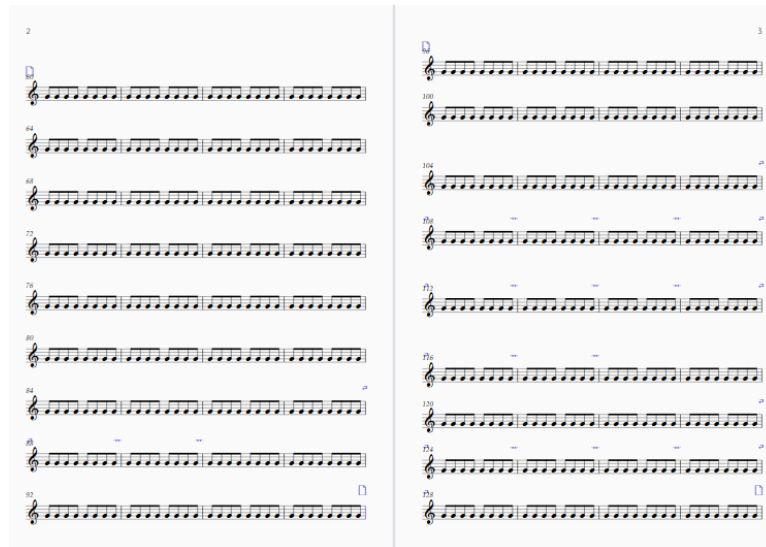
Bear in mind, however, that this will affect all the staves on all pages, globally.

Aligning staves

It's good to have an equivalent number of staves on facing pages. I'm sure you'd agree that the following looks horrible:



Now, as far as I know, there is no way of just clicking a button to fix this, so if anyone has that info, do please tell me! In a situation like this, I count the staves on each page – ten on the left, eight on the right. Let's change that to nine on each. So, lock the end of the right-hand page, then make a page break at the end of the penultimate staff on the left-hand page. This then happens:

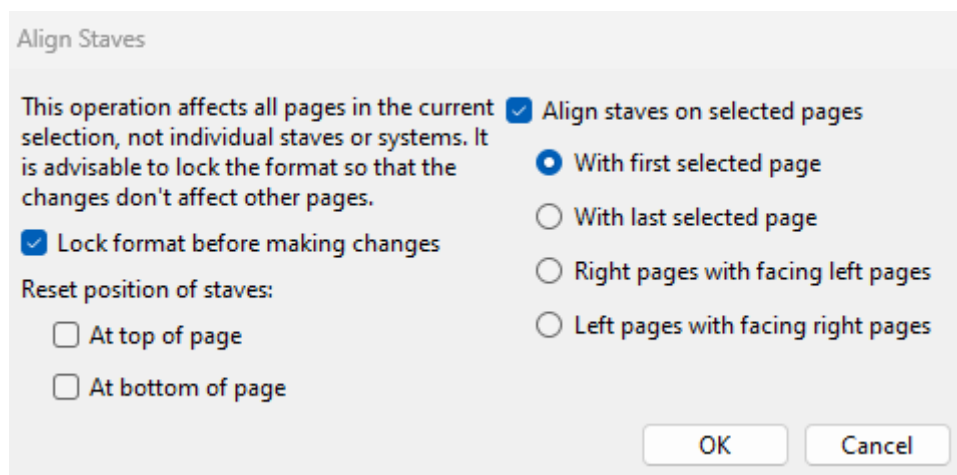


We now have nine staves on each page. But it still looks messy. We need to tidy up that gappy second page. It's a simple process: select both pages, then do the following:

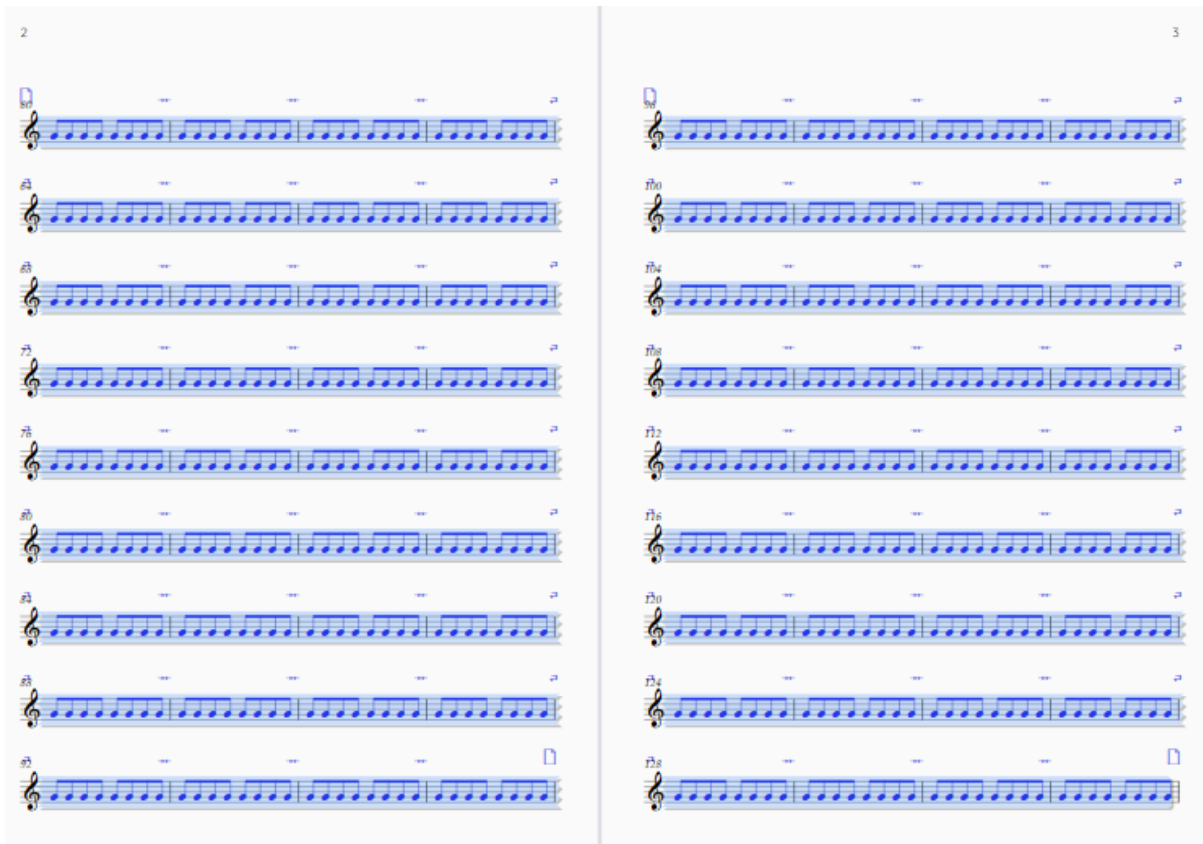
Layout Tab

Staff Spacing

Align Staves



In this situation, you would align with the first selected page, and doing so results in the following:



And if that's sitting a little too low for your taste, put the cursor in any bar on the top line and drag the whole lot up. Realign the other page using the process described above if necessary.

Hopefully, this will have given some of you a few new ideas. Even if it's only one new thing you take from this, that's still good! I am constantly learning about Sibelius and always open to feedback. Let me know if there are any issues you would like me to add to this blog.

Ivor McGregor August 2023