

Orchestral Instrumentation Shorthand

Overview

This is a method of identifying the instruments required for a given orchestral work. It shows how many of each instrument a composition requires. The arrangement of instruments follows the normal orchestral score order, from top to bottom. This order consists of Woodwinds, Brass, Timpani with Percussion and Harp or Piano, Other Instruments or Voices, and Strings (Violins, Violas, Cellos, Basses) separated by punctuation.

Example of Shorthand

There is little standardization between music publishers, but the Boosey & Hawkes version shown below is among the clearest and most complete.

Shorthand for Instrumentation	List of Required Instruments Spelled Out
<i>Beethoven Symphony No. 5</i> 3.2.2.3 - 2.2.3.0 - timp - strings	3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings
<i>Pictures at an Exhibition (Mussorgsky/Ravel)</i> 3(III=picc).3(III=cor A).3.3 - 4.3.3.1 - timp.perc(5) - cel - 2harps - strings	3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, 5 percussionists, celesta, 2 harps, strings

The Original Reference

A widely used print catalog of around 4,500 compositions indicating the instrumentation required for orchestral works was compiled by David Daniels. Here is a citation:

Daniels, David. Orchestral Music: A Handbook, 4th Ed. Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, 2005.

In the first editions of Orchestral Music, the works were listed using a method that included the symbols *, +, and =. These showed that certain auxiliary woodwinds were present, but not how many of them. There is a current online version available by subscription entitled [Daniels' Orchestral Music](#) with clear indications of the instruments required. It is updated monthly and includes over 14,000 entries.