

Parts of a Note

Music

Notehead, stem, flag and beam — the four parts and the rules for each.

Every written note is built from up to four parts. Which parts are present, and which way they point, carries the rhythm and keeps the page readable.

FLAGS =
1 eighth

TWO FLAGS
sixteenth

BEAM
= flags, joined

- Notehead: hollow for whole and half notes, filled for quarter and shorter.
- Stem: absent on a whole note; present on everything shorter.
- Stems point UP from the right side when the note is below the middle line.
- Stems point DOWN from the left side when the note is on or above the middle line.
- Flags: one for an eighth, two for a sixteenth, three for a thirty-second.
- Beams replace flags when notes are grouped, and show the beat at a glance.

LOOK FOR IT

Four sixteenths beamed together fill one beat in 4/4, and are read as a single unit.

Beam to the beat, not across it. Beaming that hides the pulse is technically legal and practically unreadable.