

So much of what gives jazz music its special character and feel are things that are not notated. Note lengths and accents are sometimes notated. But, too often those notations are incomplete or wrong. Experienced jazz musicians have learned what to do with a line. What follows are a few general guidelines students can use as a brief introduction to applying appropriate jazz articulations to jazz figures and lines.

General Guidelines

- Quarter notes are usually played short.
- With consecutive quarter notes, the notes on beats 1 or 3 may be long.
- Use a “tongue stop.”
- Eighth-note lines must be connected and not “choppy.”
- In scalar passages, upbeats are usually accented.
- Downbeats also may be accented, particularly if they are at the top of a melodic contour.
- Tonguing the beginning or “front” of an accented note can help it “pop” out. However, if this introduces separation, it would be better to slur.

Back Accent Tonguing

Accenting the upbeats or “backs” of the beats is appropriate in scalar passages and tonguing those notes helps create the accents. Do not clip off the note preceding the accent.



This approach works with patterns of thirds if the upbeats are on the top of the melodic contour.



If the top of the melodic contour occurs on the downbeat, it should be accented.



First alto part as printed in Peter Blair’s arrangement of Autumn Leaves:

Two staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff contains measures 42-45, with measure 43 marked with a box containing the number 43. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes. The second staff contains measures 46-49, also with slurs and accents.

First alto part as many professionals would play it:

Two staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff contains measures 42-45, with measure 43 marked with a box containing the number 43. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes. Below the staff are the syllables: du da u da u da__ da u da__ da u da u da u da__ da u da u da u da u n. The second staff contains measures 46-49, also with slurs and accents. Below the staff are the syllables: du dot dot dot dot da u da u da__ du dah__.

Another alternative requiring less tonguing:

Two staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff contains measures 42-45, with measure 43 marked with a box containing the number 43. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes. The second staff contains measures 46-49, also with slurs and accents.