

HOLD THAT THOUGHT

Reading holds and pauses

Music that bubbles along is all well and good, and can be perfectly enjoyable (think of most of what you hear on Top 40 radio), but sometimes it's good to meander—or even stop—to sniff the flowers along the way to your musical destination.

Dramatic pauses in music are the equivalent of an actor stopping in the middle of a speech to make eye contact with his audience: they grab the attention, making the listeners hold their breath in anticipation of what comes next. On the other hand, a long-held note or chord can be used to highlight a musical climax, heightening tension and increasing the desire to hear what follows.

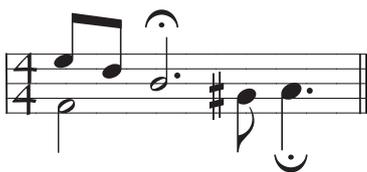
Like most instructions in music, holds and pauses are notated in specific ways. At its simplest, the fermata (or hold) is a sign that indicates the prolonging of a sound or a silence. It's drawn as a half-circle with a dot centered along its bottom:



Fermatas should nearly always be written above the staff, and directly over the indicated note or rest:

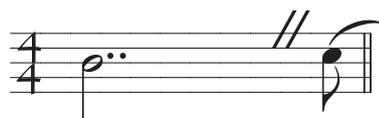


Like all rules, though, there are exceptions, such as when the hold appears at two different locations in a measure of two-part (or *divisi*) music. In this case, the fermata for the bottom part is placed upside-down below the staff, directly beneath its corresponding note or rest:



In fast tempos, a fermata usually indicates a brief pause; at slower speeds, the fermata can be long and more drawn out. In a band or orchestra, the conductor will determine the exact duration.

Longer pauses, called caesuras, indicate a suspension of time, a total (albeit momentary) halting of tempo and pulse. Caesuras are drawn as two small, downward-slanting lines that start in the space above the fifth (top) line of the staff, crossing it to touch the fourth line:



To indicate an extended caesura, a fermata can be drawn directly above the caesura indication:



As with fermatas, the length of a caesura is determined by the conductor of a band or orchestra. In small groups, it's up to the individual members to come to musical agreement over how long they'd like to linger over a passage before moving on.

