

ORNAMENTS: THE NACHSCHLAG

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Preface

The first thing you need to know when deciding how to play any ornament in pre-20th-century music is that there was no "common practice." The notation and execution of ornaments varied from country to country and composer to composer. Written instructions from long ago or ornament tables (even by J.S. Bach) cannot overcome the general shortcomings of musical notation. Rigid rules, no matter where they come from, go against the very nature of ornaments—they were often improvised and, therefore, are too free to be tamed into regularity or taught by the book. ↵

Descriptions of ornaments are only rough outlines, and many are contradictory. It's a jungle and very frustrating to try to figure out. There is simply no definitive solution to any ornament in a given situation. Therefore, be skeptical of everything I write from here on!

If you want a short answer to how to play an ornament, I say, "Do whatever you want. Do what makes the music sound best, and do what sounds best to you. In the end, that's what counts."

What is the Nachschlag ornament?

In 17th and 18th-century music, the Nachschlag falls BETWEEN two principal notes. It is usually one scale degree above or below the first principal note to which it is attached with a slur. It is a note of short duration (16th, 32nd, or 64th), and "steals" its rhythmic value from the first principal note so that it doesn't displace the second principal note. Therefore, the performer plays the first principal note for a shorter duration than written to accommodate the desired duration of the Nachschlag. The second principal note retains its original written value. Here are some examples. Example #1:

THE NACHSCHLAG

Example #1

Notated:

First Principal note Second Principal note

Or, the grace note (the Nachschlag) could be a 16th note.

Execution:

First Principal note Second Principal note

Nachschlag

OR:

First Principal note Second Principal note

Nachschlag

Execution:

First Principal note Second Principal note

Nachschlag

OR:

First Principal note Second Principal note

Nachschlag

Or, the grace note (the Nachschlag) could be a 16th note.

What is the Notation for a Nachschlag?

Composers notated the Nachschlag in several ways.

1. The Nachschlag could be a grace note with a slur attached to the principal note preceding it (by the Romantic period, composers often omitted the slur). The grace note could be an 8th or 16th note.
2. German theorist and composer Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg cited using a bent line like a V (the point sticking down) to indicate that the Nachschlag was below the first principal note and an inverted bent line (the point sticking up) to indicate the Nachschlag was above the first principal note.
3. Other composers used short oblique lines (they did not connect to the second principal note) slanted up or down to indicate whether the Nachschlag was to be higher or lower than the first principal note.

Here are examples of all three systems of notation, for the ascending Nachschlag. Example #2:

NOTATION OF THE ASCENDING NACHSCHLAG

Example #2

Notated: **Notated:** **Notated:**

First Principal note Second Principal note First Principal note Second Principal note First Principal note Second Principal note

Or, the grace note (the Nachschlag) could be a 16th note. The ascending Nachschlage symbol The ascending Nachschlage symbol

All three of the above could be played like this:

First Principal note Second Principal note First Principal note Second Principal note

Nachschlag OR: Nachschlag

Here are examples of all three systems of notation, for the descending Nachschlag. Example #3:

NOTATION OF THE DESCENDING NACHSCHLAG

Example #3

Notated: **Notated:** **Notated:**

First Principal note Second Principal note First Principal note Second Principal note First Principal note Second Principal note

Or, the grace note (the Nachschlag) could be a 16th note. The descending Nachschlage symbol The descending Nachschlage symbol

All three of the above could be played like this:

First Principal note Second Principal note First Principal note Second Principal note

Nachschlag OR: Nachschlag

From the 1800s, composers began notating the Nachschlag in regular-sized notes. However, the Romantic composers sometimes reverted to using grace notes instead (without the slur to the first principal note). However, they were careful to position the grace note before a bar line to avoid confusion with on-the-beat execution.

The Anticipatory Nachschlag

A special type of Nachschlag anticipates the following note. The descending anticipation was a common ornament in the 17th century, known in France as the *cheute* and England as a *cadent*. An ascending version was also possible. Its symbol was the same in both countries—a long, descending oblique line to the right of the first principal note connecting to the second principal note. Example #4:

THE ANTICIPATORY NACHSCHLAG

Example #4

Notated: First Principal note, Second Principal note

Executed: First Principal note, Second Principal note, Anticipatory Nachschlag

OR: First Principal note, Second Principal note, Anticipatory Nachschlag

Notated: First Principal note, Second Principal note

Executed: First Principal note, Second Principal note, Anticipatory Nachschlag

OR: First Principal note, Second Principal note, Anticipatory Nachschlag

Notated: First Principal note, Second Principal note

Executed: First Principal note, Second Principal note, Anticipatory Nachschlag

OR: First Principal note, Second Principal note, Anticipatory Nachschlag

The image contains three rows of musical notation. Each row illustrates the execution of an anticipatory Nachschlag for two principal notes. The notation is in 2/4 time, bass clef, and 8va. In the 'Notated' section of each row, two principal notes are shown with arrows pointing to them. The 'Executed' section shows two alternatives: one with a grace note before the second principal note, and another with a grace note before the first principal note. Arrows point from the labels 'First Principal note', 'Second Principal note', and 'Anticipatory Nachschlag' to the corresponding notes in the notation.

Nachschlags of multiple notes

The Nachschlag was not limited to a single note. German composer and organist Daniel Gottlob Türk described Nachschlags of two notes that he called Double Nachschlags. Occasionally, composers extended the Nachschlag to three or more notes. Their execution was the same as the single Nachschlag. They took their value from the first principal note, retaining the full value of the second principal note. Composers notated the multiple-note Nachschlag with small grace notes or regular-size notes.

A Secondary Meaning of the Nachschlag

In modern German terminology, the Nachschlag refers to the two terminating notes we can add to a trill as a suffix. However, some authorities consider only the first of the two notes to be the Nachschlag since it is the only pitch foreign to the trill. Example #5:

THE NACHSCHLAG AS THE SUFFIX TO A TRILL

Example #5

In the Baroque period, the trill begins on the upper auxiliary and contains at least four notes.

Trill of at least four notes beginning on the upper auxiliary

The diagram shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The trill begins on the upper auxiliary note (G4) and contains at least four notes. The principal note (F4) is indicated by an arrow. The Nachschlag is a suffix (termination) of two notes, consisting of the lower auxiliary note (G3) and the principal note (F4). The Nachschlag is enclosed in a box.

Upper auxiliary note

Principal note

Lower auxiliary note

Principal note

The Nachschlag
Suffix (termination)
of two notes

FURTHER READING

If you want to explore any of these topics in-depth (630 pages), I highly recommend one of my favorite books, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music With Special Emphasis on J.S. Bach* by Frederick Neumann.