

ORNAMENTS: THE SLIDE

By Douglas Niedt

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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."

IMPORTANT NOTE:

This discussion is about the slide ornament, a specific musical technique. It's important to note that the topic has nothing to do with the common guitar technique of sliding from one note to another.

THE SLIDE

The slide (Latin: *circuitus*; German: *schleiffer* (though some used this term only for descending slides); French: *coulé* or *coulade*, *port de voix double* (or *double*) is an ornament found throughout music history but particularly in music of the Baroque period.

The slide ornament consists of three notes—two auxiliary notes and the principal note. The slide serves as a melodic and rhythmic ornament, not a harmonic one like the appoggiatura.

The Ascending Slide

The ascending slide starts on a lower auxiliary note, two scale steps below the principal note. The second note is a lower auxiliary note, one scale step below the principal note. The third note of the

slide is the principal note itself. The distance from note to note will usually be a half-step or whole-step. Usually, there is a slur connecting the auxiliary notes to the principal note.

Therefore, on the guitar, if the principal note is the 1st-string G, the slide would be open 1st-string E, 1st-fret F, and finally, the 3rd-fret G (all on the 1st string).

Here are some examples of note sequences for an ascending slide. Example #1:

THE SLIDE

Examples of Ascending Slides

Example #1

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Faster auxiliary notes:

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

The Descending Slide (*Schleiffer* in German)

The descending slide (*Sschleiffer* in German) starts on an upper auxiliary note, two scale steps above the principal note. The second note is an upper auxiliary note, one scale step above the principal note. The third note of the slide is the principal note itself. The distance from note to note will usually be a half-step or whole-step. Usually, there is a slur connecting the auxiliary notes to the principal note.

Therefore, on the guitar, if the principal note is the 2nd-string open B, the slide would be 3rd-fret D on the 2nd string, 1st-fret C, and finally, the open B (all on the 2nd string). Example #2:

Examples of Descending Slides

Example #2

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Faster auxiliary notes:

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

Composers occasionally write slides of more than three notes. Multitone patterns were called *tirata* by Italians, *coulade* by Frenchmen, and *Pfeil* by Germans. In measure 2 of the "Aria" from J. S. Bach's Cantata BWV 92 (*I have given over to God's heart and mind*) is an example of a four-note and five-note *tirata*. Example #3:

Examples of Four and Five-Note Slides ("tiratas")

"Aria" measure 2, from *Cantata BWV 92 (I have given over to God's heart and mind)* (J. S. Bach)

Example #3

Principal note of the slide

Principal note of the slide

What is the Notation for the Slide Ornament?

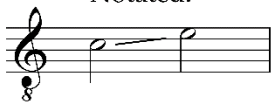
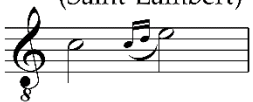


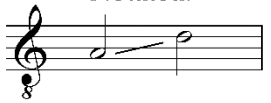



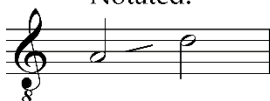



In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, composers used several different symbols for slides. Some used a line starting and ending on a specific line or space of the staff to indicate the desired auxiliary notes. Example #4:

Notation of the Slide

Some French theorists used a line to indicate the slide. The line started and ended on a specific line or space of the staff to indicate the desired auxiliary notes.

Les principes du clavecin (1702) p. 53 (Monsieur de Saint-Lambert)

Example #4

Notated:	"Expression" (Saint-Lambert)	Probable execution:	Possible execution:
			
Notated:	"Expression" (Saint-Lambert)	Probable execution:	Possible execution:
			
Notated:	"Expression" (Saint-Lambert)	Probable execution:	Possible execution:
			

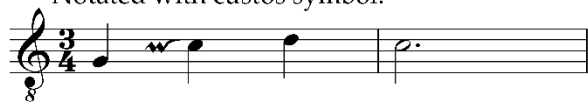
For an ascending slide, other composers, such as Johann Kuhnau, Johann Gottfried Walther (a cousin of J. S. Bach), and J. S. Bach, used a horizontal zig-zag line (like an ascending mordent or trill) with an upward diagonal or curved line springing up from the right side of the zigzag. Example #5:

Other composers used a custos symbol to indicate the slide.

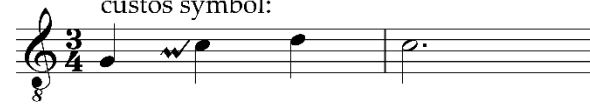
For the ascending slide, the symbol looks like the symbol for an ascending mordent with a curved line or diagonal line springing up from the right side of the zig-zag:

Example #5


Notated with custos symbol:




Notated with slightly different custos symbol:



Possible execution for both of the above:




Another possible execution for both of the above:



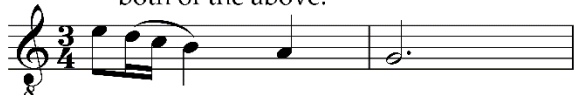
For a descending slide, Kuhnau and Walter used a horizontal zig-zag line (like an ascending mordent or trill) with a curved line hanging down from the right side of the zigzag. Example #6:

Example #6

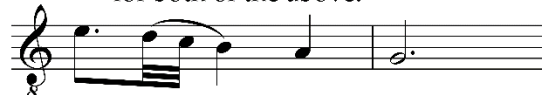
For the descending slide, the symbol looks like the symbol for an ascending mordent with a curved line or diagonal line hanging down from the right side of the zig-zag:



Possible execution for both of the above:



Another possible execution for both of the above:



As time passed, composers began to increasingly use small grace notes instead of symbols to indicate the auxiliary notes of the slide as shown in this example from measures 1-2 of Aguado's "Valse No. 6." Example #7:

As time passed, composers began to increasingly use small grace notes instead of symbols to indicate the auxiliary notes of the slide.

Example #7

Six Menuets et Six Valses from *Collection of Works for the Guitar* (Dionisio Aguado)
"Valse No. 6" measure 1-2



Auxiliary notes of the slide
notated as small grace notes

There are Three Ways to Accent the Notes and Execute the Rhythm of the Slide Ornament

As with most ornaments, there is no one answer to whether the Slide Ornament should start on a strong beat or before. It all depends on the date of the composition, the musical context, the composer, and the country. Sometimes, the ease of execution will offer a hint. For example, playing a slide on the beat may be technically awkward or impossible. Playing the slide ahead of the beat may sound odd. Ultimately, the individual performer must choose what sounds best to him. But here is some information to help you decide.

Slide Ornaments fall into three categories of accentuation and rhythmic execution:

1. Anapestic
2. Lombard
3. Dactylic

The Anapestic Slide

The Anapestic Slide is anticipatory. We play the auxiliary notes BEFORE a strong beat. We play the grace notes quietly and emphasize the principal note. It implies a buildup or crescendo.

The slides shown from Saint-Lambert's *Les principes du clavecin* in example #4 are anapestic slides. Here is an example of Anapestic Anticipatory Ascending Slides from J. S. Bach's *Violin Sonata in E minor* BWV 1023. Note that Bach wrote these slides in regular notation (no grace notes or symbols), so there is no doubt as to the execution. Example #8:

The Anapestic Slide

"Adagio" measure 3, from *Violin Sonata in E minor* BWV 1023 (J. S. Bach)

Example #8

Principal note of the slide

Ascending Anapestic Slide

Ascending Anapestic Slide

Principal note of the slide

Anticipatory auxiliary notes

Strong beat

Anticipatory auxiliary notes

Strong beat

Next, here is an example of a descending Anapestic Anticipatory Slide from J. S. Bach's *Cantata BWV 97 (In all that I do, In all my undertakings)*. Example #9:

"Aria" measure 9, from *Cantata BWV 1023, In all that I do, In all my undertakings* (J. S. Bach)

Example #9

Principal note of the slide

Descending Anapestic Slide

Anticipatory auxiliary notes

Strong beat

The Lombard Slide

We execute the Lombard slide ON a strong beat. We play the first auxiliary note of the slide with a distinct accent, again, ON the strong beat. However, historical evidence shows that performers sometimes shifted the Lombard Slide slightly before or after the strong beat. But it retains its on-the-beat feel because the first auxiliary note receives the strongest accent of the ornament.

Here is an example of two Ascending Lombard Slides in J. S. Bach's *Cantata BWV 179*. Example #10:

The Lombard Slide

Ascending Lombard Slides

"Aria" measure 1, from *Cantata BWV 179, See to it, that your fear of God be not hypocrisy* (J. S. Bach)

Example #10

Principal note of the slide

Ascending Lombard Slide

Principal note of the slide

First auxiliary note ON the beat

Strong beat

Next, here is an example of Descending Lombard Slides in the violin solo of the "Laudamus te" from J. S. Bach's *Mass in B minor*. Example #11:

Descending Lombard Slides

"Laudamus te" measure 5, from *Mass in B minor BWV 232* (J. S. Bach)

Example #11

Descending Lombard Slides, Each ON a Strong Beat

First auxiliary note ON the beat

First auxiliary note ON the beat

First auxiliary note ON the beat

The Dactylic Slide

Its long-short-short rhythm sets the Dactylic Slide apart from the Anapestic and Lombard slides. The Dactylic Slide is usually anticipatory and falls most naturally on weak beats. The Dactylic Slide is unaccented, and the first auxiliary note only receives a slight emphasis. It was one of J. S. Bach's favorite melodic figures.

Here is an example of several Dactylic Slides in the oboe d'amore part in measures 1-3 of the aria "Es halt es mit der blinden Welt" from J. S. Bach's *Cantata BWV 94*. Example #12:

The Dactylic Slide

As is usually the case, these dactylic slides are on weak beats.

Aria "Es halt es mit der blinden Welt" measures 1-3,
from *Cantata BWV 94, What should I ask of the world* (J. S. Bach)

Example #12

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The music consists of five measures. Each measure contains a dactylic slide, which is a group of three notes with a long-short-short rhythmic pattern. The first note of each slide is marked with an upward-pointing arrow and the text "First auxiliary note on weak beat". Above each slide, a bracket is labeled "Dactylic Slide". The slides occur on the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth beats of the piece.

Although the Dactylic Slide usually falls on weak beats, there are exceptions. Here are two Dactylic Slides that fall on the strong beats in the oboe d'amore part in measure 1-2 of the aria "Ich nehme mein Leiden mit Freuden auf mich" from J. S. Bach's *Cantata BWV 75*. Also, note that while both display the characteristic long-short-short rhythm of the Dactylic Slide, the rhythmic values of the two slides are slightly different. Example #13:

These dactylic slides are on strong beats.

Also, note that while both exhibit the long-short-short rhythmic pattern, the note values of the two slides are different.

Aria "Ich nehme mein Leiden mit Freuden auf mich" measures 1-3,
from *Cantata BWV 75, The miserable shall eat* (J. S. Bach)

Example #13

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef with a 3/8 time signature. The music consists of two measures. Each measure contains a dactylic slide, which is a group of three notes with a long-short-short rhythmic pattern. The first note of each slide is marked with an upward-pointing arrow and the text "First auxiliary note on strong beat". Above each slide, a bracket is labeled "Dactylic Slide". The slides occur on the first and second beats of the piece.

How Do We Play Slides on the Guitar?

Unlike many other ornaments, guitarists only play slides using slurs (hammer-ons and pull-offs). They are usually not suitable for cross-string fingerings.


Examples of Slide Ornaments in the Guitar Repertoire

In measure 7 of the "Introduction" to Fernando Sor's *Grand Solo Op. 14* (Meissonnier edition), Sor notates two ornamental slides as grace notes. We could start the slides BEFORE the strong beats as Anticipatory Anapestic Slides or ON the strong beats as Lombard Slides. Both are difficult to play. Example #14:

Introduction, measure 7, *Grand Solo* (Fernando Sor)

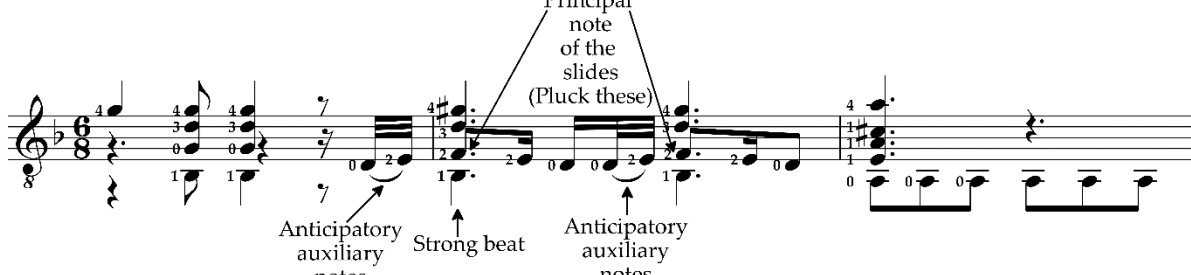
Example #14

Notated:



Slides notated with grace notes

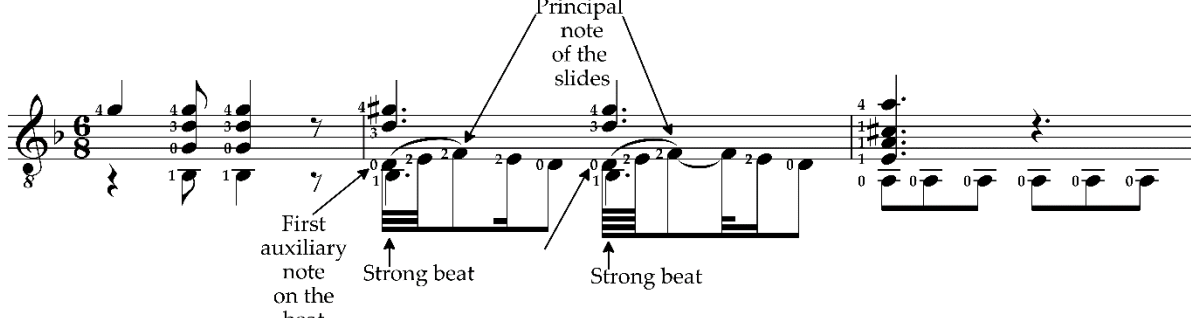
Executed as Anticipatory Anapestic Slides



Principal note of the slides (Pluck these)

Anticipatory auxiliary notes Strong beat Anticipatory auxiliary notes

Executed as on-the-beat Lombard Slides



Principal note of the slides

First auxiliary note on the beat Strong beat Strong beat

I prefer the Anticipatory Anapestic Slides because they emphasize the 4th-string Fs, the slides' principal note. Plus, the 4th-string Fs are the active melody note in the chords.

We also find examples of the slide ornament in the *Rossiniana No. 1, Op. 119* by Mauro Giuliani. In measures 3-6 of the "Allegro Vivace" section, Giuliani writes a slide ornament in grace notes.

Example #15:

"Allegro Vivace" measures 3-6, *Rossiniana No. 1, Op. 119* (Mauro Giuliani)

Example #15

Slide notated with
grace notes:

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a sequence of chords and melodic lines. A bracket labeled "Slide" is placed over a specific melodic phrase, with the numbers "0 1 2" written below it, indicating the fret positions for the slide. The bottom staff shows a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C), with a sequence of chords corresponding to the top staff.

Executed as an Anticipatory Anapestic Slide

The image shows two staves of musical notation, similar to the first example. The top staff has a treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and common time (C). A bracket labeled "Anapestic Slide" is placed over a melodic phrase. Above the first note of this phrase, the text "Principal note of the slide (Pluck this)" is written with a downward arrow pointing to the note. Below the staff, the text "Anticipatory auxiliary notes" is written with an upward arrow pointing to the notes preceding the slide. Further down, the text "Strong beat" is written with an upward arrow pointing to the first note of the slide. The bottom staff shows a bass clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and common time (C), with a sequence of chords.

Executed as an on-the-beat Lombard Slide

The image displays two musical staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It shows a sequence of notes with a 'Lombard Slide' indicated by a slur over three notes. Labels include 'First auxiliary note ON the beat', '(3-note slur)', and 'Unaccented Principal note of the slide'. A 'Strong beat' is marked below the staff. The bottom staff shows a simplified version of the slide ornament.

Here again, we can play the slide ornament BEFORE the downbeat as an Anticipatory Anapestic Slide or ON the downbeat as a Lombard Slide. Italian composers favored the Lombard Slide, but in this instance, I prefer the Anticipatory Anapestic Slide. Remember, one of the qualities of the Anapestic Slide is that it implies a building up or crescendo, which fits nicely with building into and emphasizing the melodic G.

Finally, we find examples of the slide ornament in guitar composer Dionisio Aguado's works. Slide ornaments are notated in grace notes throughout his "Lesson No. 5" from *Eight Lessons for Guitar*. These slide ornaments sound best as on-the-beat Lombard Slides. Lombard Slides give the entrances of the ornaments a punchiness that fits the piece very well. Example #16:

"Lesson No. 5" measures 1-6, *Eight Lessons for Guitar* (Dionisio Aguado) Edition by Sophocles Papas

Example #16

All slide ornaments notated with grace notes:

Executed as an on-the-beat Lombard Slides

First auxiliary note ON the beat (3-note slur) Lombard Slide

Strong beat

First auxiliary note ON the beat (3-note slur) Lombard Slide

Strong beat

(3-note slur) Lombard Slide (3-note slur) Lombard Slide (3-note slur) Lombard Slide

Strong beat Strong beat Strong beat

Each first auxiliary note is ON the beat

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.