

2.13 Guitar notation and tab

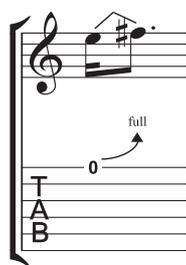
1.5 Guitar tab input, 2.7 Chord diagrams, 2.17 Lute tablature, 8.16 ASCII tab files.

Guitar music features a wide array of special markings – including bends, pre-bends, slides, hammer-ons and pull-offs, and so on – all of which can be produced easily in Sibelius. The most common ones are listed below.

You can create these in either tab or notation staves, and they change design automatically when copied between tab and notation staves (with a few minor exceptions stated below).

Some of the tab markings involve hidden notes on the tab staff, which can be viewed and edited when **View ▶ Hidden Objects** (shortcut **Ctrl+Alt+H** or **⌘+⌘H**) is switched on.

Bend



Bends are produced by fretting a string and then pushing the string sideways to bend the note after playing it. Bends are normally either a half-step (semitone) or a whole step (tone) up or down, but it's possible to bend microtonal intervals too if you want.

On notation staves, a bend is drawn as an angled line between two notes, a bit like a crooked slur. On tab staves, it is drawn as an arrow that curves upwards if the second note is higher than the first, or downwards if the second note is lower than the first; additionally, for upward bends the second note is not notated on the tab staff, the interval for the bend instead being given above the curved arrow, in half-steps. A whole step bend is usually written as “full” rather than “1” (although you can change this in Sibelius from the **Guitar** page of the **House Style ▶ Engraving Rules** dialog by switching off the **Use full on tab bends** option).

To create a bend, select the first note and type **J** (which looks a little like a bend on a tab staff); the bend line will automatically be positioned between it and the next note (or will snap to the next note when you create it). You can also create a bend with the mouse: first ensure that nothing is selected in your score, choose **Create ▶ Line** (shortcut **L**) and select the bend line (shown as if on a notation staff) from the **Staff lines** panel. The mouse pointer changes color and you can click in the score to place the line.

Bend lines behave similarly to slurs: type **space** to extend the bend to the next note, or **Shift-space** to retract it; on notation staves, you can choose **Edit ▶ Flip** (shortcut **X**) to move the bend to the other side of the note. You can also adjust the position of either end of the bend line using the mouse or arrow keys. Like slurs, bends are magnetic, and position themselves automatically.

Bend intervals

To change the bend interval on a notation staff, simply change the pitch of the second note. On a tab staff, make sure **View ▶ Hidden Objects** (shortcut **Ctrl+Alt+H** or **⌘+⌘H**) is switched on, then

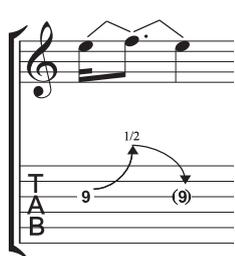
2. Notations

select the hidden second note and change its pitch (either by playing a note on your MIDI keyboard, or by typing the fret number on the main keyboard).

To create a slight or microtonal bend, create a bend on a note and type **Shift-space** to retract the right-hand end so that it attaches to the same note as the left-hand end. A slight bend is drawn as a curved line on a notation staff, and as a quarter-tone bend on a tab staff.

Should you need to change the font or point size used by the numbers above bends on a tab staff, simply edit the **Chord diagram fret** text style –  **3.10 Edit Text Styles**.

If you prefer bends on a tab staff to be written without an arrowhead, switch off **Use arrows** in **guitar bends** on the **Guitar** page of the **House Style** ▶ **Engraving Rules** dialog.



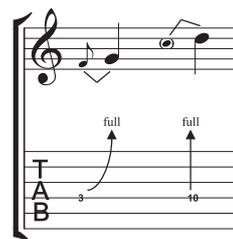
Bend and release

A bend and release is a bend upwards followed by a release back to the original note. To notate this, simply create an upward bend followed by a downward one.

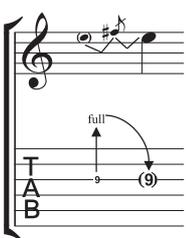
When written on a tab staff, the final note is usually in parentheses (because it isn't actually played); to add parentheses to the note, select it and choose the round bracket button (, shortcut 1) on the second Keypad layout (shortcut F9).

Grace note bends and pre-bends

Both these kinds of bends are notated in the same way: first, from the second Keypad layout (shortcut F9), create the grace note (, shortcut * on Windows, = on Mac) or pre-bend note (, shortcut – on Windows, * on Mac); hit J to create a bend; then create the second note.



On a tab staff, a pre-bend is represented by a vertical arrow.



Pre-bend and release

A pre-bend and release is created in much the same way as grace-note bends and pre-bends, as above; as you would expect, create a pre-bend note followed by a grace note, create a bend, then create a full-size note, and create another bend between the grace note and the full-size note. Remember to add parentheses to the final note on the tab staff (see **Bend and release** above).

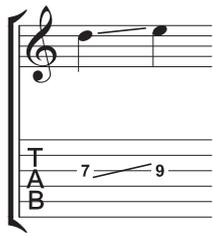
Unison bend

A unison bend is when you strike the two notes simultaneously, and bend the lower note up to the pitch of the higher. On a notation staff, the unison bend is written in a similar way to a pre-bend (see above), with two noteheads for the upper note.

On the tab staff, you will need to add the higher of the two initial notes as text; choose **Create** ▶ **Text** ▶ **Special Text** ▶ **Tablature numbers** and type the number.



Slide



A slide is achieved by striking the first note then sliding the same finger up or down to the second note, which is struck if the slide is a *shift slide*, and not struck if the slide is a *legato slide*.

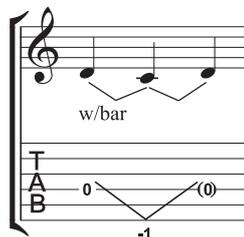
On both notation staves and tab staves, shift slides are notated as a straight line (as shown on the left). Legato slides are notated as a line together with a slur. If the second note of the slide is higher, the line points upwards; if the second note is lower, the line points downwards. On tab staves, the line is at a fixed angle, but on notation staves, the line is angled according to the position of the notes to which it is attached.

To create a slide, input the first note of the slide and click the slide button (, shortcut .) on the second Keypad layout (shortcut F9), then input the second note. You can also input the slide after creating both notes – just select the first of the two notes and click the slide button. To make a legato slide, just add a slur in the normal way ( **2.22 Slurs**).

Slides are magnetic and position themselves automatically. You can adjust their position by selecting either end and moving the handle with the mouse or the arrow keys.

Where there are several notes in a chord with slides, it is assumed that they are all sliding in the same direction. Should this not be the case, you should use straight lines from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog (shortcut L) to create the slides going in the opposite direction.

Vibrato (whammy) bar dive and return



The pitch of the note or chord is dropped a specified number of whole-steps (tones), then returned to the original pitch.

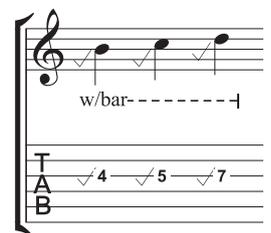
On a notation staff, a bar dive and return is written with two bend lines (see **Bend** above) and the “w/bar” line from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog (shortcut L).

On a tab staff, delete the middle note and add parentheses to the last note. Use two separate straight lines from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog for the V (because bends would appear as arrows). Type the number below the tab staff at the point of the V using **Create ▶ Text ▶ Special Text ▶ Tablature numbers**.

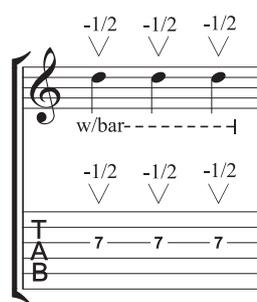
Vibrato bar scoop

A vibrato bar scoop is played by depressing the bar just before striking the note, then quickly releasing it.

To write this, use the symbol from the **Guitar** row of the **Create ▶ Symbol** dialog (shortcut Z). On a notation staff, you should also add a “w/bar” line from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog (shortcut L); to extend the line rightwards, hit space.



2. Notations



Vibrato bar dip

A vibrato bar dip is played by striking the note, then dropping a specified number of steps, then releasing back to the original pitch.

To notate this, use the V symbol from the **Guitar** row of the **Create ▶ Symbol** dialog, typing the numbers above using **Create ▶ Text ▶ Other staff text ▶ Small text**, then, on a notation staff, add a “w/bar” line from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog.

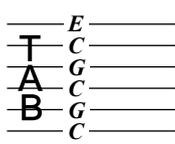
Other techniques

Other guitar markings are easily created as follows:

- *Hammer-on and pull-off*: use a slur – [📖 2.22 Slurs](#)
- *Tapping*: use a slur, with a + articulation on the first note if appropriate ([📖 2.2 Articulations](#)); for left-hand tapping, use the ◦ symbol on the **Techniques** row of the **Create ▶ Symbol** dialog ([📖 2.25 Symbols](#))
- *Vibrato and wide vibrato*: suitable lines are provided near the bottom of the list in the **Create ▶ Line** dialog – [📖 2.16 Lines](#)
- *Trill*: use a trill line – [📖 2.16 Lines](#)
- *Arpeggiate*: use an arpeggio line – [📖 2.16 Lines](#)
- *Tremolo picking*: use a tremolo – [📖 2.28 Tremolos](#)
- *Shake*: use a shake symbol – [📖 2.25 Symbols](#)
- *Harmonics*: on notation staves, use a diamond notehead ([📖 2.20 Noteheads](#)), and on tab staves, write “Harm.,” “H.H.” (for a harp harmonic), or “P.H.” (for a pinched harmonic) above the note in **Small text**
- *Slap*: write “T” above the note in **Small text**
- *Pop*: write “P” above the note in **Small text**
- *X notehead*: select a note and choose the X notehead from the **Notes** panel of the **Properties** window
- *Pick scrape*: use an angled wiggly gliss. line from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog and write “P.S.” above the tab staff with **Small text**; on a notation staff, use a cross notehead
- *Muffled strings*: use cross noteheads – [📖 2.20 Noteheads](#)
- *Rake*: on a notation staff, create grace notes with cross noteheads; on a tab staff, either copy the music from a notation staff (in which case the noteheads are automatically copied as crosses) or change the noteheads after creating the notes, and then add a suitable “Rake” line from the **Create ▶ Line** dialog.
- *Fingering*: use **Create ▶ Text ▶ Other Staff Text ▶ Guitar fingering (p i m a)** and write the fingering above each note or chord

The **Create ▶ Line** dialog (shortcut L) contains lines for most of the common guitar techniques, such as “w/bar,” “P.M.” (for palm muting), and so on. Should you need to create additional lines for guitar techniques, [📖 7.13 Edit Lines](#).

Showing tunings on tab staves



When using non-standard guitar tunings, it is helpful to show the pitch of each string directly on the tab staff, as shown on the left (depicting Open C tuning).

Sibelius shows these pitches by default for non-standard tunings. If you don't want them, select a bar in the staff, choose **House Style ▶ Edit Instruments**, click **Edit Instrument**, click **Yes**, then click **Edit Staff Type**, and finally switch off the **Key signatures / Tuning** option on the **General** page (📖 **7.12 Edit Instruments**).

Customizing tab, tunings and fret instruments

Sibelius has more than 30 alternative guitar tunings built-in (not to mention half a dozen banjo tunings, 11 dobro tunings, two sitar tunings and several lute tunings!), but despite this comprehensive collection, you can also create your own, as follows.

Changing the tuning of an instrument

To change the tuning used by a staff in your score, simply change it to a different instrument. With nothing in the score selected, choose **Create ▶ Other ▶ Instrument Change**, select the instrument with the desired tuning, click **OK**, and then click in the score to the left of the initial barline at the very start of the score.

But if the tuning you're looking for is available in a built-in instrument, you can easily modify one of the existing tunings or create one from scratch using **House Style ▶ Edit Instruments** – 📖 **7.12 Edit Instruments**.

White out around tab notes

Different publishers have different conventions for whether numbers in tab staves sit directly on the staff lines or whether they are cushioned by a little white space (so that the staff line does not go through the number). Naturally, Sibelius allows you to specify this yourself by editing the settings for individual instruments in the **House Style ▶ Edit Instruments** dialog. Choose the instrument in the dialog, then click **Edit Instrument**; if the instrument already exists in your score, you'll be asked if you're sure you want to continue, so click **Yes**, then in the **Edit Instrument** dialog click **Edit Staff Type**. The relevant option is **White out around notes** on the **Tab** page.

Sibelius's default settings are as follows:

- For tab staff types that show rhythms where stems are drawn in the staff, the **White out around notes** option is switched on; this makes the stems clearer.
- For tab staff types that show rhythms where stems are drawn entirely outside the staff, and for tab staff types that don't show rhythms, the **White out around notes** option is switched off.

Tab can be fun

Oh yes, it can!

In Sibelius, guitar tab is treated as a special type of staff (rather like a percussion staff), and just as Sibelius lets you change the number of staff lines mid-score, you can change from notation to tab mid-score, or even mid-staff – or for that matter, change the string tunings mid-score.

Try this out: from **Create ▶ Other ▶ Instrument Change**, choose a guitar tab instrument, then click in the middle of a notation staff that has music on it. From there onwards, the notation will

2. Notations

turn into tab, and you'll find that the changeover point is in fact an "object" (a bit like a clef), which shows as a purple rectangle when selected. Now try dragging this rectangle left and right, or up and down from staff to staff, and you'll see that Sibelius instantly converts all the following notation to tab. Most excellent!

Engraving Rules options

The Guitar page of the House Style ▶ Engraving Rules dialog (shortcut **Ctrl+Shift+E** or **⇧⌘E**) is mostly concerned with the esoterica of chord diagrams, but there are a few tab-specific options, namely:

- **Use 'full' on tab bends:** with this option switched on, guitar bends of a whole step will be marked with the text "full"; switching the option off will make whole step (tone) bends use the number "1" instead
- **Use arrows on tab bends:** switch off this option if you prefer bend lines on tab staves to be drawn without arrowheads
- **Draw grace notes with 'tablature letters' text style:** this option allows you to adjust the size of grace notes on tab staves independently from the size of cue notes on notation staves. When this option is switched on, grace notes on tab staves take their size from the **Tablature letters** text style. The option is switched off by default.

You can also edit the text style used for tablature numbers by clicking the **Edit Text Style** button.