Music manuscript paper

European classical music notation is a (comparatively) efficient graphic medium for conveying musical information. Unfortunately, many manufacturers don't know (or don't care) about the principles of proper graphic organization, so that there is much *soi-disant* music paper on which it's virtually impossible to produce proper, legible notation.

There are four ABSOLUTE requirements for the music manuscript paper you use.

1. Each page must be no smaller than letter-size, and no larger than 9"x12".
Anything smaller is probably intended for the simple jottings of small children; anything larger is probably intended for professionals writing for large ensembles.

2. Each page must contain at least ten staves, and no more than 16 (12 is usual).
At this paper size, nine or fewer staves would be excessively large and/or excessively far apart. NB the larger the staff, the more effort is required to produce appropriately round noteheads, thick beams, straight barlines, etc.

3. The space *between* staves must be greater than the width of a single staff.
With less than a staff's width between staves, there's not enough room for notes that require ledger lines, flags and beams when multiple voices share a staff, or analytic symbols below the bass.

4. In each staff, the lines must be of HAIRLINE thickness.
Ideally, the staves are printed in gray or brown ink, for further contrast between the hairlines of the staff and the slightly thicker lines of stems, barlines, etc.

At this writing, the MIT Book Store sells three products that are acceptable, but just barely (no professional musician would be caught dead using these):

National (Avery-Dennison), 10-stave music notebook
Roaring Spring Paper Products, 12-stave music refills
Roaring Spring Paper Products, 12-stave music book

Better music paper by Passantino, Archives, or Carta isn't available at the MIT Book Store, but may be purchased online from the following vendors:

http://www.hickeys.com/pages/mss.htm
http://www.pattimusic.com/catalog/index.html
http://www.honeysucklemusic.com/show2.php?cat=Paper

Yes, obtaining such paper requires some extra initial effort on your part, but it will make your life (and, more critically, *my* life) easier over the course of the semester. Properly proportioned staves will make it easier for you to produce legible notation, and heavier paper will better sustain repeated erasure.

What about free music paper on the web?

Don't go there. Some people have made files freely available for printing your own paper. So far, I haven't seen *any* acceptable music paper available in this way. It typically fails to meet requirement no. 4 above (staff lines of *hairline* thickness), so music written on it falls short of ideal legibility. This problem is compounded if the paper is printed by inkjet. Laserprinting achieves better hairlines, but the toner doesn't hold up under repeated erasure (this is also true of photocopied manuscript paper).

OK...now that you've obtained proper music paper...

There are TWO absolute requirements for your use of the paper.

1. ALWAYS leave a blank staff between notated staff systems.
  If you use every staff on the page, the marks below each bass staff (including Roman numerals and bass figures) will collide with the marks above the treble staff of the next system. For the sake of legibility, you MUST leave at least one blank staff between systems. (If the staves are small and the bass staff includes many low notes, phrase or pedal markings, it may be desirable to leave *two* blank staves between systems.)

2. ALWAYS use only ONE side of the paper.
  If you write on both sides of the paper, it will be inconvenient to compare parallel passages on opposite sides of the same leaf, and it will be that much more difficult for you to spot errors in the move from the end of one page to the beginning of the next.

Music notation software

  Music notation software (e.g., Sibelius, Finale, GNU LilyPond) is typically capable of producing professional-quality output. The problem, though, is that such software often doesn't produce proper output by default. If you use notation software, you are responsible to learn how to edit your files to produce proper output. I *will* deduct points for improper notation, and I will *not* accept "But this is what the software does!" as an excuse. (When in doubt, consult classical scores from publishers such as Breitkopf & Härtel, G. Henle, C.F. Peters, G. Schirmer, Schott, Universal).

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