

# Creating Feathered-Beam Figures with Sibelius®

*A Step-by-Step Guide by Paul Nauert*

The feathered beam (also called “fanned” or “splayed” beam) is a familiar notational device in Twentieth-Century music. It provides the composer with a clear and simple way to specify freely accelerating and decelerating figures:



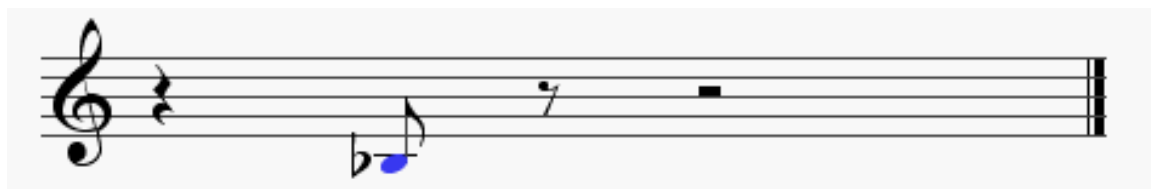
Sibelius offers a number of useful tools for creating feathered-beam figures. Here’s a fast approach with several advantages:

- SPACING. The note-to-note spacing is automatically correct, with the faster notes positioned more closely together.
- PLAYBACK. The acceleration or deceleration effect plays back correctly.
- INTEGRITY. Figures created this way will not interfere with the spacing or playback of events on other staves.

What follows is a step-by-step guide to creating the example shown above. Using the same techniques, you can create similar figures with more or fewer notes, figures that decelerate, figures that occupy a different total duration, and so on. (The secret revealed, for impatient readers: we take advantage of Sibelius’ remarkable ability to nest multiple levels of tuplets, and to hide the associated brackets and numerals.)

## Step 1

Input the first note of the figure as an eighth note.



## Step 2

Using  $\text{⌘}3$  or  $\text{Ctrl}+3$ , begin a triplet at the first note.



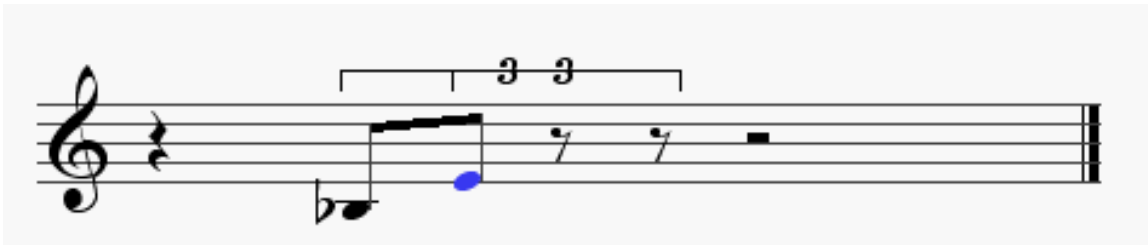
## Step 3

Input the second note.



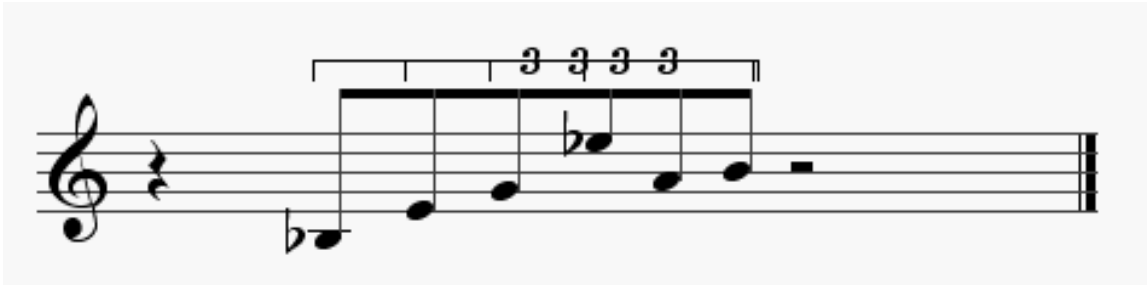
## Step 4

Using  $\text{⌘}3$  or  $\text{Ctrl}+3$ , begin another triplet at the second note. This will nest inside the first triplet. Sibelius places all tuplet numerals and brackets at the same default vertical position, so the result will look a little funny, but there's no need for concern.



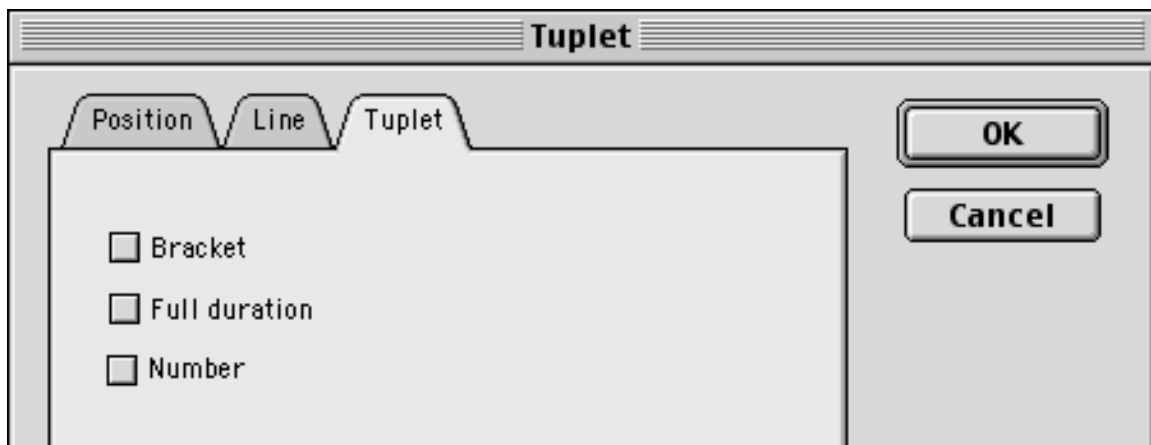
## Step 5

Continue in this manner, entering new notes and creating more deeply nested triplets, until all the notes are in place. The last triplet begins at E-flat and is completed by the remaining two notes. (How deeply can you nest tuplets? I've done as many as twelve, just out of curiosity, and Sibelius handled them perfectly.)



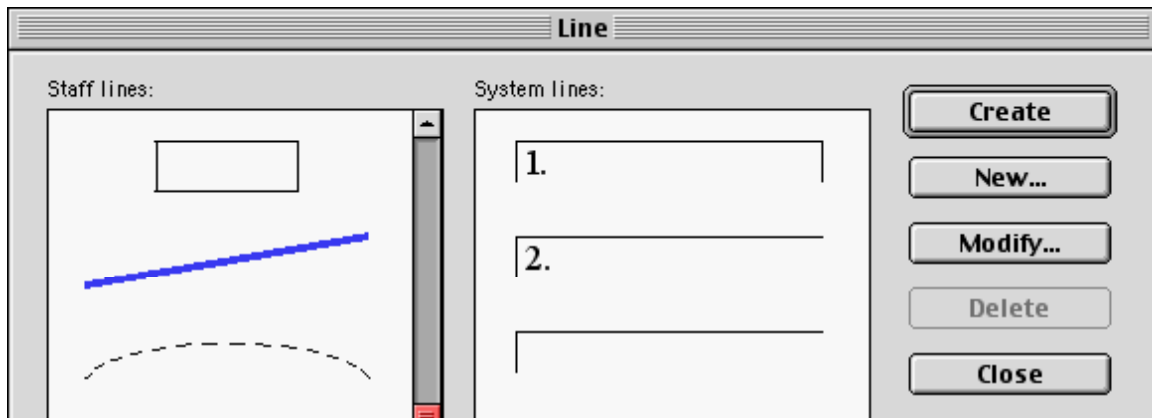
## Step 6

Drag/nudge the largest triplet bracket out of the way. Then click on each of the remaining tuplet brackets and access its Properties using **⌘I** or **Alt+Return**. Switch off the Brackets and Numbers by un-checking these fields in each case. However, keep the *largest* bracket, switching off only its Number, if you want to show the total duration of the figure as in the example with which we began.



## Step 7

Adjust the position of the “real” eighth-note beam as necessary, and draw in the additional, feathered beams using the Beam line. Finally, add a grace-note-sized quarter-note symbol above the tuplet bracket. Voilà!



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a composer and educator.*