The following ornament table is a transcription of the one appearing in the *Clavier-Büchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*, written by Johann Sebastian Bach for the keyboard instruction of his eldest son. (A scan of the original manuscript appears at [Dave's J.S. Bach Page](http://members.aol.com/kjvisbest/jsb_ornm.htm).) The German title translates as "Explanation of various signs, showing how to play certain ornaments correctly."[1] Bach gives the sign for each ornament on the upper of the paired staves, while the lower shows its execution directly beneath. I have simply modernized the clefs in my transcription, since Bach's manuscript uses soprano clefs, as several composers continued to do throughout the 18th century in place of the treble clef now used in all keyboard music.

The graphic of the transcription is image-mapped, meaning that you can click on any of the ornaments and hear an AU sound file play its execution. After the table, there appear clickable buttons which are keyed to the same AU sound files; some may find these more convenient to use than the image map.

Such a table as this, coming from the hand of the great J.S. Bach himself, is obviously valuable for the help it gives us in interpreting the signs he used for ornaments. Because the execution of ornaments often varied in the 18th century from country to country and from composer to composer, it is good to see Bach specifying what he wants in this regard. Nevertheless, a cautionary note is in order: Willard A. Palmer, in his detailed explanation of this table, helpfully remarks that "Since the Explication applies each ornament to a quarter note only, and that application is only practical at a moderate tempo, it can only show the GENERAL CONFIGURATION of each ornament. Note that all ornaments in the table begin on the beat." [2]

This is not really the place for a detailed discussion of the controversy that surrounds some of the finer points of Baroque ornamentation, such as whether a trill should begin on the principal note or the upper auxiliary. **C.P.E. Bach's** authority on these matters has been much disputed, but the fact that his own music is very different from his father's, and the shift that musical idioms underwent after
Sebastian's death, do not necessarily invalidate the application of ornamentation rules from Emanuel's famous Essay to the music of Sebastian. Since Emanuel promoted his father's works repeatedly and praised them to the skies—going so far as to say that J.S. Bach "is not in need of my recommendation. One was accustomed to see nothing but masterpieces come from him"{3}--, it does not seem to me reasonable that, if Emanuel's practice on ornamentation had significantly differed from his father's, the son would not have indicated as much. Indeed, Willard Palmer's remark, "...I believe that if I could play Bach's music as well as Karl Philipp Emanuel[,] I would be doing all right,"{4} seems to me to reflect an eminently safe and sane position to take in these matters.

In the following graphic of the transcription, I have transcribed Bach's table as closely as possible, including his original German title and captions. The captions are given in a sometimes-paraphrased English form beside the buttons key to the musical examples. I have also added after the paraphrases significant differences found in Palmer, who gives the "most common English names" of these ornaments.

**Explication unterschiedlicher Zeichen, so gewisse Manieren artig zu spielen, andeuten.**

1. Trillo (trill).
2. Mordant (mordent).

3. Trillo und mordant (trill combined with mordent; Palmer: "trill with termination").


5. Doppelt-Cadence (trill with initial turn; Palmer: "ascending trill").

6. Idem (another trill with initial turn; Palmer: "descending trill").

7. Doppelt-Cadence und Mordant (the above combined with a mordent; Palmer: "ascending trill with termination").

8. Idem (the same; Palmer: "descending trill with termination").

9. Accent steigend (ascending appogiatura; Palmer: "appogiatura from below").

10. Accent fallend (descending appogiatura; Palmer: "appogiatura from above").

11. Accent und Mordant (appogiatura with mordent; Palmer: "appogiatura and mordent").

12. Accent und Trillo (appogiatura with trill; Palmer: "appogiatura and trill").
13. Idem (another sign for appogiatura with trill).

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**Sample MIDI Files**

1. The first prelude (BWV 846) from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 1, had its origin in a piece entitled "Praeludium" in the same clavier instruction book containing this list of ornaments. To hear a MIDI file of this "rough draft" of the first WTC prelude, click on the music button below.[5]

![Play the Clavier-Büchlein "Praeludium."](General MIDI, 5kb)

2. The third of J.S. Bach's "Inventions" (also known as "Two-Part Inventions"), BWV 774, shows several of the ornaments in the above table in action, including the mordent, the trill, and the turn. It is also interesting as an example of the occasional difficulty of interpreting the signs as written by Bach. Measure 3 (and likewise measure 45) of the Invention no. 3 was printed in the authoritative Bach-Gesellschaft edition and subsequent editions with a "Doppelt-Cadence und Mordant" ornament (no. 7 above) over a 16th note, despite the fact that such an ornament here is, as Willard Palmer comments, "clearly impossible to execute at any reasonable tempo":[6]

![Inventio 3.](General MIDI, 7kb)

Dr. Palmer's comparison of this Invention as it appears in the *Clavier-Büchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* showed that the composer actually intended a slur between the "b" and "c#" and a mordent over the "c#." Here is the Invention as it appears in Palmer's *J.S. Bach: Inventions and Sinfonias*, 2nd Edition (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991). [Used with Permission of the Publisher; for copyright notice to "Inventions and Sinfonias," click here.]

![Play the Invention no. 3 in D Major, BWV 774.](General MIDI, 7kb)
References


For this revision of the page (2001), my table graphic above has been again scrutinized against the facsimile of Bach's handwritten table, and compared with Palmer's transcription, and additional corrections over and above the ones previously pointed out by various correspondents (see "Acknowledgements," below) have been made accordingly. (The ornament table appears in facsimile and transcription in both Palmer editions; see note 2 below for information on the second one.)

[2] Palmer, *Well-Tempered Clavier, Vol. 1*, p. 14 (capitals and italics Palmer's). See also the same editor's *J.S. Bach: Inventions and Sinfonias*, 2nd Edition (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991), p. 6, where this caution also appears. [Used with Permission of the Publisher; for copyright notice to "Inventions and Sinfonias," click here.] Both publications contain an excellent explanation of the ornament table, differing between them only in the examples given, which in either score illustrates the ornaments with passages from the specific work in that volume.

**Addendum 2/20/05:** However, my correspondent Alexei Zouboff points out that "Palmer's statement cited at the top of your page: 'Since the Explication applies each ornament to a quarter note only', is not absolutely exact: we have at least two exceptions [at nos. 4 and 8]; therefore 'only' should be changed to something like 'mostly' or 'almost only'' (personal communication via e-mail, 1/29/05). Mr. Zouboff is right, and therefore the transcription in Palmer's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, p. 13 (also in his *Inventions and Sinfonias*, p. 4) therefore slightly disagrees at no. 8 from the facsimile of Bach's table on the same page in lacking the dot on the quarter note. (However, the transcription of no. 4, despite Palmer's statement quoted above, is correct in making the upper note an eighth note.) My transcription of the table, which previously mistranscribed both no. 4 and no. 8, has now been corrected accordingly.


[5] The MIDI file gives this piece as reprinted in Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. Clara Bell & J.A. Fuller-Maitland, Vol. 3, NY: Dover, 1951, p. 387. As a matter of fact, Bach's score of this "Praeludium" has none of the above-listed ornaments, but it does show a kind of musical shorthand that was no doubt also part of Friedemann's curriculum: after bar 7, the notation is all half-note and whole-note chords, but this is a kind of abbreviated notation that Bach uses often when he wants continued arpeggios. (Two other examples of this can be found in the viola da gamba obbligato in the bass recitative "Ja! freilich will in uns das Fleisch
und Blut" in Part 2 of the *St. Matthew Passion* [BWV 244], and in the violin solo to the alto aria "Ich will doch wohl Rosen brechen" from the Cantata "Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage euch" [BWV 86].

{6} See Willard A. Palmer, *J.S. Bach: Inventions and Sinfonias*, p. 5, which also includes facsimiles of the relevant bars in Bach's "Autograph of 1723" and the *Clavier-Büchlein* demonstrating his point about the proper reading here.

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- For corrections to previous versions of the ornaments table transcription, and various suggestions, I thank Alexei Zouboff, Hume Smith and Dr. Yo Tomita.

- For pointing out an additional correction to Ornament 1's realization (correct in Bach-Gesellschaft and Palmer; this blunder was all mine!), I would like to thank Alan Melvin.

- I would like to especially thank Bill Palmer for introducing me to the editions by his late father, Dr.
Willard A. Palmer, for Alfred Publishing Co., Inc, which are the basis for this present revision of my page.

This page is referenced at

A Directory of J.S. Bach Resources on the Internet.

- Also see Bach's Fantasia and Fugue, BWV 906 on this site.