Marking the Score

All[1] musical scores include the basic information the performer will need: note names, duration, and relative timing. But it is often helpful for the performer to add additional information to a score, to expedite the learning process. Which finger should press a given key, for example? What is the name of that note with all the ledger lines? How do the right-hand and left-hand rhythms fit together?

It is easy to simply scribble the answers to such questions "anywhere" on the page. The pianist below has written finger numbers in as close to the notes as possible. Makes sense, right?

The challenge arises when, after writing in fingerings, the pianist realizes that the counting is a bit tricky as well, and all those numbers start to get a little confusing:

And what if, after a few times through, she realizes that she keeps playing a C instead of that B in the last measure of the left hand, and that while she's at it, reminders that the notes in the 4th measure are different from those in the 2nd wouldn't hurt? Things get pretty messy:

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[1] Never say "all."

Experienced performers develop habitual locations for each type of information, so that if more than one is needed the page doesn't start to look like a pencil-covered mess. Here's the system Prof. Glasgow uses.

Fingerings go outside the staff (above the right hand and below the left hand). Be sure to keep the finger numbers stacked in the correct order, high to low, regardless of which hand you're notating:

Counting goes between the staves—because the timeline is consistent between the hands, this helps the performer make sure the two hands are in sync for the duration of the piece:

Note names, then, go as close to the notehead as possible—but *to the left* of the notehead wherever possible, so the eye sees the correctly written letter before it gets to the note you've been playing wrong!

Compare this example to the third example on the other side of the page. Both include the same information. Which is easier to understand?