Tutorial: Using Invisible Noteheads In Sibelius Ultimate
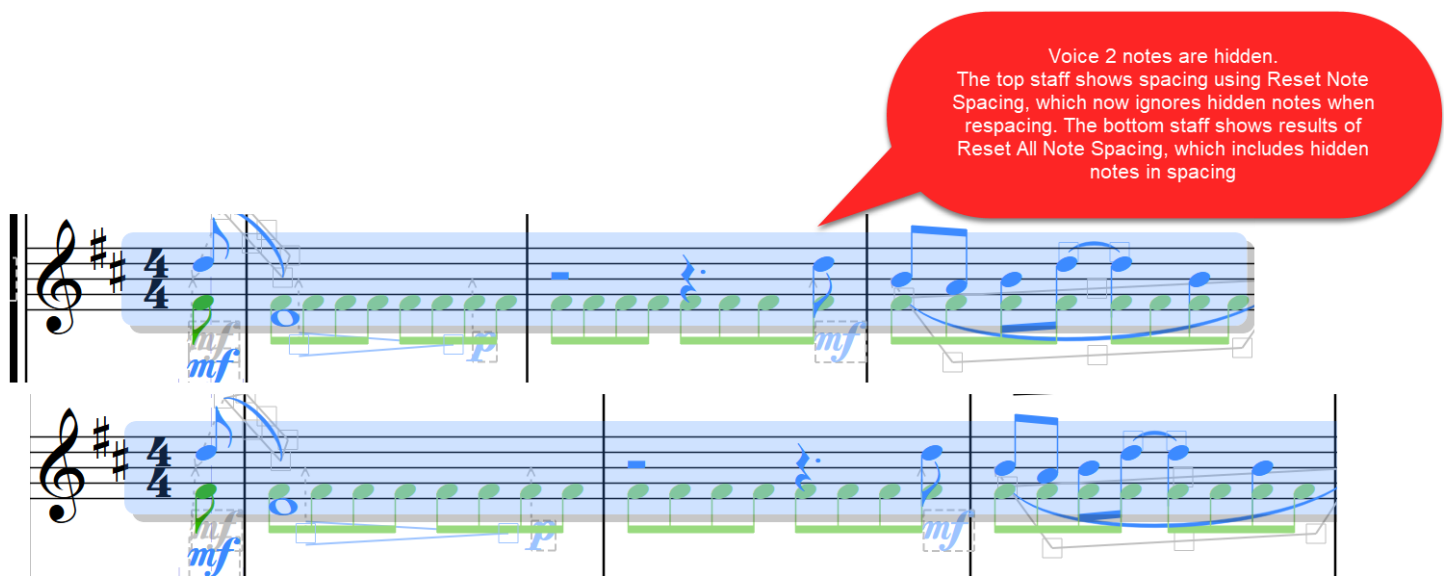*Bob Zawalich August 3, 2023 Updated August 19, 2023*

In **Sibelius Ultimate 2023.5**, individual notes in chords were allowed to be hidden. Previously, hiding a note in a chord would hide all the notes in the chord, and, if fact would hide all parts of the chord, including stems and accidentals.

A related change allowed **Reset Note Spacing** to ignore hidden notes, treating them as though they did not exist for spacing purposes. A new command, **Reset All Note Spacing** (Windows shortcut ctrl+alt+shift+N) was added to provide the previous behavior, which respaced hidden notes as though they were visible.

One problem is that silent hidden notes in an unused voice are often used to force bars to maintain a desired width. Typically, full bars of 8th, 16th, or 32nd notes were added so that respacing would not alter the size of the bars.

With the new **Reset Note Spacing**, this no longer worked. As shown below, the hidden notes no longer affected spacing. One can switch to **Reset All Note Spacing**, but muscle memory is hard to change, **Reset All Note Spacing** is not on the Ribbon, so it is only accessible via **Command Search** or a shortcut. There are lots of scores that use this "hack", and if you start editing such a score, and forget about the change, you can suddenly lose your carefully spaced bars, quite possibly not even noticing if such bars were off screen when respaced. The following screenshot demonstrates the spacing changes when using the current **Reset Note Spacing**.


Voice 2 notes are hidden.
The top staff shows spacing using Reset Note Spacing, which now ignores hidden notes when respacing. The bottom staff shows results of Reset All Note Spacing, which includes hidden notes in spacing

One approach, if you are not planning to use the features that depend on the new spacing rules, is simple to remap **Reset All Note Spacing** to use the shortcut of **Reset Note Spacing**, so that the old spacing rules will be used. Be careful not to invoke **Reset Note Spacing** from the Ribbon or **Command Search**, though.

"Invisible" Notes

You can use **notes that are both not hidden and not visible** to ensure spacing. Such notes can either be normal notes or grace notes, and each type has advantages.

To create invisible notes, you need to create a new Notehead Style. You can do this in **Notations>Noteheads>Edit Noteheads**.
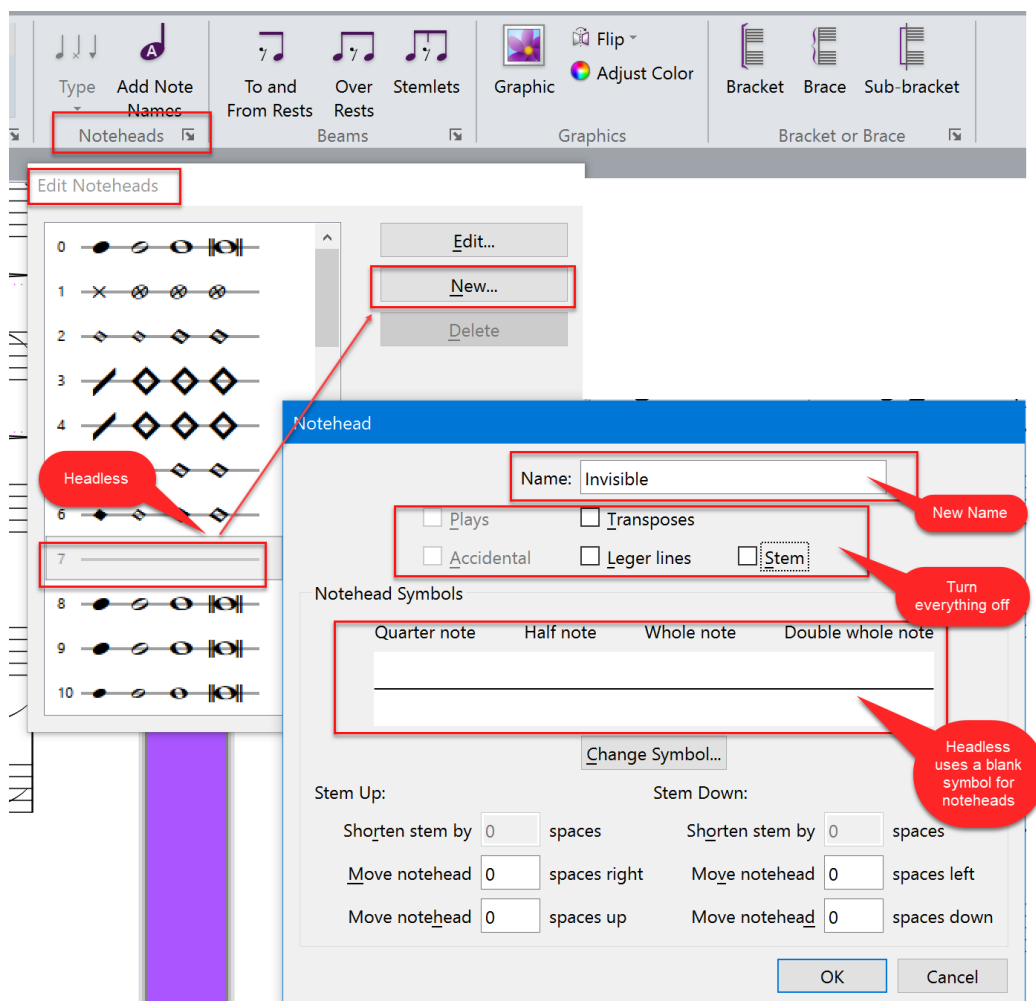
IMPORTANT NOTE!

Making a notehead invisible does not hide rhythm dots, articulations or ties. If you want invisible notes, keep them simple

There is no easy way to change dotted notes to be undotted without changing the number of notes, which could change spacing, but it can be done. See
https://www.rpmseattle.com/of_note/deconstructing-the-rhythm-dot-the-mathematics-of-dotted-notes/.

A data score that defines an Invisible Notehead Style

If you create an **Invisible** notehead style, you will want to make it available to other scores. You could add it to a **House Style** and then import that style, but **House Styles** often change things you did not want to change.

You could also define a new notehead style in each score in which you want to use it.

An alternative is to create a score that defines the desired styles and contains notes with those styles, and copy and paste notes from that score.

You can open the score, select the styled notes, copy them, then paste them into empty bars in your score. After pasting, you can immediately delete the pasted notes, and the style definitions will be transferred to your score. You can now apply the **Invisible** or **Show Invisible** styles to notes.

I have created a score in Sibelius 6.2 format that defines 2 styles, **Invisible** and **Show Invisible**. This score can be downloaded from https://bobzawalich.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Data-scores-for-Sibelius-14-August-2023.pdf, and will be downloaded as a Manuscript Paper when you install the plugin **Replace Notehead Style**s. Here is a screenshot showing the instructions for its use:

Data Score - *Invisible* and *Show Invisible* Notehead Styles

Each bar contains a whole note with a special notehead style. Passage select and copy bars 1 and 2, and paste into 2 empty bars in your score. The text will not be copied. You can then delete what you pasted and the notehead styles will still be defined in your score. *Invisible* notes are hard to see (!), so filter them and replace the notehead style temporarily with *Show Invisible* so you can see and manipulate them.

Use ctrl/cmd+z to restore the original notehead style if nothing changed, or filter the *Show Invisible* notes and replace the style with *Invisible*.

There is a second set of notes you can experiment with. Redefine the Show Invisible style if you prefer a different look.

Invisible style is based on *Headless*, and the notes are silent, with no accidentals, stems or ledger lines. *Show Invisible* is a clone of the *Ping* notehead style.

Select and copy these bars

Invisible
Notehead Style

Show Invisible
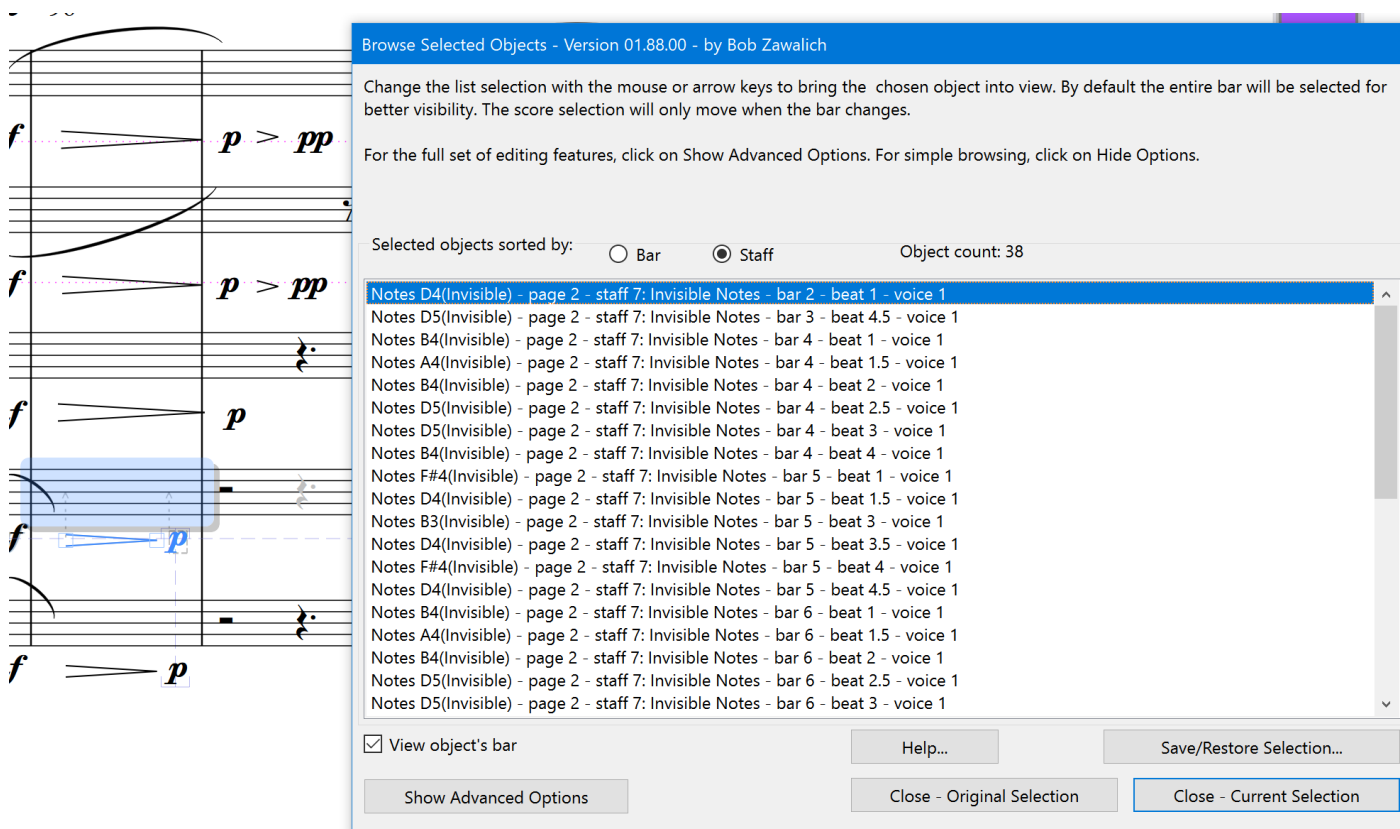Notehead Style

Experiment with Invisible
Notehead Style

Experiment with Show Invisible
Notehead Style

Making invisible notes visible (temporarily)

An obvious disadvantage of invisible notes is that they are invisible, so you can't see where they are. Hidden notes will appear grayed out if **View>Hidden Objects** is on, but invisible notes have no such property, and you can't color such notes either.

You can filter notes with a specific notehead style in the **Advanced Filter** or using the **Filter Other** plugin, and then go the Notations>Noteheads>Type, and change the filtered notes to use a different, visible notehead style.

You can instead select a bunch of invisible notes and run the plugin **Browse Selected Objects**, and it will tell you where the notes are, but they are still invisible.

The Replace Notehead Styles plugin

I have written **Replace Notehead Styles** a plugin that produces a list of all the notehead styles that are used in the selected notes. You can either

- filter all the notes with given styles, using **Filter_style_in_selection**, or
- replace the chosen styles in the left-hand box with one of the available notehead styles in the right hand box, using **Replace_style**.

The data score described above contains both definitions of **Invisible** and **Show Invisible** styles, providing a specific style exclusively to make invisible notes temporarily visible. That way if you are looking through the now-visible notes and change something, you can get back the **Invisible** notes by selecting notes and replacing **Show Invisible** with **Invisible**.

You can multi-select the entries in the left-hand list, so you could, for example, convert both rests and normal noteheads to invisible notes in a single pass.

As an aid in the process of converting hidden notes to invisible notes, I added the checkboxes for **Process hidden objects only** and **Unhide hidden notes after replacing style**.

The plugin has a "**New macro/plugin**" button, so if you were to use specific replacements a lot, you could auto-generate new plugins that would only replace **Invisible** with **Show Invisible**, and another to replace **Show Invisible** with **Invisible**, without bringing up a dialog.

The data score **Invisible and Show Invisible Notehead Styles** will be included in the zip file for this plugin. The installer will place it in the user **Manuscript Papers** folder, and you can use **File New** with that Manuscript Paper to open the data score, copy and paste the notes, and then close the data score without saving.

Replace Notehead Styles may be downloaded directly through Sibelius 7 and higher at **File > Plug-ins > Install Plug-ins > Notes and Rests.**

Replace Notehead Style - Version 01.09.00 - by Bob Zawalich

The styles of selected notes are in the left-hand list, and the available noteheads are in the right hand list. Replace a notehead style with one from the available list, or filter notes whose style is chosen in the left-hand list. You do not need to filter for a notehead style before running the plugin, but you could run the plugin Filter With Deselect first to filter for other properties.

Use "New macro/dialog" to generate a macro or plugin that uses the current dialog settings.

See Help for information about Invisible noteheads, replacing hidden notes or rests, and replacing rests, which converts rests to notes with the target note style.

Filter selected objects in this style or replace...

- 0-Normal
- 48-Invisible
- Rest

...notehead styles with this style:

- 31-Back slashed (2)
- 32-Arrow down (2)
- 33-Arrow up (2)
- 34-Inverted triangle (2)
- 35-Shaped note 1 (2)
- 36-Shaped note 4 (stem up) (2)
- 37-Shaped note 5 (2)
- 38-Shaped note 7 (2)
- 39-Shaped note 4 (stem down) (2)
- 40-Cross 2 (2)
- 41-Stick notation
- 42-Large cross
- 43-Large stemless slash
- 44-Large slash with stem
- 45-Cross (ornate)
- 46-Ping
- 47-CSquare Cluster Notehead
- 48-Invisible
- 49-Show Invisible

☐ Process hidden objects only

☐ Unhide hidden notes/rests after replacing style

Filter_style_in_selection
Replace_style

New macro/dialog...   Help...

Cancel   OK

Replacing hidden notes and rests with invisible notes

If you were using hidden notes or rests for spacing, you might want to replace hidden notes and rests with invisible silent notes. You need to have defined an **Invisible** notehead style before you do this.

To replace hidden notes with invisible notes, filter for hidden notes, unhide them *(ctrl+shift+H/cmd+shift+H),* then apply the style. Rests are trickier. You can filter them, replace the filtered rests with notes (waves hands in the air...), and then unhide the notes and change the style.

Simon Nathan has written a plugin called **Replace Grace Notes With Headless** that will look for hidden grace notes. It applies a silent and invisible notehead style to these notes, then unhides the notes. This effectively replaces hidden grace notes with unhidden invisible notes; you need to unhide the invisible notes because hidden notes can be ignored in spacing.

Replacing hidden notes and rests with invisible notes using **Replace Notehead Style**

Though it is not obvious, **Replace Notehead Style** can replace hidden notes with invisible notes.

If you have selected some **hidden notes**, and want to convert them to notes with **unhidden Visible noteheads**, choose the desired original notehead styles, such as **Normal**, in the left listbox, and the replacement style, such as **Invisible,** in the right box. Check the **Process hidden objects only** checkbox so you will only process hidden notes and check the **Unhide hidden notes...** box.

Choose **Replace_style** and **OK**. The plugin will process any hidden notes with notehead **Normal**, give them style **Invisible**, and then unhide the notes, giving you the desired unhidden **Invisible** notes.
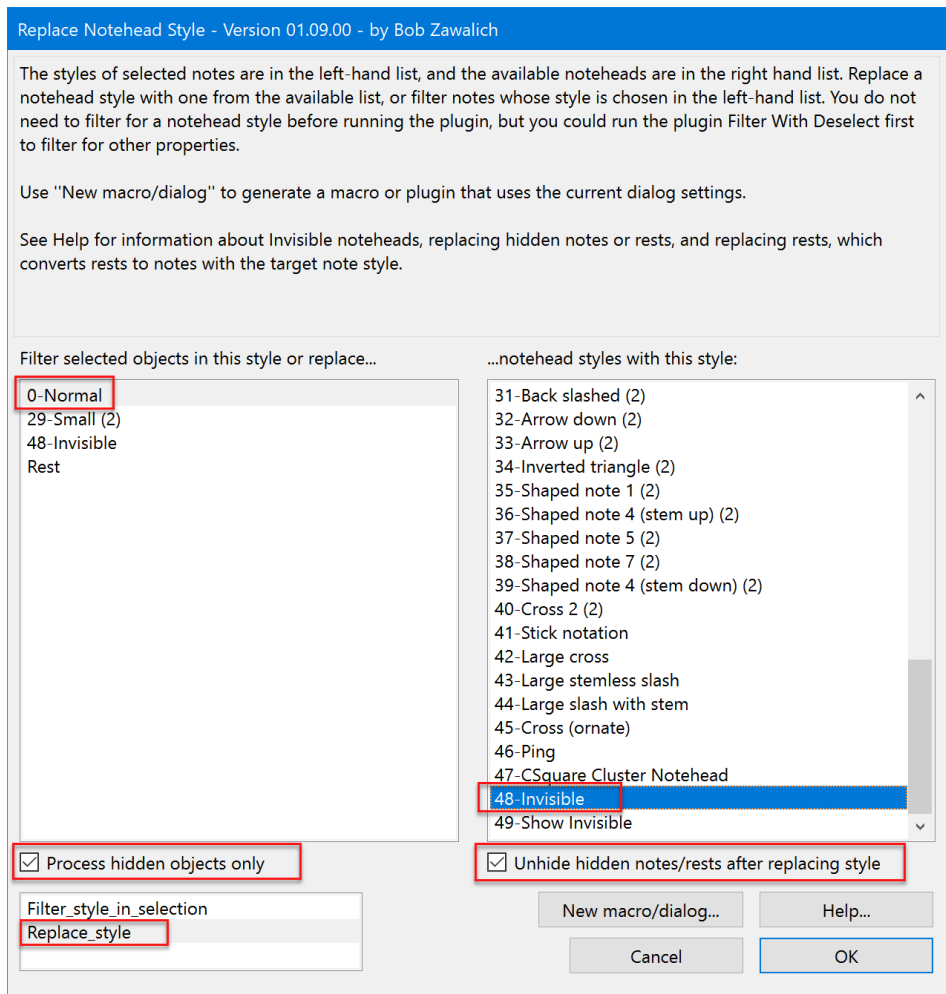
You can also **convert hidden rests to Invisible notes**. You might want to do this because hidden rests will not affect spacing, so they need to be unhidden, but also made invisible, so they need to be converted from rests to notes.

For each rest you will get a single note with pitch C4 (middle C), and the replacement notehead style, thus converting hidden rests to unhidden **Invisible** notes. As above, check both "hidden" checkboxes, choose the pseudo notehead style **Rest** on the left, **Invisible** on the right, and use **Replace_Style**.

Appendix: the Help text in Replace Notehead Styles

"This plugin lets you replace the Notehead Style of selected notes with a different Notehead Style defined in your score.

You do not need to filter for a notehead style before running the plugin, but you could run the plugin Filter With Deselect first to filter for other properties.

In the special case of rests, replacing the special style "Rest" will convert the rests into single notes at pitch C4 (middle C) using the chosen replacement style. You can also choose to only filter notes with a special notehead style, or filter rests (which have no notehead style).

This plugin can be used as expected to replace notehead styles, but it was written to help deal with Invisible notes.

In recent version of Sibelius Ultimate, hidden notes or rests can no longer be used to force a specific bar width. As a workaround of this workaround, some users are replacing such hidden notes and rests with custom silent Invisible notes, which are not seen but still affect spacing.

You can define an Invisible notehead style by making a new style based on Headless, and unchecking all the note style properties including stems and playback.

The Data Score "Invisible and Show Invisible Notehead Styles_sib6.sib" is included in the zip file for this plugin. On Installation it will be added to the Manuscript Papers folder. It defines both Invisible and Show Invisible notehead styles, and contains notes that use these stypes. Use File New to open a copy of the score and copy the notes into your score to transfer the style definitions, then close the data score without saving. The data score text describes how to use it.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Making a notehead invisible does not hide rhythm dots, articulations or ties. If you want invisible notes, keep them simple.

If you have already created some Invisible notes that you would now like to see, you can temporarily replace notes that have the Invisible style with a Visible style. Choose a recognizable new style you are unlikely to be using in the score. When you are done, use ctrl/cmd+z to restore the original notehead style if no changes were made, or run the plugin again, replacing the new style with the original style.

The plugin has some special options if you want to replace hidden notes/rests with Invisible notes and have defined the Invisible notehead style in this score.

If you have selected hidden notes with Normal noteheads, and want to convert them to unhidden Visible noteheads, choose the original notehead style (such as Normal) in the left listbox, and the replacement style (such as Invisible) in the right box. Check the "Process hidden objects only" checkbox so you will only process hidden notes, and check the "Unhide hidden notes..." box, then choose "Replace_style" and OK. The plugin will process any hidden notes with notehead Normal, give them style Invisible, and then unhide the notes, giving you the desired unhidden Invisible notes.

You can also convert hidden rests to Invisible notes. You will get a single note with pitch C4, and the replacement notehead style, thus converting hidden rests to unhidden Invisible notes. As above, check both "hidden" checkboxes, choose Rest on the left, and Invisible on the right, and Replace_Style.

If you want more specific filtering, for grace notes, for example, filter your selection before running Replace Notehead Styles. Use the plugin Filter With Deselect or one of the Sibelius filters to do this.

If you use certain replacements often, you can set up the dialog for what you want to do, and then press "New plugin/macro". This can generate a plugin or macro that uses the settings in the current dialog, without bringing up the dialog."