How to write microtones in Finale

There exists an easy way to enter microtonal accidentals in Finale, namely using Nonstandard Key Signatures. Unfortunately, this feature is so badly documented in the user manual that it seems not to be common knowledge even among microtonal composers. Since entering microtonal accidentals as real accidentals (and not as expressions or articulations) makes a lot more sense in many cases, I offer some instructions here. Once you have created a library file for a microtonal notation system, it is very easy to use. Don't expect the microtones to play back – but they do look right and are easy to edit.

The following example creates a "nonstandard key signature" for quarter-tone or 31-tone music, using accidental characters from the Maestro Percussion font. When you understand the procedure, you can use the same principle and substitute other fonts, other accidentals or other microtonal systems that you may want to use.

- Select Key Signature tool
- Select All (or the region where you want to use the microtonal accidentals), and double-click within the selection area
- Instead of Major/Minor Key, choose 'Nonstandard...'
- Select 'Linear key format'
- Click 'Next' twice (= Linear Key Format 2)
- Click 'Key Map'
- Change number of Total Steps to 24 for quarter-tone music, or to 31 for 31-tone music.
- Clicking on the black and white squares, change the pattern to:
- | (for quarter-tones)
- _____ (for 31-tone)

This means: place three or four "black keys" between naturals that are a whole tone apart, and one or two "black keys" between naturals that are a semitone apart.

- Click OK
- Click 'Attributes'. This is where you define the symbols for each accidental.
- Click 'Symbol Font'
- Choose Maestro Percussion, and click OK
- Click 'Symbol List ID'
- Enter 'Alter Amount' as 0 (zero), and 'Characters' as 'n' (this is the character that shows as a natural sign in the Maestro Percussion font), and click 'Insert', then 'Next'
- Enter 'Alter Amount' as 1, and 'Characters' as ' μ ' (Greek mu sign, which is the quarter-sharp sign in Maestro Percussion), and click 'Insert', then 'Next'
- Enter 'Alter Amount' as 2, and 'Characters' as 'm' (the sharp sign), and click 'Insert', then 'Next'
- Enter 'Alter Amount' as -1, and 'Characters' as 'B' (the guarter-flat sign), and click 'Insert', then 'Next'
- Enter 'Alter Amount' as -2, and 'Characters' as 'b' (the flat sign), and click 'Insert', then 'Next'
- Click OK four times
- The microtonal "nonstandard key signature" has now been applied, and you can enter semi-sharps, sharps, semi-flats and flats using the normal + and commands in Simple or Speedy Entry.
- Save the nonstandard key signature that you just created as a Library file (go to File > Save Library, and select 'Key Signatures'). This library file can then be loaded into any other score (go to File > Load Library). To apply the nonstandard key signature, use the Key Signature Tool as usual, but selecting 'Nonstandard' instead of Major or Minor key, and checking that 'Linear Key Format 2' is selected.