

Basic Musical Terms

Accelerando	Increase of tempo in music
Accompaniment	Music that goes along with a more important part; often harmony or rhythmic patterns accompanying a melody.
Adagio	Slow, leisurely
Allegretto	Moderately fast, lively. Faster than Andante, slower than allegro
Allegro	Lively, brisk, rapid
Andante	Moderately slow, a walking speed
Chord	Three or more tones combined and sounded simultaneously
Da Capo	From the beginning. (D.C. al coda, D.C. al fine)
Diminuendo	Gradually growing softer. Decrescendo.
Dissonance	A simultaneous sounding of tones that produces a feeling of tension or unrest and a feeling that further resolution is needed.
Dolce	Sweetly, softly
Espressione	Expressively
Fine	The end of a musical piece
Grave	Heavy, slow, ponderous in movement. Pronounced "Groov Ay"
Harmony	The sound resulting from the simultaneous sounding of two or more tones consonant with each other
Hemiola	A rhythmic pulse of 2 against a rhythmic pulse of 3.
Interval	The distance between two tones
Legato	Smooth, flowing
Largo	Large, broad, slow and stately
Legato	Smooth and connected
Lento	Slow
L'istesso tempo	The same tempo. (The tempo remains as before, after a change was made)
Melody	An arrangement of single tones in a meaningful sequence
Maestoso	Majestic, dignified
Meno	Less
Molto, molta	Much
Ostinato	A repeated melodic or rhythmic fragment
Piano	Soft, softly
Pianissimo	Very soft

Presto	Fast, rapid
Phrase	A small section of a composition comprising a musical thought. Comparable to a sentence in language.
Ritardando	Gradually growing slower
Romantic	Relating to the nineteenth-century musical period characterized by subjectivity on the part of the composer, emotionalism in music, longer musical forms, and richer harmonies.
Rubato	From the Italian "robbed". Used to indicate a modification of the strict rhythmical flow.
Scale	A graduated series of tones arranged in a specified order
Scherzo	Joke, jest. A sprightly movement, light and humorous in nature
Sforzando	Explosively (<i>sfz</i>)
Sostenuto	Sustained
Spirito	Spiritedly
Staccato	Separate. Sounded in a short, detached manner
Syncopation	The rhythmic result produced when a regularly accented beat is displaced onto an unaccented beat.
Tempo	The rate of speed at which a musical composition is performed
Theme	A short musical passage that states an idea. It often provides the basis for variations, development, etc.
Timbre	The quality of a musical tone that distinguishes voices and instruments.
Tone	1. A musical sound 2. The quality of a musical sound
Tutti	All, whole, everyone
Vivace	Spirited, bright, rapid, equalling or exceeding allegro