

Terms and Symbols

Most definitions are taken from *The Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music*.

Early Elementary

p: soft.

mp: medium-soft.

mf: medium-loud.

f: loud.

Late Elementary

common time (C): 4/4 time (a time signature indicating four quarter note beats per measure).

crescendo: (getting louder).

decrescendo or **diminuendo**: (getting softer).

dynamics: instructions that indicate the volume of sound.

interval: the distance between two notes.

legato: connected smoothly.

pickup/upbeat: a beat coming before the downbeat (first beat of the measure), sometimes found in an incomplete measure at the beginning of a piece.

slur: a curved line extending over a group of notes, indicating a legato touch.

staccato: short, not connected.

tie: a curved line between two notes of the same pitch indicating that they should be performed as a single note with their values combined.

triad: a three-note chord consisting of two intervals of a third.

: sharp (raise the pitch one half-step).

b : flat (lower the pitch one half-step).

♮ : natural (return to the original pitch after a sharp or flat).

|| : double bar (signals the end of a piece).

:|| : repeat sign.

***** eighth note triplet**: Three eighth notes to be played in the time of two normal eighth notes. Or: three eighth notes to be played in the time of one quarter note. They are usually indicated by the number 3 written above or below the notes. *******

Early Intermediate

cut time (C): 2/2 time (a time signature indicating two half note beats per measure).

8^{va}: play an octave higher or lower than the indicated pitch.

loco: back to the original octave after an 8^{va} indication. (Italian for “in its place”.)

key signature: the sharp or flat signs placed at the beginning of a composition or after a double bar which indicate the key of a piece.

time signature: two numbers, one above the other, or a sign placed at the beginning of a composition to indicate its meter.

ritardando: holding back, becoming slower.

fermata: hold note or rest longer than its usual value. (Italian for “pause”.)

a tempo: return to the original tempo.

pp: very soft (pianissimo).

ff: very loud (fortissimo)

triple: three notes in the place of two, usually indicated by a “3” placed near the notes. **** new for 2009 ****

Late Intermediate

AB form: form consisting of two contrasting parts.

ABA form: form consisting of three parts, the second one contrasting with the first and third, which are identical or very similar.

accent: emphasis given to a note by an increase in volume.

allegro: quick and lively.

andante: moderately slow, walking pace.

D.C. al fine (Da capo al fine): play from the beginning to the word *fine*. (Italian for “from the head to the end”.)

dampener pedal: the right pedal on the piano, which raises the dampers on the strings so that all notes that are played continue to sound.

moderato: moderate.

natural: symbol placed before a note canceling a sharp or flat that would otherwise affect it.

ostinato: the repetition of a musical pattern many times in succession.

tempo: the speed of a composition.

tenuto: a line placed above or below a note which indicates to hold the note its full value.

whole-tone scale: a six-note scale consisting entirely of whole steps.

Early Advanced

accelerando: accelerating.

adagio: slow. (Italian for “at ease”, “leisurely”.)

cantabile: in a singing style.

chromatic: based on an octave of twelve half-steps.

coda: the last part of a piece or melody. (Italian for “tail”.)

D.S. al fine (Dal segno al fine): return to the sign and play until the *fine*. (Italian for “from the sign to the end”.)

diatonic: based on an octave divided into seven tones (five whole-steps and two half-steps); for example, major and natural minor scales.

dolce: sweet.

dominant: the fifth step or degree of the major or minor scale. The dominant is **V** in Roman numeral notation.

marcato: marked, stressed, accented.

opus: a term used with a number to identify a work or group of works in a composer’s output. (Latin for “work”.)

pentatonic: a scale with five different notes to the octave.

poco: a little.

primo: the first part in a piano duet. (Italian for “first”.)

rallentando: becoming slower.

ritenuto: an immediate reduction in speed (a more sudden, extreme slowing down than *rallentando* or *ritardando*).

rondo form: a musical form in which the first or main section recurs between subsidiary sections and to conclude the composition. (ABACABA is an example.)

secondo: the second part in a piano duet. (Italian for “second”.)

sfz (sforzando): a strong accent. (Italian for “forcing”, “compelling”.)

sostenuto pedal: the middle pedal on a grand piano which sustains only the notes being held at the time that the pedal is pressed.

sotto voce: an indication that a passage is to be played in a undertone, i.e., without emphasis. (Italian for “under the voice”.)

subdominant: the fourth step or degree of the major or minor scale. The subdominant is **IV** in Roman numeral notation.

tonic: the main note of a key (its key note), after which the key is named. The tonic is **I** in Roman numeral notation.

tre corda: indication to release the *una corda* pedal so that the hammers strike all the available strings. (Italian for “three strings”.)

una corda pedal: the left pedal, or soft pedal, which shifts the hammers sideways on a grand piano or closer to the strings on a upright piano to produce a softer tone color. (Italian for “one string”.)

vivace: vivacious, lively.

Late Advanced

con: with

a piacere: an indication that the performer may use his discretion in the manner of performance, especially in the manner of tempo. (Italian for “at pleasure”.)

allargando: broadening.

allegretto: a little slower than *allegro*.

cadence: the conclusion or punctuation point in a musical phrase.

cadenza: a virtuoso passage near the end of a concerto movement or aria.

concerto: a work for a solo instrument and orchestra. (For example, a piano concerto.)

enharmonic: different ways of spelling the name of a note (e.g., C-sharp and D-flat).

espressivo: expressive.

largo: broad, slow.

leading tone: the seventh step or degree of the major or minor scale.

leggiero: light.

maestoso: majestic.

mediant: the third step or degree of the major or minor scale.

meno mosso: slower (less motion).

molto: much, very.

morendo: dying away.

più mosso: faster (more motion).

presto: quick, fast. (Faster than *allegro*.)

rubato: slowing down, stretching or broadening of time for expressive effect. (Italian for “stolen”.)

sempre: always.

senza: without.

sequence: pattern in which a phrase is repeated using the same intervals but at a different pitch level.

simile: play as before. (Italian for “similar”.)

sonata: a piece of music, almost always instrumental and usually in several movements, for a soloist or a small ensemble. (Different from “sonata form”.)

subito: suddenly.

submediant: the sixth step or degree of the major or minor scale.

supertonic: the second step or degree of the major or minor scale.