




Musical Terminology and Symbols

The Musical Terminology and Symbols represented here are the basic terms and symbols that every musician needs to know to perform any genre of Western Music.

Terms shown in **BOLD** and **CAPITALIZED** type are important. Strong, literate musicians know these terms. They also know how to perform a musical composition when these terms and symbols are written in the music. Be a strong and literate musician.







ACCIDENTAL


A sign placed before a note to alter its previously understood pitch.


-  1. **SHARP:** Raises the pitch of a note by one half step.
-  2. **FLAT:** Lowers the pitch of a note by half step.
-  3. **NATURAL:** Cancels a previous accidental, or modifies the pitch of a sharp or flat as defined by the prevailing key signature (such as F-sharp in the key of G major, for example).


ARTICULATIONS

The separation of successive notes from one another, singly or in groups.

-  1. **TENUTO:** This symbol has several meanings: It may indicate that a note be played for its full value, or slightly longer; it may indicate a slight dynamic emphasis; or it may indicate a separate attack on a note.
-  2. **STACCATO:** performed in a detached, separated manner between notes.
-  3. **ACCENT:** The note is played louder or with a harder attack than surrounding unaccented notes. May appear on notes of any duration.
-  4. **MARCATO:** The note is played somewhat louder or more forcefully than a note with a regular accent mark (open horizontal wedge).
-  5. **FERMATA:** An indefinitely-sustained note, chord, or rest. Usually appears over all parts at the same metrical location in a piece, to show a halt in tempo. It can be placed above or below the note.
-  6. **TIE:** Indicates that the two (or more) notes joined together are to be played as one note with the time values added together. To be a tie, the notes must be identical; that is, they must be on the same line or the same space; otherwise, it is a slur (see below).


7.  **SLUR:** Indicates that two or more notes are to be played in one physical stroke, one uninterrupted stream of air. In repeated pitches under a slur, legato (smooth) re-articulation is expected. Slurs and ties look similar. A slur may join any number of notes of varying pitches.

8.  **CAESURA:** Indicates a brief, silent pause, during which time is not counted. In ensemble playing, time resumes when the conductor or leader indicates.

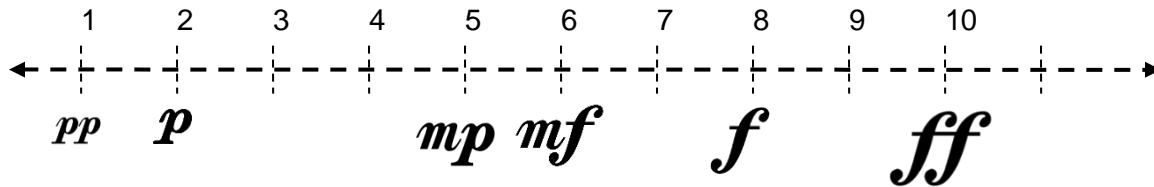
9.  **BREATH MARK:** In a score, this symbol tells the performer or singer to take a breath (or make a slight pause for non-wind instruments). This pause usually does not affect the overall tempo.

DYNAMICS


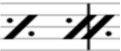


The aspect of musical expression resulting from variation in the volume of sound.
It is the loudness and softness of the music being performed.

1. ***pp*** **PIANISSIMO:** Very soft. Usually the softest indication in a piece of music, though softer dynamics are often specified with additional ***ps***.
2. ***p*** **PIANO:** Soft. Usually the most often used indication.
3. ***mp*** **MEZZO PIANO:** Literally, half as soft as piano or medium soft.
4. ***mf*** **MEZZO FORTE:** Similarly, half as loud as forte or medium loud. If no dynamic appears, mezzo-forte is assumed to be the prevailing dynamic level.
5. ***f*** **FORTE:** Loud. Used as often as piano to indicate contrast.
6. ***ff*** **FORTISSIMO:** Very loud. Usually the loudest indication in a piece, though louder dynamics are often specified with additional ***fs***.
7.  **CRESCENDO:** A gradual increase in volume. Can be extended under many notes to indicate that the volume steadily increases during the passage.
8.  **DIMINUENDO:** Also **DECRESCENDO.** A gradual decrease in volume. Can be extended in the same manner as crescendo.
9. ***sfz*** **SFORZANDO:** Literally "forced", denotes an abrupt, fierce accent on a single sound or chord. When written out in full, it applies to the sequence of sounds or chords under or over which it is placed.

If functional dynamics were on a scale of 1 to 10, it would look like below. Notice that the levels are not necessarily equally distant. Furthermore, dynamics should be interpreted as adaptable based on the style of music, the importance of the part, and the number of performers on that part.



REPETITIONS AND CODAS

1. ***D.S.*** **DAL SEGNO:** (lit. "From the sign") This symbol tells the performer to repeat playing of the music starting at the nearest **segno**. When this is followed by **al fine** (lit. "to the end"), which means to repeat to the word **fine** and stop, or **al coda** (lit. "to the coda (sign)"), which means repeat to the **coda** sign and then jump forward.
2. **§** **SEGNO:** Mark used with dal segno.
3. ***D.C.*** **DA CAPO:** (lit. "From top") This sign tells the performer to repeat playing of the music from its beginning. This is followed by **al fine** or **al coda** just as with **dal segno**.
4. **⊕** **CODA:** Indicates a forward jump in the music to its ending passage, marked with the same sign. Only used after playing through a ***D.S. al coda*** (Dal segno al coda) or ***D.C. al coda*** (Da capo al coda).
5.  **REPEAT:** Enclose a passage that is to be played more than once. If there is no left repeat sign, the right repeat sign sends the performer back to the start of the piece or the nearest double bar.
6.  **SIMILE MARKS:** Denote that preceding groups of beats or measures are to be repeated. In the examples here, the first usually means to **repeat the previous measure**, and the second usually means to **repeat the previous two measures**.
7.   **1st & 2nd Endings:** A repeated passage is to be played with different endings on different playings; it is possible to have more than two endings (1st, 2nd, 3rd ...).

TEMPO

TEMPO is the speed at which the **beats** happen in a composition. The tempo can remain steady from the first beat to the last beat of a piece of music or it can speed up or slow down within a section, a phrase, or a measure of music. Performers need to watch the conductor for any changes in the tempo.

Tempo is the Italian word for “time.”

A **METRONOME** is an apparatus for establishing musical tempo. Its distinct main purposes are to establish an appropriate tempo for the piece and to establish a consistency of tempo through a work or exercise.

The **BEAT** is the main pulse of any piece of music. Time signatures indicate what note value is the beat and how many beats are in each measure of the section of music. A new time signature found in the course of the piece replaces the previous section’s time signature.

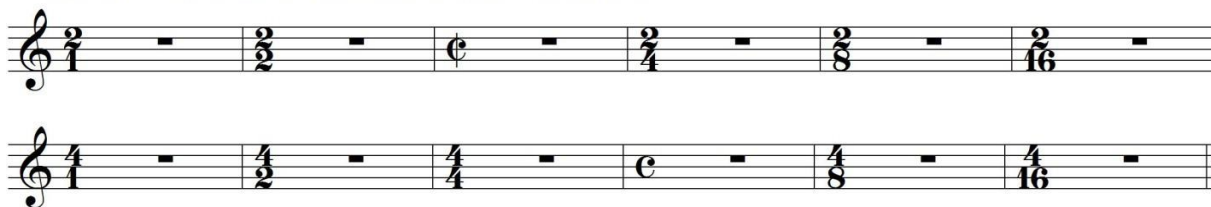
Below are terms that refer to the tempo and **METRONOME** settings for each term. **BPM** is short for **BEATS PER MINUTE**. This number is what one would set the metronome. Please note that these numbers are generalities and should never be considered as strict ranges. Time Signatures, music genres, instrumentations, and a host of other considerations may make a tempo of Grave a little faster or slower than as listed below. These words generally appear above the staff at the start of the piece or at the beginning of a change of tempo.

1. **LARGO** — broadly (40–60 BPM)
2. **ADAGIO** — slow and stately (literally, "at ease") (66–76 BPM)
3. **ANDANTE** — at a walking pace (76–108 BPM)
4. **ANDANTINO** – slightly faster than andante (although in some cases it can be taken to mean slightly slower than andante)
5. **MODERATO** — moderately (108–120 BPM)
6. **ALLEGRETTO** — moderately fast (but less so than allegro)
7. **ALLEGRO MODERATO** — moderately quick (112–124 BPM)
8. **ALLEGRO** — fast, quickly and bright (120–168 BPM)
9. **VIVACE** — lively and fast (≈140 BPM) (quicker than allegro)
10. **PRESTO** — very fast (168–200 BPM)

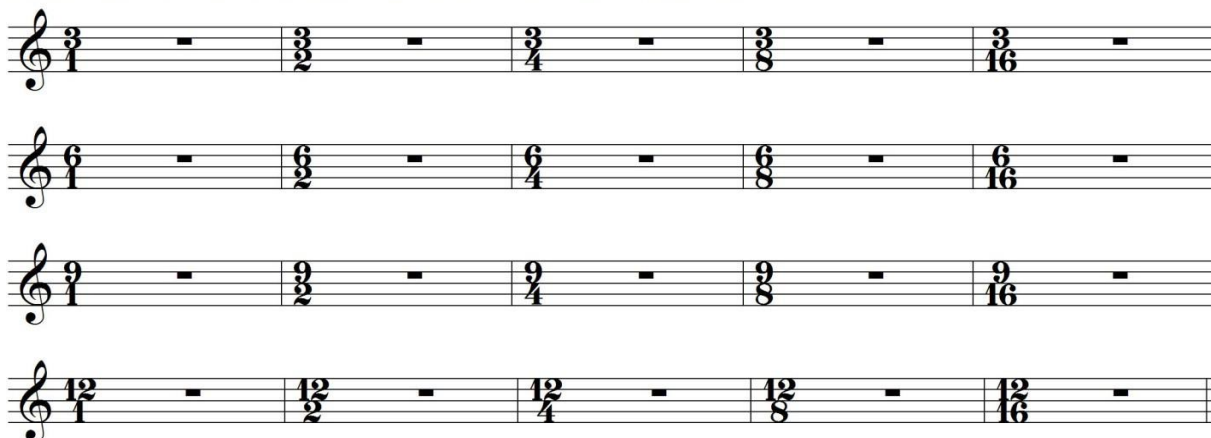
METER: The organization of notes in a composition or passage, with respect to time, in such a way that a regular pulse made up of **BEATS** can be perceived and the duration of each note can be measured in terms of these beats. The beats are grouped regularly into larger units called **BARS** or **MEASURES**. Meter is identified at the beginning of a composition, or at any point where it changes, by a **TIME SIGNATURE**.

There are two types of meter or time: **SIMPLE METER** or **TIME** and **COMPOUND METER** or **TIME**. In **SIMPLE METER/TIME**, the beat can be divided into two equal parts. In **COMPOUND METER/TIME**, the beat can be divided into three equal parts.

EXAMPLES OF SIMPLE METERS/SIMPLE TIME SIGNATURES



EXAMPLES OF COMPOUND METERS/COMPOUND TIME SIGNATURES



In the above examples of **COMPOUND METERS**, those **METERS** which have a top number divisible by three may be counted or conducted as if it were in the resulting number. For instance, any meter in **SIX** could be counted or conducted as if it were in **TWO** with the subdivision of the beat into three equal parts or **TRIPLETS** of the **NOTE VALUE** represented by the bottom number.

TIME SIGNATURES

Represented by a fraction.

The top number tells the performer how many **BEATS** in each measure. This number can be any number from 1 to infinity. However, time signatures, for us, will rarely have a top number larger than 7.

The bottom number can only be the numbers 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, et c. These numbers represent the **NOTE VALUES** of a whole note, half note, quarter note, eighth note, sixteenth note, thirty-second note, sixty-fourth note, one hundred twenty-eighth note, two hundred fifty-sixth note, five hundred twelfth note, et c. However, time signatures, for us, will only have a bottom numbers 2, 4, 8, 16, and possibly 32.

Examples of Time Signatures:



The above chart represents the **same note relationships in five different time signatures**. At the same tempo the five lines would sound exactly the same.

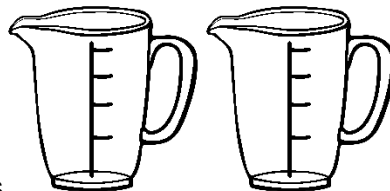
Any note value can equal one beat.

Simple Time:

Here the beat can be subdivided into two equal parts, which can then be divided in half again, and again, and again, and again; or the beat can be subdivided into three equal parts.

BEAT

A **BEAT** is a measurement of length of time. If you imagine a **BEAT** to be a cup, each cup can be filled with a certain amount of volume just as each beat can fill a specified amount of time.



2 Large cups = 2 long BEATs



2 Small cups = 2 short BEATs

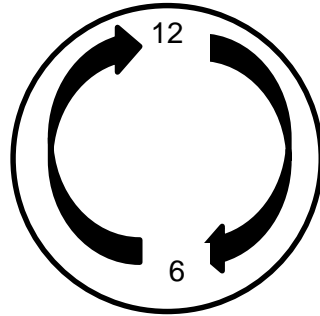
It would take the same person longer to drink the 2 large cups than the 2 small cups; it would take the same musician longer to perform 2 slow beats than 2 fast beats.

Any note value can equal one beat. The **Beat** could be a **whole note, half note, quarter note, eighth note, sixteenth note**, or any other note value. The beat is usually only divided in one of two ways: **DUPLE** (in twos) or **TRIPLE** (in threes).

TWO EQUAL PARTS

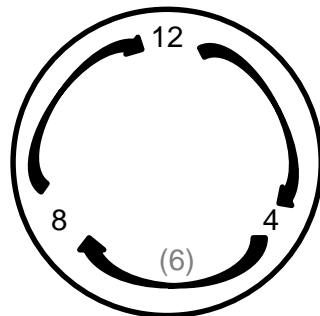
The first half of a beat is the **DOWNBEAT**. (“*THE*” downbeat can also be used to reference to the first count in every measure.) The second half of a beat is the **UPBEAT**. The **UPBEAT** is the impulse in a measured rhythm that both comes after and before the next downbeat. Any time a rhythmic impulse emphasizes **UPBEATS**, the term **SYNCOPATION** is applied.

If the beat were a clock, the **DOWNBEAT** would be every time we crossed 6 and the **UPBEAT** would be every time we crossed 12, as we continue to rotate around the clock face from one beat to the next.



THREE EQUAL PARTS

Here the beat is subdivided into thirds or **TRIPLETS**. A **TRIPLET** is a group of three notes to be performed in the time of two of the same kind. If the beat were a clock, the division into thirds would occur at 4, 8, and 12 o'clock before moving into the next beat:



The middle of the beat is occurs exactly halfway through the 2nd triplet division. In Triple Time, 12 is not an indication of a subdivision of the beat. In Duple Time, this scheme represents triplets.

12→4 4→8 8→12 12→12 12→12 12→12
Beat One Beat Two Beat Three Beat Four

NOTE VALUES

NOTE

REST

DURATION

Whole
Whole



Dotted Half
Dotted Half



Half
Half



Dotted Quarter
Dotted Quarter



Quarter
Quarter



Dotted Eighth
Dotted Eighth

Eighth
Eighth



Dotted Sixteenth
Dotted Sixteenth

Sixteenth
Sixteenth

