

| Term | Definition |
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| A cappella - | One or more vocalists performing without an accompaniment. |
| Accelerando - | A symbol used in musical notation indicating to gradually quicken tempo. |
| Accessible - | Music that is easy to listen to and understand. |
| Adagio - | A tempo having slow movement; restful at ease. |
| Allegro - | A direction to play lively and fast. |
| Atonal - | Music that is written and performed without regard to any specific key. |
| Baroque - | Time in music history ranging from the middle of the 16th to the middle of the 17th centuries. Characterized by emotional, flowery music; written in strict form. |
| Beat - | The unit of musical rhythm. |
| Cadence - | A sequence of chords that brings an end to a phrase, either in the middle or the end of a composition. |
| Cadenza - | Initially an improvised cadence by a soloist; later becoming an elaborate and written out passage in an aria or concerto, featuring the skills of an instrumentalist or vocalist. |
| Cadenza - | Originally an improvised cadence by a soloist. Later it became a written out passage to display performance skills of an instrumentalist or performer. |
| Canon - | A musical form where the melody or tune is imitated by individual parts at regular intervals. The individual parts may enter at different measures and pitches. The tune may also be played at different speeds, backwards, or inverted. |
| Cantabile - | A style of singing which is characterized by the easy and flowing tone of the composition. |
| Cantata - | Music written for chorus and orchestra. Most often religious in nature. |
| Capriccio - | A quick, improvisational, spirited piece of music. |
| Carol - | A song or hymn celebrating Christmas. |

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| Castrato - | Male singers who were castrated to preserve their alto and soprano vocal range. |
| Cavatina - | A short and simple melody performed by a soloist that is part of a larger piece. |
| Chamber music - | Written for 2 to 10 solo parts featuring one instrument to a part. Each part bears the same importance. |
| Chant - | Singing in unison, texts in a free rhythm. Similar to the rhythm of speech. |
| Choir - | Group of singers in a chorus. |
| Chorale - | A hymn sung by the choir and congregation often in unison. |
| Chord - | 3 or 4 notes played simultaneously in harmony. |
| Chord progression - | A string of chords played in succession. |
| Chorus - | A group singing in unison. |
| Chromatic scale - | Includes all twelve notes of an octave. |
| Classical - | The period of music history which dates from the mid 1700's to mid 1800's. The music was spare and emotionally reserved, especially when compared to Romantic and Boroque music. |
| Classicism - | The period of music history which dates from the mid 1800's and lasted about sixty years. There was a strong regard for order and balance. |
| Clavier - | The keyboard of a stringed instrument. |
| Clef - | In sheet music, a symbol at the beginning of the staff defining the pitch of the notes found in that particular staff. |
| Coda - | Closing section of a movement. |
| Concert master - | The first violin in an orchestra. |
| Concerto - | A composition written for a solo instrument. The soloist plays the melody while the orchestra plays the accompaniment. |
| Conductor - | One who directs a group of performers. The conductor indicates the tempo, phrasing, dynamics, and style by gestures and facial expressions. |
| Consonance - | Groups of tones that are harmonious when sounded together as in a chord. |

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| Contralto - | Lowest female singing voice. |
| Counterpoint - | Two or three melodic lines played at the same time. |
| Courante - | A piece of music written in triple time. Also an old French dance. |
| Da Capo - | In sheet music, an instruction to repeat the beginning of the piece before stopping on the final chord. |
| Deceptive cadence - | A chord progression that seems to lead to resolving itself on the final chord; but does not. |
| Development - | Where the musical themes and melodies are developed, written in sonata form. |
| Dissonance - | Harsh, discordant, and lack of harmony. Also a chord that sounds incomplete until it resolves itself on a harmonious chord. |
| Drone - | Dull, monotonous tone such as a humming or buzzing sound. Also a bass note held under a melody. |
| Duet - | A piece of music written for two vocalists or instrumentalists. |
| Dynamics - | Pertaining to the loudness or softness of a musical composition. Also the symbols in sheet music indicating volume. |
| Elegy - | An instrumental lament with praise for the dead. |
| Encore - | A piece of music played at the end of a recital responding to the audiences enthusiastic reaction to the performance, shown by continuous applause. |
| Energico - | A symbol in sheet music a direction to play energetically. |
| Enharmonic Interval - | Two notes that differ in name only. The notes occupy the same position. For example: C sharp and D flat. |
| Ensemble - | The performance of either all instruments of an orchestra or voices in a chorus. |
| Espressivo - | A direction to play expressively. |
| Etude - | A musical composition written solely to improve technique. Often performed for artistic interest. |
| Exposition - | The first section of a movement written in sonata |

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| | form, introducing the melodies and themes. |
| Expressionism - | Atonal and violent style used as a means of evoking heightened emotions and states of mind. |
| Falsetto - | A style of male singing where by partial use of the vocal chords, the voice is able to reach the pitch of a female. |
| Fermata - | To hold a tone or rest held beyond the written value at the discretion of the performer. |
| Fifth - | The interval between two notes. Three whole tones and one semitone make up the distance between the two notes. |
| Finale - | Movement or passage that concludes the musical composition. |
| Flat - | A symbol indicating that the note is to be diminished by one semitone. |
| Form - | The structure of a piece of music. |
| Forte - | A symbol indicating to play loud. |
| Fourth - | The interval between two notes. Two whole tones and one semitone make up the distance between the two notes. |
| Fugue - | A composition written for three to six voices. Beginning with the exposition, each voice enters at different times, creating counterpoint with one another. |
| Galliard - | Music written for a lively French dance for two performers written in triple time. |
| Gavotte - | A 17th century dance written in Quadruple time, always beginning on the third beat of the measure. |
| Glee - | Vocal composition written for three or more solo parts, usually without instrumental accompaniment. |
| Glissando - | Sliding between two notes. |
| Grandioso - | Word to indicate that the movement or entire composition is to be played grandly. |
| Grave - | Word to indicate the movement or entire composition is to be played very slow and serious. |
| Grazioso - | Word to indicate the movement or entire composition is to be played gracefully. |

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| Gregorian Chant - | Singing or chanting in unison without strict rhythm. Collected during the Reign of Pope Gregory VIII for psalms and other other parts of the church service. |
| Harmony - | Pleasant combination of two or three tones played together in the background while a melody is being played. Harmony also refers to the study of chord progressions. |
| Homophony - | Music written to be sung or played in unison. |
| Hymn - | A song of praise and glorification. Most often to honor God. |
| Impromptu - | A short piano piece, often improvisational and intimate in character. |
| Instrumentation - | Arrangement of music for a combined number of instruments. |
| Interlude - | Piece of instrumental music played between scenes in a play or opera. |
| Intermezzo - | Short movement or interlude connecting the main parts of the composition. |
| Interpretation - | The expression the performer brings when playing his instrument. |
| Interval - | The distance in pitch between two notes. |
| Intonation - | The manner in which tones are produced with regard to pitch. |
| Introduction - | The opening section of a piece of music or movement. |
| Key - | System of notes or tones based on and named after the key note. |
| Key signature - | The flats and sharps at the beginning of each staff line indicating the key of music the piece is to be played. |
| Klangfarbenmelodie - | The technique of altering the tone color of a single note or musical line by changing from one instrument to another in the middle of a note or line. |
| Leading note - | The seventh note of the scale where there is a strong desire to resolve on the tonic. |
| Legato - | Word to indicate that the movement or entire composition is to be played smoothly. |

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| Leitmotif - | A musical theme given to a particular idea or main character of an opera. |
| Libretto - | A book of text containing the words of an opera. |
| Ligature - | Curved line connecting notes to be sung or played as a phrase. |
| Madrigal - | A contrapuntal song written for at least three voices, usually without accompaniment. |
| Maestro - | Refers to any great composer, conductor, or teacher of music. |
| Major - | One of the two modes of the tonal system. Music written in major keys have a positive affirming character. |
| March - | A form of music written for marching in two-step time. Originally the march was used for military processions. |
| Measure - | The unit of measure where the beats on the lines of the staff are divided up into two, three, four beats to a measure. |
| Medley - | Often used in overtures, a composition that uses passages from other movements of the composition in its entirety. |
| Mezzo - | The voice between soprano and alto. Also, in sheet music, a direction for the tempo to be played at medium speed. |
| Minor - | One of the two modes of the tonal system. The minor mode can be identified by the dark, melancholic mood. |
| Minuet - | Slow and stately dance music written in triple time. |
| Modes - | Either of the two octave arrangements in modern music. The modes are either major or minor. |
| Modulation - | To shift to another key. |
| Monotone - | Repetition of a single tone. |
| Motif - | Primary theme or subject that is developed. |
| Movement - | A separate section of a larger composition. |
| Musette - | A Baroque dance with a drone-bass. |
| Musicology - | The study of forms, history, science, and methods of music. |

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| Natural - | A symbol in sheet music that returns a note to its original pitch after it has been augmented or diminished. |
| Neoclassical - | Movement in music where the characteristics are crisp and direct. |
| Nocturne - | A musical composition that has a romantic or dreamy character with nocturnal associations. |
| Nonet - | A composition written for nine instruments. |
| Notation - | First developed in the 8th century, methods of writing music. |
| Obbligato - | An extended solo, often accompanying the vocal part of an aria. |
| Octave - | Eight full tones above the key note where the scale begins and ends. |
| Octet - | A composition written for eight instruments. |
| Opera - | A drama where the words are sung instead of spoken. |
| Operetta - | A short light musical drama. |
| Opus - | Convenient method of numbering a composer's works where a number follows the word "opus". For example, Opus 28, No. 4. |
| Oratorio - | An extended cantata on a sacred subject. |
| Orchestra - | A large group of instrumentalists playing together. |
| Orchestration - | Arranging a piece of music for an orchestra. Also, the study of music. |
| Ornaments - | Tones used to embellish the principal melodic tone. |
| Ostinato - | A repeated phrase. |
| Overture - | Introduction to an opera or other large musical work. |
| Parody - | A composition based on previous work. A common technique used in Medieval and Renaissance music. |
| Part - | A line in a contrapuntal work performed by an individual voice or instrument. |
| Partial - | A harmonic given off by a note when it is played. |
| Partita - | Suite of Baroque dances. |

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| Pastoral - | A composition whose style is simple and idyllic; suggestive of rural scenes. |
| Pentatonic Scale - | A musical scale having five notes. For example: the five black keys of a keyboard make up a pentatonic scale. |
| Phrase - | A single line of music played or sung. A musical sentence. |
| Piano - | An instruction in sheet music to play softly. Abbreviated by a "p". |
| Pitch - | The frequency of a note determining how high or low it sounds. |
| Pizzicato - | String instruments that are picked instead of bowed. |
| Polyphony - | Combining a number of individual but harmonizing melodies. Also known as counterpoint. |
| Polytonality - | Combination of two or more keys being played at the same time. |
| Portamento - | A mild glissando between two notes for an expressive effect. |
| Prelude - | A short piece originally preceded by a more substantial work, also an orchestral introduction to opera, however not lengthy enough to be considered an overture. |
| Presto - | A direction in sheet music indicating the tempo is to be very fast. |
| Progression - | The movement of chords in succession. |
| Quadrille - | A 19th century square dance written for 4 couples. |
| Quartet - | A set of four musicians who perform a composition written for four parts. |
| Quintet - | A set of five musicians who perform a composition written for five parts. |
| Recapitulation - | A reprise. |
| Recital - | A solo concert with or without accompaniment. |
| Recitative - | A form of writing for vocals that is close to the manner of speech and is rhythmically free. |
| Reed - | The piece of cane in wind instruments. The players cause vibrations by blowing through it in |

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| | order to produce sound. |
| Refrain - | A repeating phrase that is played at the end of each verse in the song. |
| Register - | A portion of the range of the instrument or voice. |
| Relative major and minor - | The major and minor keys that share the same notes in that key. For example: A minor shares the same note as C major. |
| Relative pitch - | Ability to determine the pitch of a note as it relates to the notes that precede and follow it. |
| Renaissance - | A period in history dating from the 14th to 16th centuries. This period signified the rebirth of music, art, and literature. |
| Reprise - | To repeat a previous part of a composition generally after other music has been played. |
| Requiem - | A dirge, hymn, or musical service for the repose of the dead. |
| Resonance - | When several strings are tuned to harmonically related pitches, all strings vibrate when only one of the strings is struck. |
| Rhythm - | The element of music pertaining to time, played as a grouping of notes into accented and unaccented beats. |
| Ricercar - | Elaborate polyphonic composition of the Baroque and Renaissance periods. |
| Rigaudon - | A quick 20th century dance written in double time. |
| Rococo - | A musical style characterized as excessive, ornamental, and trivial. |
| Romantic - | A period in history during the 18th and early 19th centuries where the focus shifted from the neoclassical style to an emotional, expressive, and imaginative style. |
| Rondo - | A musical form where the principal theme is repeated several times. The rondo was often used for the final movements of classical sonata form works. |
| Root - | The principal note of a triad. |
| Round - | A canon where the melody is sung in two or more voices. After the first voice begins, the next voice |

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| | starts singing after a couple of measures are played in the preceding voice. All parts repeat continuously. |
| Rubato - | An important characteristic of the Romantic period. It is a style where the strict tempo is temporarily abandoned for a more emotional tone. |
| Scale - | Successive notes of a key or mode either ascending or descending. |
| Scherzo - | Pertaining to the sonata form, a fast movement in triple time. |
| Scordatura - | The retuning of a stringed instrument in order to play notes below the ordinary range of the instrument or to produce an unusual tone color. |
| Septet - | A set of seven musicians who perform a composition written for seven parts. |
| Sequence - | A successive transposition and repetition of a phrase at different pitches. |
| Serenade - | A lighthearted piece, written in several movements, usually as background music for a social function. |
| Sextet - | A set of six musicians who perform a composition written for six parts. |
| Sharp - | A symbol indicating the note is to be raised by one semitone. |
| Slide - | A glissando or portamento. Also refers to the moving part of a trombone. |
| Slur - | A curve over notes to indicate that a phrase is to be played legato. |
| <u>Sonata -</u> | Music of a particular form consisting of four movements. Each of the movements differ in tempo, rhythm, and melody; but are held together by subject and style. |
| Sonata form - | A complex piece of music. Usually the first movement of the piece serving as the exposition, a development, or recapitulation. |
| Sonatina - | A short or brief sonata. |
| Song cycle - | A sequence of songs, perhaps on a single theme, or with texts by one poet, or having continuous narrative. |

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| Soprano - | The highest female voice. |
| Staccato - | Short detached notes, as opposed to legato. |
| Staff - | Made up of five horizontal parallel lines and the spaces between them on which musical notation is written. |
| Stretto - | Pertaining to the fugue, the overlapping of the same theme or motif by two or more voices a few beats apart. |
| String Quartet - | A group of 4 instruments, two violins, a viola, and cello. |
| Suite - | A loose collection of instrumental compositions. |
| Symphony - | Three to four movement orchestral piece, generally in sonata form. |
| System - | A combination of two or more staves on which all the notes are vertically aligned and performed simultaneously in differing registers and instruments. |
| Tablature - | A system of notation for stringed instruments. The notes are indicated by the finger positions. |
| Temperament - | Refers to the tuning of an instrument. |
| Tempo - | Indicating speed. |
| Tessitura - | The range of an instrumental or a vocal part. |
| Theme - | A melodic or, sometimes a harmonic idea presented in a musical form. |
| Timbre - | Tone color, quality of sound that distinguishes one verse or instrument to another. It is determined by the harmonies of sound. |
| Time Signature - | A numeric symbol in sheet music determining the number of beats to a measure. |
| Tonal - | Pertains to tone or tones. |
| Tonality - | The tonal characteristics determined by the relationship of the notes to the tone. |
| Tone - | The intonation, pitch, and modulation of a composition expressing the meaning, feeling, or attitude of the music. |
| Tone less - | Unmusical, without tone. |
| Tonic - | The first tone of a scale also known as a keynote. |

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| Treble - | The playing or singing the upper half of the vocal range. Also the highest voice in choral singing. |
| Tremolo - | Quick repetition of the same note or the rapid alternation between two notes. |
| Triad - | Three note chords consisting of a root, third, and fifth. |
| Trill - | Rapid alternation between notes that are a half tone or whole tone apart. |
| Trio - | A composition written for three voices and instruments performed by three persons. |
| Triple time - | Time signature with three beats to the measure. |
| Triplet - | Three notes played in the same amount of time as one or two beats. |
| Tritone - | A chord comprised of three whole tones resulting in an augmented fourth or diminished fifth. |
| Tune - | A rhythmic succession of musical tones, a melody for instruments and voices. |
| Tuning - | The raising and lowering a pitch of an instrument to produce the correct tone of a note. |
| Tutti - | Passage for the entire ensemble or orchestra without a soloist. |
| Twelve-tone music - | Music composed such that each note is used the same number of times. |
| Unison - | Two or more voices or instruments playing the same note simultaneously. |
| Verismo - | A form of Italian opera beginning at the end of the 19th century. The setting is contemporary to the composer's own time, and the characters are modeled after every day life. |
| Vibrato - | Creating variation pitch in a note by quickly alternating between notes. |
| Virtuoso - | A person with notable technical skill in the performance of music. |
| Vivace - | Direction to performer to play a composition in a brisk, lively, and spirited manner. |
| Voice - | One of two or more parts in polyphonic music. Voice refers to instrumental parts as well as the singing voice. |

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| Waltz - | A dance written in triple time, where the accent falls on the first beat of each measure. |
| Whole note - | A whole note is equal to 2 half notes, 4 quarter notes, 8 eighth notes, etc. |
| Whole-tone scale - | A scale consisting of only whole-tone notes. Such a scale consists of only 6 notes. |

Here are the names of the notes for both clefs. Although you only really need to know 1 or the other, it is good practice to know both.

The treble clef



The bass clef:



Lines

Staff

The fundamental latticework of music notation, upon which symbols are placed. The five staff lines and four intervening spaces correspond to pitches of the diatonic scale - which pitch is meant by a given line or space is defined by the clef. With treble clef, the bottom staff line is assigned to E above middle C (E4 in note-octave notation); the space above it is F4, and so on. The grand staff combines bass and treble staves into one system joined by a brace. It is used for keyboard and harp music. The lines on a basic five-line staff are designated a number from one to five, the bottom line being the first one and the top line being the fifth. The spaces between the lines are, in the same fashion, numbered from one to four. In music education, for the Treble Clef, the mnemonic "Every Good Boy Does Fine" (or "Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge") is used to remember the value of each line from bottom to

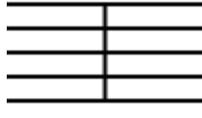
top. The interstitial spaces are often remembered as spelling the word "face" (notes F-A-C-E).

Ledger or leger lines



Used to extend the staff to pitches that fall above or below it. Such ledger lines are placed behind the note heads, and extend a small distance to each side. Multiple ledger lines may be used when necessary to notate pitches even farther above or below the staff.

Bar line



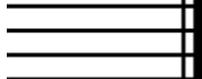
Used to separate measures (see [time signatures](#) below for an explanation of *measures*). Bar lines are extended to connect the upper and lower staves of a grand staff.

Double bar line, Double barline



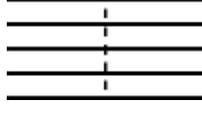
Used to separate two sections of music. Also used at changes in [key signature](#), [time signature](#) or major changes in style or [tempo](#).

Bold double bar line, Bold double barline



Used to indicate the conclusion of a movement or an entire composition.

Dotted bar line, Dotted barline



Subdivides long measures of complex meter into shorter segments for ease of reading, usually according to natural rhythmic subdivisions.



Accolade, brace

Connects two or more lines of music that are played simultaneously.^[1] Depending on the instruments playing, the brace, or accolade, will vary in designs and styles.

Clefs

Clefs define the pitch range, or [tessitura](#), of the staff on which it is placed. A clef is usually the *leftmost* symbol on a staff. Additional clefs may appear in the middle of a staff to indicate a change in register for

instruments with a wide range. In early music, clefs could be placed on any of several lines on a staff.

G clef (Treble Clef)



The centre of the spiral defines the line or space upon which it rests as the pitch *G above middle C*, or approximately [392 Hz](#). Positioned here, it assigns G above middle C to the *second line from the bottom* of the staff, and is referred to as the "treble clef." This is the most commonly encountered clef in modern notation, and is used for most modern vocal music. Middle-C is the 1st ledger line below the stave here. The shape of the clef comes from a stylised upper-case-G.

C clef (Alto Clef and Tenor Clef)



This clef points to the line (or space, rarely) representing middle C, or approximately [262 Hz](#). Positioned here, it makes the *center line on the staff* middle C, and is referred to as the "alto clef." This clef is used in modern notation for the [viola](#). While all clefs can be placed anywhere on the staff to indicate various tessitura, the C clef is most often considered a "movable" clef: it is frequently seen pointing instead to the fourth line and called a "tenor clef". This clef is used very often in music written for [bassoon](#), [cello](#), and [trombone](#); it replaces the bass clef when the number of ledger lines above the bass staff hinders easy reading.

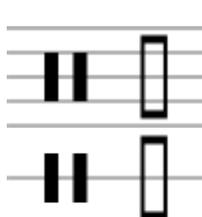
C clefs were used in vocal music of the classical era and earlier; however, their usage in vocal music has been supplanted by the universal use of the treble and bass clefs. Modern editions of music from such periods generally transpose the original C-clef parts to either treble (female voices), octave treble (tenors), or bass clef (tenors and basses).

F clef (Bass Clef)



The line or space between the dots in this clef denotes F below middle C, or approximately [175 Hz](#). Positioned here, it makes the *second line from the top* of the staff F below middle C, and is called a "bass clef." This clef appears nearly as often as the treble clef, especially in choral music, where it represents the bass and baritone voices. Middle C is the 1st

ledger line above the staff here. The shape of the clef comes from a stylised upper-case-F (which used to be written the reverse of the modern F)



Neutral clef

Used for pitchless instruments, such as some of those used for percussion. Each line can represent a specific percussion instrument within a set, such as in a drum set. Two different styles of neutral clefs are pictured here. It may also be drawn with a separate single-line staff for each untuned percussion instrument.

Octave Clef



Treble and bass clefs can also be modified by octave numbers. An eight or fifteen above a clef raises the intended pitch range by one or two octaves respectively. Similarly, an eight or fifteen below a clef lowers the pitch range by one or two octaves respectively. A treble clef with an eight below is the most commonly used, typically used instead of a C clef for tenor lines in choral scores. Even if the eight is not present, tenor parts in the treble clef are understood to be sung an octave lower than written.

Tablature

For guitars and other plucked instruments it is possible to notate tablature in place of ordinary notes. In this case, a TAB-sign is often written instead of a clef. The number of lines of the staff is not necessarily five: one line is used for each string of the instrument (so, for standard 6-stringed guitars, six lines would be used). Numbers on the lines show on which fret the string should be played. This Tab-sign, like the Percussion clef, is not a clef in the true sense, but rather a symbol employed instead of a clef. The interstitial spaces on a tablature are never used.

Notes and rests

Note and rest values are not absolutely defined, but are proportional in duration to all other note and rest values. The whole note is the reference value, and the other notes are named (in American) in comparison; i.e. a quarter note is a quarter the length of a whole note.

| Note | British name / American name | Rest |
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| | <u>Breve / Double whole note</u> | |
| | <u>Semibreve / Whole note</u> | |
| | <u>Minim / Half note</u> | |
| | <u>Crotchet / Quarter note</u> | |
| | <u>Quaver / Eighth note</u> For notes of this length and shorter, the note has the same number of flags (or hooks) as the rest has branches. | |
| | <u>Semiquaver / Sixteenth note</u> | |
| | <u>Demisemiquaver / Thirty-second note</u> | |



Hemidemisemiquaver / Sixty-fourth note



Beamed notes

Beams connect eighth notes (quavers) and notes of shorter value, and are equivalent in value to flags. In metered music, beams reflect the rhythmic grouping of notes. They may also be used to group short phrases of notes of the same value, regardless of the meter; this is more common in ametrical passages. In older printings of vocal music, beams are often only used when several notes are to be sung to one beat; modern notation encourages the use of beaming in a consistent manner with instrumental engraving, and the presence of beams or flags no longer informs the singer. Today, due to the body of music in which traditional metric states are not always assumed, beaming is at the discretion of the composer or arranger and irregular beams are often used to place emphasis on a particular rhythmic pattern.



Dotted note

Placing dots to the right of the corresponding notehead lengthens the note's duration, e.g. one dot by one-half, two dots by three-quarters, three dots by seven-eighths, and so on. Rests can be dotted in the same manner as notes. For example, if a quarter note had one dot alongside itself, it would get one and a half beats. Therefore n dots lengthen the note's or rest's original d duration to $d \times (2 - 2^{-n})$.



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Multi-measure rest

Indicates the number of measures in a resting part without a change in meter, used to conserve space and to simplify notation. Also called "gathered rest" or "multi-bar rest".



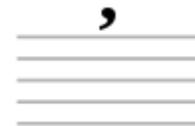
Durations shorter than the 64th are rare but not unknown. 128th notes are used by Mozart and Beethoven; 256th notes occur in works of Vivaldi

and even Beethoven. An extreme case is the Toccata Grande Cromatica by early-19th-century American composer Anthony Philip Heinrich, which uses note values as short as 2,048ths; however, the context shows clearly that these notes have one beam more than intended, so they should really be 1,024th notes.

The name of very short notes can be found with this formula: *Name* = $2^{(\text{number of flags on note} + 2)}$ th note.

Breaks

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. For bowed instruments, it indicates to lift the bow and play the next note with a downward (or upward, if marked) bow.

Caesura



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

Accidentals and key signatures

Common accidentals

Accidentals modify the pitch of the notes that follow them on the same staff position within a measure, unless cancelled by an additional accidental.



Flat

Lowers the pitch of a note by one semitone.



Sharp

Raises the pitch of a note by one semitone.



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).



Double flat

Lowers the pitch of a note by two chromatic semitones. Usually used when the note to be modified is already flatted by the key signature.

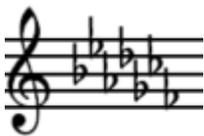


Double sharp

Raises the pitch of a note by two chromatic semitones. Usually used when the note to be modified is already sharped by the key signature.

Key signatures

Key signatures define the prevailing key of the music that follows, thus avoiding the use of accidentals for many notes. If no key signature appears, the key is assumed to be C major/A minor, but can also signify a neutral key, employing individual accidentals as required for each note. The key signature examples shown here are described as they would appear on a *treble staff*.



Flat key signature

Lowers by a semitone the pitch of notes on the corresponding line or space, and all octaves thereof, thus defining the prevailing major or minor key. Different keys are defined by the number of flats in the key signature, starting with the leftmost, i.e., B ♭, and proceeding to the right; for

example, if only the first two flats are used, the key is B ♭ major/G minor, and all B's and E's are "flattened", i.e. lowered to B ♭ and E ♭.

Sharp key signature

Raises by a semitone the pitch of notes on the corresponding line or space, and all octaves thereof, thus defining the prevailing major or minor key. Different keys are defined by the number of sharps in the key signature, also proceeding from left to right; for example, if only the first four sharps are used, the key is E major/C# minor, and the corresponding pitches are raised.



Quarter tones

Quarter-tone notation in Western music is not standardized. A common notation involves writing the fraction $1/4$ next to an arrow pointing up or down. Below are examples of an alternative notation:

Demiflat



Lowers the pitch of a note by one quarter tone. (Another notation for the demiflat is a flat with a diagonal slash through its stem. In systems where pitches are divided into intervals smaller than a quarter tone, the slashed flat represents a lower note than the reversed flat.)



Flat-and-a-half (sesquiflat)

Lowers the pitch of a note by three quarter tones.



Demisharp

Raises the pitch of a note by one quarter tone.



Sharp-and-a-half

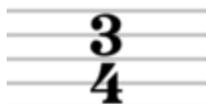
Raises the pitch of a note by three quarter tones.
Occasionally represented with two vertical and three diagonal bars instead.

Time signatures

Time signatures define the meter of the music. Music is "marked off" in uniform sections called bars or measures, and time signatures establish the number of beats in each. This is not necessarily intended to indicate which beats are emphasized, however. A time signature that conveys information about the way the piece actually sounds is thus chosen. Time signatures tend to suggest, but only *suggest*, prevailing groupings of beats or pulses.

Specific time

The bottom number represents the note value of the basic pulse of the music (in this case the 4 represents the crotchet or quarter-note). The top number indicates how many of these note values appear in each measure. This example announces that each measure is the equivalent length of three crotchets (quarter-notes). You would pronounce this as "Three Four Time", and was referred to as a "perfect" time.



Common time

This symbol is a throwback to sixteenth century rhythmic notation, when it represented 2/4, or "imperfect time". Today it represents 4/4.



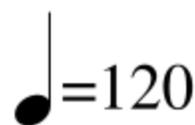
Alla breve or Cut time

This symbol represents 2/2 time, indicating two minim (or half-note) beats per measure. Here, a crotchet (or quarter note) would get half a beat.



Metronome mark

Written at the start of a score, and at any significant change of tempo, this symbol precisely defines the tempo of the music by assigning absolute durations to all note values within the score. In this particular example, the performer is told that 120 crotchets, or quarter notes, fit into one minute of time. Many publishers precede the marking with letters "M.M.", referring to Maelzel's Metronome.



Note relationships

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).



Slur

Indicates that two or more notes are to be played in one physical stroke, one uninterrupted breath, or (on instruments with neither breath nor bow) connected into a phrase as if played in a single breath. In certain contexts, a slur may only indicate that the notes are to be played legato; in this case, rearticulation is permitted.



Slurs and ties are similar in appearance. A tie is distinguishable because it always joins exactly two immediately adjacent notes of the same pitch, whereas a slur may join any number of notes of varying pitches.



A *phrase mark* (or less commonly, *ligature*) is a mark that is visually identical to a slur, but connects a passage of music over several measures. A phrase mark indicates a musical phrase and may not necessarily require that the music be slurred. In vocal music, a phrase mark usually shows how each syllable in the lyrics is to be sung.

Glissando or Portamento

A continuous, unbroken glide from one note to the next that includes the pitches between. Some instruments, such as the trombone, timpani, non-fretted string instruments, electronic instruments, and the human voice can make this glide continuously (portamento), while other instruments such as the piano or mallet instruments will blur the discrete pitches between the start and end notes to mimic a continuous slide (glissando).



Tuplet

A number of notes of irregular duration are performed within the duration of a given number of notes of regular time value; e.g., five notes played in the normal duration of four notes; seven notes played in the normal duration of two; three notes played in the normal duration of four. Tuplets are named according to the number of irregular notes; e.g., duplets, triplets, quadruplets, etc.



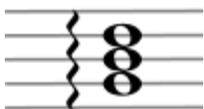
Chord

Several notes sounded simultaneously ("solid" or "block"), or in succession ("broken"). Two-note chords are called dyad; three-note chords are called triads. A chord may contain any number of notes.



Arpeggiated chord

A chord with notes played in rapid succession, usually ascending, each note being sustained as the others are played. Also called a "broken chord".



Dynamics

Dynamics are indicators of the relative intensity or volume of a musical line.

pppp **Pianississimo**

Extremely soft. Very infrequently does one see softer dynamics than this, which are specified with additional *ps*.

pp

Pianissimo

Very soft. Usually the softest indication in a piece of music, though softer dynamics are often specified with additional *ps*.

p

Piano

Soft. Usually the most often used indication.

mp

Mezzo piano

Literally, half as soft as *piano*.

mf

Mezzo forte

Similarly, half as loud as *forte*. If no dynamic appears, *mezzo-forte* is assumed to be the prevailing dynamic level.

f

Forte

Loud. Used as often as *piano* to indicate contrast.

ff

Fortissimo

Very loud. Usually the loudest indication in a piece, though louder dynamics are often specified with additional *fs* (such as fortississimo - seen below).

fff

Fortississimo

Extremely loud. Very infrequently does one see louder dynamics than this, which are specified with additional *fs*.

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.

<

Crescendo

A gradual increase in volume.

Can be extended under many notes to indicate that the volume steadily increases during the passage.

>

Diminuendo

Also **decrescendo**

A gradual decrease in volume. Can be extended in the same manner as *crescendo*.

Other commonly used dynamics build upon these values. For example "piano-pianissimo" (represented as '**ppp**' meaning so softly as to be almost inaudible, and forte-fortissimo, ('**fff**') meaning extremely loud. In some European countries, use of this dynamic has been virtually

outlawed as endangering the hearing of the performers.^[2] A small "s" in front of the dynamic notations means "subito", and means that the dynamic is to be changed to the new notation rapidly. Subito is commonly used with sforzandos, but all other notations, most commonly as "sff" (subitofortissimo) or "spp" (subitopianissimo).

fp **Forte-piano**
A section of music in which the music should initially be played loudly (forte), then immediately softly (piano).

Another value that rarely appears is *niente*, which means 'nothing'. This may be used at the end of a diminuendo to indicate 'fade out to nothing'.

Articulation marks

Articulations (or accents) specify how individual notes are to be performed within a phrase or passage. They can be fine-tuned by combining more than one such symbol over or under a note. They may also appear in conjunction with phrasing marks listed above.

 **Staccato**
This indicates that the note is to be played shorter than notated, usually half the value, the rest of the metric value is then silent. Staccato marks may appear on notes of any value, shortening their performed duration without speeding the music itself.

 **Staccatissimo**
Indicates a longer silence after the note (as described above), making the note very short. Usually applied to quarter notes or shorter. (In the past, this marking's meaning was more ambiguous: it sometimes was used interchangeably with staccato, and sometimes indicated an accent and not staccato. These usages are now almost defunct, but still appear in some scores.)

 **Accent**
The note is played louder or with a harder attack than surrounding unaccented notes. May appear on notes of any duration.

 **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. It may be combined with a staccato dot to indicate a slight detachment ("portato" or "mezzo staccato").

 **Marcato**
The note is played somewhat louder or more forcefully than a note with a regular accent mark (open horizontal wedge).

 **Left-hand pizzicato** or **Stopped note**
A note on a stringed instrument where the string is plucked with the left hand (the hand that usually stops the strings) rather than bowed. On the horn, this accent indicates a "stopped note" (a note played with the stopping hand shoved further into the bell of the horn).

 **Snap pizzicato**
On a stringed instrument, a note played by stretching a string away from the frame of the instrument and letting it go, making it "snap" against the frame. Also known as a Bartók pizzicato.

 **Natural harmonic** or **Open note**
On a stringed instrument, denotes that a natural harmonic (also called **flageolet**) is to be played. On a valved brass instrument, denotes that the note is to be played "open" (without lowering any valve, or without mute). In organ music, this denotes that a pedal note is to be played with the heel.

 **Fermata (Pause)**
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.



Up bow or Sull'arco

On a bowed string instrument, the note is played while drawing the bow upward. On a plucked string instrument played with a plectrum or pick (such as a guitar played pickstyle or a mandolin), the note is played with an upstroke. In organ notation, this marking indicates to play the pedal note with the toe.



Down bow or Giù arco

Like *sull'arco*, except the bow is drawn downward. On a plucked string instrument played with a plectrum or pick (such as a guitar played pickstyle or a mandolin), the note is played with a downstroke. Also note in organ notation, this marking indicates to play the pedal note with the heel.

Ornaments

Ornaments modify the pitch pattern of individual notes.



Trill

A rapid alternation between the specified note and the next higher note (according to key signature) within its duration. Also called a "shake." When followed by a wavy horizontal line, this symbol indicates an extended, or running, trill. Trills can begin on either the specified root note or the upper auxiliary note, though the latter is more prevalent in modern performances.



Mordent

Rapidly play the principal note, the next higher note (according to key signature) then return to the principal note for the remaining



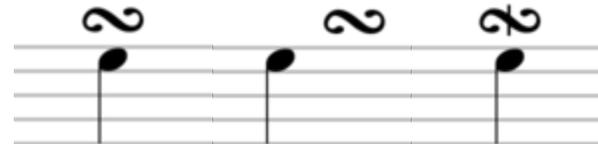
duration. In most music, the mordent begins on the auxiliary note, and the alternation between the two notes may be extended.

Mordent (lower)

Rapidly play the principal note, the note below it, then return to the principal note for the remaining duration. In much music, the mordent begins on the auxiliary note, and the alternation between the two notes may be extended.

Turn

When placed directly above the note, the turn (also known as a *gruppetto*) indicates a sequence of upper auxiliary note, principal note, lower auxiliary note, and a return to the principal note. When placed to the right of the note, the principal note is played first, followed by the above pattern. By either placing a vertical line through the turn symbol or inverting it, it indicates the order of the auxiliary notes is to be reversed.





Appoggiatura

The first half of the principal note's duration has the pitch of the grace note (the first two-thirds if the principal note is a dotted note).



Acciaccatura

The acciaccatura is of very brief duration, as though brushed on the way to the principal note, which receives virtually all of its notated duration.

Octave signs



Ottava

The *8va* sign is placed *above* the staff (as shown) to indicate the passage is to be played one octave higher.

(An *8vb* sign is placed *below* the staff to indicate the passage is to be played one octave *lower*.^{[3][4]})



Quindicesima

The *15ma* sign is placed *above* the staff (as shown) to indicate the passage is to be played two octaves *higher*.

(A *15mb* sign is placed *below* the staff to indicate the passage is to be played two octaves *lower*.)

8va and *15ma* are sometimes abbreviated further to *8* and *15*. When they appear below the staff, the word *bassa* is sometimes added.

Repetition and codas

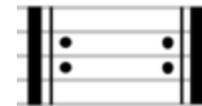
Tremolo

A rapidly-repeated note. If the tremolo is between two notes, then they are played in rapid alternation. The number of slashes through the stem (or number of diagonal bars between two notes) indicates the frequency at which the note is to be repeated (or alternated). As shown here, the note is to be repeated at a demisemiquaver (thirty-second note) rate.



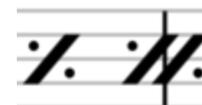
In percussion notation, tremolos are used to indicate rolls, diddles, and drags. Typically, a single tremolo line on a sufficiently short note (such as a sixteenth) is played as a drag, and a combination of three stem and tremolo lines indicates a double-stroke roll (or a single-stroke roll, in the case of timpani, mallet percussions and some untuned percussion instrument such as triangle and bass drum) for a period equivalent to the duration of the note. In other cases, the interpretation of tremolos is highly variable, and should be examined by the director and performers.

Repeat signs



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.

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.

Volta brackets (1st and 2nd endings, or 1st and 2nd time bars)

1.

Denote that a repeated passage is to be played in different ways on different playings. (Can also have more than two endings (1st,2nd,3rd...n'th endings) by changing the number inside the bracket to the number repeated. (Note: More than two or three endings is very uncommon but can be found in some musical arrangements.))

2.

Da capo

(lit. "From top") Tells the performer to repeat playing of the music from its beginning. 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.

D.C.

Dal segno

(lit. "From the sign") Tells the performer to repeat playing of the music starting at the nearest *segno*. This is followed by *al fine* or *al coda* just as with *da capo*.

D.S.



Segno

Mark used with *dal segno*.

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).



Instrument-specific notation - Guitar

The guitar has a right-hand fingering notation system derived from the names of the fingers in Spanish or Latin. They are written above, below, or beside the note to which they are attached. (The little finger is rarely used in classical music.) They read as follows:

| Symbol | Spanish | Latin | English |
|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| p | pulgar | pollex | thumb |
| i | índice | index | index |
| m | medio | media | middle |

a anular anularis ring
c, x, e, q, a meñique minimus little

Piano Pedal marks

These pedal marks appear in music for instruments with sustain pedals, such as the piano, vibraphone and chimes.



Engage pedal

Tells the player to put the sustain pedal down.



Release pedal

Tells the player to let the sustain pedal up.

Variable pedal mark



More accurately indicates the precise use of the sustain pedal. The extended lower line tells the player to keep the sustain pedal depressed for all notes below which it appears. The inverted "V" shape (Λ) indicates the pedal is to be momentarily released, then depressed again.

Other piano notation

m.d. / **mano destra** (Italian)

MD / **main droite** (French)

r.H. / **rechte Hand** (German)

r.h. / **RH right hand** (English)

m.s. /

MS / **mano sinistra** (Italian)

m.g. / **main gauche** (French)

MG / **linke Hand** (German)

l.H. / **l.h. left hand** (English)

/ LH

Finger identifications:

1 = thumb

2 = index

3 = middle

4 = ring

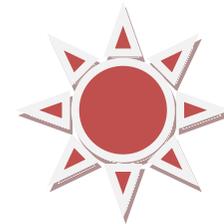
5 = little

1, 2, 3, 4,
5

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