

The Arts Vocabulary - Music

Music Glossary

A cappella. Unaccompanied choral singing.

Alla breve. The meter signature C indicating the equivalent of $2 \frac{1}{2}$ time.

Articulation. In performance, the characteristics of attack and decay of tones and the manner and extent to which tones in sequence are connected or disconnected.

Atonal. Music in which no single tone is the home base or key center.

Binary. A musical form consisting of two main sections.

Cadence. A group of notes or chords at the end of a phrase or piece of music that gives a feeling of pausing or finality.

Cadenza. A parenthetical flourish in a solo piece commonly just before a final or other important cadence.

Classroom instruments. Instruments typically used in the general music classroom, including, for example, recorder-type instruments, chorded zithers, mallet instruments, simple percussion instruments, fretted instruments, keyboard instruments, and electronic instruments.

Coda. A "tail" or short closing section added at the end of a piece of music.

Compound meter. Meter characterized by 3:1 relationship of the beat to the subdivided beat (the note receiving the beat in compound meter is always a dotted note.).

Diction. The use of pure and uniform vowel sounds and the execution of crisp and energetic consonants as appropriate for the musical style being sung.

Duple meter. The grouping of beats into sets of two.

Dynamic levels, dynamics. Degrees of loudness.

Elements of music. Pitch, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, texture, form.

Expression, expressive, expressively. With appropriate dynamics, phrasing, style, and interpretation and appropriate variations in dynamics and tempo.

Form. The overall structural organization of a music composition (e.g., AB, ABA, call and response, rondo, theme and variations, sonata-allegro) and the interrelationships of music events within the overall structure.

Genre. A type or category of music (e.g., sonata, opera, oratorio, art song, gospel, suite, jazz, madrigal, march, work song, lullaby, barbershop, Dixieland).

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Level of difficulty. For purposes of these frameworks, music is classified into six levels of difficulty:

- Level 1 - Very easy. Easy keys, meters, and rhythms; limited ranges.
- Level 2 - Easy. May include changes of tempo, key, and meter; modest ranges.
- Level 3 - Moderately easy. Contains moderate technical demands, expanded ranges, and varied interpretive requirements.
- Level 4 - Moderately difficult. Requires well-developed technical skills, attention to phrasing and interpretation, and ability to perform various meters and rhythms in a variety of keys.
- Level 5 - Difficult. Requires advanced technical and interpretive skills; contains key signatures with numerous sharps or flats, unusual meters, complex rhythms, subtle dynamic requirements.
- Level 6 - very difficult. Suitable for musically mature students of exceptional competence.

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Meter. The grouping in which a succession of rhythmic pulses or beats is organized; indicated by a meter signature at the beginning of a work.

Meter signature. An indicator of the meter of a musical work, usually presented in the form of a fraction, the denominator of which indicates the unit of measurement and the numerator of which indicates the number of units that make up a measure.

MIDI(Musical Instrument Digital Interface). Standard specifications that enable electronic instruments such as the synthesizer, sampler, sequencer, and drum machine from any manufacturer to communicate with one another and with computers.

Modal tonalities. Music based on scales other than major, minor, or pentatonic.

Obligato. An elaborate melodic part accompanying a solo or principal melody.

Ostinato. A short musical pattern that is repeated persistently throughout a composition.

Pentatonic scale. Music based on a five-tone scale using tones, Do, Re, Mi, Sol and La.

Rhythm. Combinations of long and short sounds that convey a sense of movement.

Rondo. A musical form in which the A section alternates with contrasting sections (ABACA)

Simple meter. Meter characterized by a 2:1 relationship of the beat to the subdivided beat (the note receiving the beat in simple meter is always an eighth note, quarter note, or half note.).

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Style. The distinctive or characteristic manner in which the elements of music are treated. In practice, the term may be applied to, for example, composers (the style of Copland), periods (Baroque style), media (keyboard style), nations (French style), form or type of composition (fugal style, contrapuntal style), or genre (operatic style, bluegrass style).

Symbols of musical expression. Commonly accepted written symbols for expressive elements such as dynamics, tempo, articulation, phrasing and style.

Syncopation. An arrangement of rhythm that places emphasis on weak beats or weak parts of beats.

Technical accuracy, technical skills. The ability to perform with appropriate timbre, intonation, and diction and to play or sing the correct pitches and rhythms.

Technique. The mechanical skill required to play an instrument or sing.

Ternary. A musical form consisting of three main sections.

Tone. A musical sound that has the properties of pitch, duration, volume, and timbre.

Triple meter. The grouping of beats into sets of three.

Vocal production. (Also referred to as vocal technique) A singer's vocal tone as determined by the combination of correct posture, effective breathing, raised soft palate, tonal placement and diction