

HELPFUL MUSICAL TERMS

I. DYNAMICS

The aspect of musical expression resulting from variation in the volume of sound.

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
Fortissississimo	<i>ffff</i>	As loud as possible
Fortississimo	<i>fff</i>	Extremely loud
Fortissimo	<i>ff</i>	Very loud
Forte	<i>f</i>	Loud
Mezzo-forte	<i>mf</i>	Moderately loud
Mezzo-piano	<i>mp</i>	Moderately soft
Piano	<i>p</i>	Soft
Pianissimo	<i>pp</i>	Very soft
Pianississimo	<i>ppp</i>	Extremely soft
Pianissississimo	<i>pppp</i>	As soft as possible
Pianoforte	<i>pf</i>	Soft, then immediately loud
Fortepiano	<i>fp</i>	Loud and accented, then immediately soft
Sforzando	<i>sfz</i>	Loud and accented

II. TEMPO

The 'time' of a musical composition, hence the speed of its performance.

Setting the tempo

grave	very slow and solemn
larghissimo	extremely slow
lentissimo	extremely slow, but not as slow as larghissimo
adagissimo	extremely slow, but slower than largo
largo	broad, very slow and dignified
larghetto	less slow than largo
largamente	broadly
adagio	slow, but not as slow as largo
adagletto	slow, but less slow than adagio
lento	slow
lentamente	slowly
andantino	a little slower than andante but sometimes a little faster than adagio
andante	moving along - walking pace
con moto	with movement, or a certain quickness
moderato	moderate speed
allegretto	pretty lively
vivace	quick and lively
allegro	quick, lively and bright
allegramente	quicker
presto	very quick
allegrissimo	very quick, between presto and vivacissimo
vivacissimo	very quick, faster than vivace
prestissimo	very quick - as quickly as possible
rapido	rapid
veloce	with velocity, speedily

Changing the tempo

doppio movimento	twice as fast
accelerando, <i>accel.</i>	getting steadily faster
stringendo	getting faster
affrettando	to increase speed gradually
Incalzando	to increase speed gradually
meno mosso	slower
ritardando, <i>rit., ritard.</i>	getting gradually slower
rallentando, <i>rall.</i>	getting gradually slower
tardando	getting gradually slower
slentando	getting gradually slower
slendendo	slowing down
strascinando	getting gradually slower
allargando, <i>allarg.</i>	getting slower, and maybe also louder
calando	getting slower as well as softer
deficiendo	getting slower as well as softer
mancando	getting slower as well as softer
morendo	getting slower as well as softer
sminuendo	getting slower as well as softer
smorzando	getting slower as well as softer
ritenuto, <i>rit., riten.</i>	holding back tempo - sometimes suddenly taking a slower tempo
più mosso	take the new section at a faster steady pace than the preceding section
più moto	take the new section at a faster steady pace than the preceding section
veloce	take the new section at a faster steady pace than the preceding section
ritenuto	take the new section at a slower steady pace than the preceding section
meno mosso	take the new section at a slower steady pace than the preceding section
meno moto	take the new section at a slower steady pace than the preceding section
a tempo	returning to a previous tempo
tempo primo	returning to tempo at beginning
lunga pausa	a long pause
l'istesso tempo	the same tempo but where the meter changes, for example from 2/2 to 6/4
rubato	a direction related to rhythmic shape rather than tempo - the overall tempo remains unchanged but the rhythmic division within one or more bars is freer than the notes as they are notated