

# Glossary of musical terminology

This is a **list of musical terms** that are likely to be encountered in printed scores, music reviews, and program notes. Most of the terms are [Italian](#) (see also [Italian musical terms used in English](#)), in accordance with the Italian origins of many European musical conventions. Sometimes, the special musical meanings of these phrases differ from the original or current Italian meanings. Most of the other terms are taken from [French](#) and [German](#), indicated by "(Fr)" and "(Ger)", respectively. Others are from languages such as Latin and Spanish.

Unless specified, the terms are Italian or English. The list can never be complete: some terms are common, and others are used only occasionally, and new ones are coined from time to time. Some composers prefer terms from their own language rather than the standard terms here. For a list of terms used in jazz, country, rock, and other popular music genres, see the [List of jazz and popular musical terms](#) article.

## [\[edit\]](#) A

- **a, à** (Fr): at, to, by, for, in, in the style of
- **a 2**: see **a due** in this list
- **aber** (Ger): but
- **a bene placito**: up to the performer
- **a cappella**: in the manner of singing in a chapel; i.e., without instrumental accompaniment
- **accarezzévole**: expressive and caressing
- **accelerando, accel.**: accelerating; gradually increasing the [tempo](#)
- **accentato**: accented; with emphasis
- **acceso**: ignited, on fire
- **acciaccatura**: crushing; i.e., a very fast [grace note](#) that is "crushed" against the note that follows and takes up no value in the measure
- **accompagnato**: accompanied; i.e., with the accompaniment following the soloist, who may speed up or slow down at will
- **adagietto**: rather slow
- **adagio**: at ease; i.e., play slowly
- **adagissimo**: very, very slow
- **ad libitum** (commonly **ad lib**; Latin): at liberty; i.e., the speed and manner of execution are left to the performer
- **a due**: intended as a duet; for two voices or instruments; together; two instruments are to play in unison after a solo passage for one of the instruments
- **affannato, affannoso**: anguished

- **affettuoso, affettuosamente, or affectueusement** (Fr): with [affect](#) (that is, with emotion); see also **con affetto**
- **affrettando**: hurrying, pressing onwards
- **agile**: swiftly
- **agitato**: agitated
- **al, alla**: to the, in the manner of (**al** before masculine nouns, **alla** before feminine)
- **alla breve**: in cut-time; two beats per measure or the equivalent thereof
- **alla marcia**: in the style of a march
- **allargando**: broadening, becoming a little slower each time
- **allegretto**: a little lively, moderately fast
- **allegretto vivace**: a moderately quick tempo
- **allegro**: cheerful or brisk; but commonly interpreted as lively, fast
- **allegroissimo**: very fast, though slower than presto
- **als** (Ger): than
- **alt** (English) (also **alt dom** or **altered dominant**): a jazz term which instructs chord-playing musicians such as a jazz pianist or jazz guitarist to perform a dominant (V7) chord with altered upper extensions (e.g., sharp 11th, flat 13th, etc.).
- **altissimo**: very high
- **alto**: high; often refers to a particular range of voice, higher than a tenor but lower than a soprano
- **alzate sordini**: lift or raise the mutes; i.e., remove mutes
- **am Steg** (Ger): at the bridge; i.e., playing a bowed string instrument near its bridge, which produces a heavier, stronger tone (see **sul ponticello** in this list)
- **amabile**: amiable, pleasant
- **amoroso**: loving
- **anacrusis**: a note or notes that precede the first full bar; a pickup
- **andante**: at a walking pace; i.e., at a moderate tempo
- **andantino**: slightly faster than **andante** (but earlier it is sometimes used to mean slightly *slower* than **andante**)
- **a niente**: to nothing; an indication to make a diminuendo which fades to pppp
- **a nessuna cosa**: to nothing; an indication to hold a fermata until it dies away (this only works with instruments which cannot sustain a note)
- **animandosi**: animated, lively
- **animato**: animated, lively
- **antiphon**: a liturgical or other composition consisting of choral responses, sometimes between two choirs; a passage of this nature forming part of another composition; a repeated passage in a psalm or other liturgical piece, similar to a [refrain](#).<sup>[1]</sup>
- **apaisé** (Fr): calmed
- **a piacere**: at pleasure; i.e., the performer need not follow the [rhythm](#) strictly
- **appassionato**: passionately
- **appoggiatura**: one or more [grace notes](#) that take up some note value of the next full note.
- **a prima vista**: at first sight; i.e., playing or singing something at first sight of the music sheet

- **arco**: the bow used for playing some string instrument; i.e., played with the bow, as opposed to **pizzicato** (plucked), in music for bowed instruments; normally used to cancel a pizzicato direction
- **arietta**: a short **aria**
- **arioso**: airy, or like an air (a melody); i.e., in the manner of an aria; melodious
- **armonioso**: harmoniously
- **arpeggio**: like a **harp**; i.e., the notes of the **chords** are to be played quickly one after another (usually ascending) instead of simultaneously. In music for **piano**, this is sometimes a solution in playing a wide-ranging chord whose notes cannot be played otherwise. Arpeggios are frequently used as an accompaniment. See also **broken chord** in this list.
- **arpeggiato**: a way of playing a chord: starting with the lowest note, and with successively higher notes rapidly joining in. Sometimes the effect is reversed, so that the highest note is played first.
- **assai**: very
- **assez** (Fr): enough, sufficiently; sometimes used in the same sense as **assai**
- **a tempo**: in time; i.e., the performer should return to the main tempo of the piece (after an **accelerando** or **ritardando**, etc.); also may be found in combination with other terms such as **a tempo giusto** (in strict time) or **a tempo di minuetto** (at the speed of a minuet)
- **attacca**: attack, or go on; i.e., at the end of a **movement**, a direction to begin (attack) the next movement immediately, without a gap or pause
- **Ausdruck** (Ger): expression
- **ausdrucksvoll** (Ger): expressively
- **avec** (Fr): with or with another


## [\[edit\]](#) B

- **B** (Ger): B flat in **German** (and **Icelandic**); B natural is called **H**
- **barbaro**: barbarous (notably used in *Allegro barbaro* by **Béla Bartók**)
- **Bartók pizzicato**: a term which instructs string performers to play a pizzicato note to pull the string away from the fingerboard so that it snaps back percussively on the fingerboard.
- **bass**: the lowest of the standard four voice ranges (bass, tenor, alto, soprano); the lowest melodic line in a musical composition, often thought of as defining and supporting the **harmony**; in an orchestral context, the term usually refers to the **double bass**.
- **basso continuo**: continuous bass; i.e., a bass part played continuously throughout a piece to give harmonic structure, used especially in the **Baroque** period
- **beat**: (1) the pronounced **rhythm** of music; (2) one single stroke of a **rhythmic** accent
- **bellicoso**: warlike, aggressive
- **ben** or **bene**: well; in *ben marcato* ("well marked") for example
- **bend**: jazz term referring either to establishing a pitch, sliding down half a step and returning to the original pitch or sliding up half a step from the original note.



- **beschleunigte** (Ger): accelerated, as in **mit beschleunigter Geschwindigkeit**, at an accelerated tempo
- **bewegt** (Ger): moved, with speed
- **binary**: a musical form in two sections: AB
- **bird's eye**: a slang term for **fermata**, which instructs the performer to hold a note or chord as long as they wish
- **bis** (Lat): twice; i.e., repeat the relevant action or passage
- **bisbigliando**: whispering; i.e., a special tremolo effect on the **harp** where a chord or note is rapidly repeated at a low volume
- **bocca chiusa**: with closed mouth
- **bravura**: boldness; as in **con bravura**, boldly
- **breit** (Ger): broad
- **bridge**: Transitional passage connecting two sections of a composition, also transition. Also the part of a stringed instrument that holds the strings in place and transmits their vibrations to the resonant body of the instrument.
- **brillante**: brilliantly, with sparkle
- **brio**: vigour; usually in **con brio**
- **brioso**: vigorously (same as **con brio**)
- **broken chord**: A **chord** in which the notes are not all played at once, but in some more or less consistent sequence. They may follow singly one after the other, or two notes may be immediately followed by another two, for example. See also **arpeggio** in this list, which as an accompaniment pattern may be seen as a kind of broken chord; see **Alberti bass**.
- **bruscamente**: brusquely

## [[edit](#)] C


- **cadenza**: a solo section, usually in a **concerto** or similar work, that is used to display the performer's technique, sometimes at considerable length
- **calando**: falling away, or lowering; i.e., getting slower and quieter; ritardando along with diminuendo
- **calore**: warmth; so **con calore**, warmly
- **cambiare**: to change; i.e., any change, such as to a new instrument
- **cantabile** or **cantando**: in a singing style
- **capo**: head; i.e., the beginning (of a movement, normally)
- **capriccioso**: capriciously, unpredictable, volatile
- **cédez** (Fr): yield, give way
- **cesura** or **caesura** (Latin form): break, stop; i.e., a complete break in sound (sometimes nicknamed "railroad tracks" in reference to their appearance)
- **chiuso**: closed; i.e., muted by hand (for a horn, or similar instrument; but see also **bocca chiusa**, which uses the feminine form, in this list)
- **coda**: a tail; i.e., a closing section appended to a movement
- **codetta**: a small coda, but usually applied to a passage appended to a *section* of a movement, not to a whole movement
- **col, colla**: with the (**col** before a masculine noun, **colla** before a feminine noun); (see next for example)

- **colla parte**: with the soloist; as an instruction in an orchestral score or part, it instructs the conductor or orchestral musician to follow the rhythm and tempo of a solo performer (usually for a short passage)
- **colla voce**: with the voice; as an instruction in an choral music/opera score or orchestral part, it instructs the conductor or orchestral musician to follow the rhythm and tempo of a solo singer (usually for a short passage)
- **col legno**: with the wood; i.e., the strings (for example, of a [violin](#)) are to be struck with the wood of the bow, making a percussive sound; also **battuta col legno**: beaten with the wood
- **coloratura**: coloration; i.e., elaborate ornamentation of a vocal line, or (especially) a soprano voice that is well-suited to such elaboration
- **colossale**: tremendously
- **col pugno**: with the fist; i.e., bang the piano with the fist
- **come prima**: like the first (time); i.e., as before, typically referring to an earlier tempo
- **come sopra**: as above; i.e., like the previous tempo (usually)
- **common time**: the [time signature](#) 4/4: four beats per measure, each beat a [quarter note](#) (a crotchet) in length. 4/4 is often written on the [musical staff](#) as . The symbol is not a C as an abbreviation for common time, but a broken circle. The full circle at one time stood for triple time, 3/4.
- **comodo** (or, commonly but less correctly, **commodo**): comfortable; i.e., at moderate speed; also, **allegro comodo**, **tempo comodo**, etc.
- **con**: with; used in very many musical directions, for example **con allegrezza** (with liveliness), **con amore** (with tenderness); (see also **col**, **colla**, above)
- **con affetto**: with [affect](#) (that is, with emotion)
- **con amore**, or (in Spanish and sometimes in Italian) **con amor**: with love, tenderly
- **con anima**: with feeling
- **con brio**: with spirit, with vigour
- **con dolore**: with sadness
- **con forza**: with force
- **con (gran, molto) espressione**: with (great, much) expression
- **con fuoco**: with fire, in a fiery manner
- **con larghezza**: with broadness; broadly
- **con moto**: with motion
- **con slancio**: with enthusiasm
- **con sordina**, or **con sordine** (plural): with a [mute](#), or with mutes; several orchestral instruments can have their tone muted with wood, rubber, metal, or plastic devices (for string instruments, mutes are clipped to the bridge, and for brass instruments, mutes are inserted in the bell); compare **senza sordina** in this list (which instructs the musicians to remove their mutes); see also [Sordino](#). **Note**: **sordina**, with plural **sordine**, is strictly correct Italian, but the forms **con sordino** and **con sordini** are much more commonly used as terms in music.
- **con sordino**, or **con sordini** (plural) (incorrect Italian): see **con sordina**, above

- **coperti** (plural of **coperto**, which may also be seen): covered; i.e., on a drum, muted with a cloth
- **conjunct**: an adjective applied to a [melodic](#) line that moves by step ([intervals](#) of a 2nd) rather in disjunct motion (by leap).
- **crescendo**: growing; i.e., progressively louder (contrast [diminuendo](#))
- **cuivré**: brassy. Used almost exclusively as a [French Horn technique](#) to indicate a forced, rough tone. A note marked both stopped and loud will be *cuivré* automatically<sup>[1]</sup>
- **cut time**: Same as the [meter](#) 2/2: two half-note (minim) beats per measure. Notated and executed like [common time](#) (4/4), except with the beat lengths

doubled. Indicated by . This comes from a literal cut of the  symbol of [common time](#). Thus, a [quarter note](#) in cut time is only half a beat long, and a measure has only two beats. See also [alla breve](#).

## [[edit](#)] D

- **da capo**: from the head; i.e., from the beginning (see **capo** in this list)
- **D.S. al fine** or **dal segno al fine**: from the sign to the end; i.e., return to a place in the music designated by the sign  and continue to the end of the piece
- **D.S.S. al coda** or **dal segno al coda**: same as D.S. al coda, but with a double segno
- **D.S.S. al fine** or **dal segno al fine**: from the double sign to the end; i.e., return to place in the music designated by the double sign (see D.S. al coda) and continue to the end of the piece
- **deciso**: decisively
- **decrescendo** or **decresc.**: same as **diminuendo** or **dim.** (see below)
- **delicatamente** or **delicato**: delicately
- **detaché**: act of playing notes separately
- **devoto**: religiously
- **diminuendo**, **dim.**: dwindling; i.e., with gradually decreasing volume (same as **decrescendo**)
- **disjunct**: an adjective applied to a [melodic](#) line which moves by leap ([intervals](#) of more than a 2nd) as opposed to conjunct motion (by step)
- **dissonante**: dissonant
- **divisi** or **div.**: divided; i.e., in a part in which several musicians normally play exactly the same notes they are instead to split the playing of the written simultaneous notes among themselves. It is most often used for string instruments, since with them another means of execution is often possible. (The return from **divisi** is marked [unisono](#): [see in this list](#).)
- **doit**: jazz term referring to a note that slides to an indefinite pitch chromatically upwards.
- **dolce**: sweetly
- **dolcissimo**: very sweetly
- **dolente**: sorrowfully, plaintively
- **doloroso**: sorrowfully, plaintively

- **doppio movimento**: twice as fast
- **double stop**: the act of playing two notes simultaneously on a melodic percussion instrument or [string instrument](#)
- **drammatico**: dramatically
- **drop**: jazz term referring to a note that slides to an indefinite pitch chromatically downwards.
- **D.S.**: [Dal Segno](#) (see above)
- **Dur** (Ger): major; used in [key signatures](#) as, for example, A-Dur (A major), B-Dur (B major), or H-Dur (B major). (See also **moll** (minor) in this list.)
- **duolo**: (Ital) grief
- **dynamics**: refers to the relative volumes in the execution of a piece of music

## [\[edit\]](#) E

- **e** (Ital): and
- **eco**: the [Italian](#) word for "echo"; an effect in which a group of notes is repeated, usually more softly, and perhaps at a different octave, to create an echo effect
- **ein wenig** (Ger): a little
- **Empfindung** (Ger): feeling
- **encore** (Fr): again; i.e., perform the relevant passage once more
- **en dehors** (Fr): prominently
- **energico**: energetic, strong
- **enfatico**: emphatically
- **en pressant** (Fr): hurrying forward
- **en retenant** (Fr): slowing
- **eroico**: heroically
- **espirando**: expiring; i.e., dying away
- **espressivo** or **espr.**: expressively
- **estinto**: extinct, extinguished; i.e., as soft as possible, lifeless, barely audible
- **etwas** (Ger): somewhat

## [\[edit\]](#) F

- **facile**: easily, without fuss
- **fall**: jazz term describing a note of definite pitch sliding downwards to another note of definite pitch.
- **falsetto**: **male voice above usual bass or tenor range (see article)**
- **fermata**: finished, closed; i.e., a rest or note is to be held for a duration that is at the discretion of the performer or conductor (sometimes called *bird's eye*); a fermata at the end of a first or intermediate movement or section is usually moderately prolonged, but the final fermata of a symphony may be prolonged for twice its printed length or more for dramatic effect.
- **feroce**: ferociously
- **feurig** (Ger): fiery
- **festivamente**: cheerfully, celebratory

- **fieramente**: proudly
- **fill** (English): a jazz or rock term which instructs performers to improvise a scalar passage or **riff** to "fill in" the brief time between **lyrical phrases**, the lines of **melody**, or between two sections
- **fine**: the end, often in phrases like **al fine** (to the end)
- **flat**: a symbol (♭) that lowers the pitch of a note by a semitone. The term may also be used as an adjective to describe a situation where a singer or musician is performing a note in which the intonation is an eighth or a quarter of a semitone too low.
- **flebile**: mournfully
- **focoso** or **fuocoso**: fiery; i.e., passionately
- **forte** or **f** (usually): strong; i.e., to be played or sung loudly
- **fortepiano** or **fp** (usually): strong-gentle; i.e., 1. loud, then immediately soft (see **dynamics**), or 2. an **early pianoforte**
- **fortissimo** or **ff**: very loud (see note at **pianissimo**, in this list)
- **fortississimo** or **fff**: as loud as possible
- **forza** : musical force
- **forzando** or **fz**: see **sforzando** in this list
- **freddo**: cold(ly); hence depressive, unemotional
- **fresco**: freshly
- **fröhlich**: lively, joyfully
- **fugue** (Fr), **fuga** (Latin and Italian): literally "flight"; hence a complex and highly regimented **contrapuntal** form in music. A short theme (the *subject*) is introduced in one voice (or part) alone, then in others, with imitation and characteristic development as the piece progresses.
- **funebre**: funeral; often seen as "marcia funebre" (funeral march), indicating a stately and plodding tempo.
- **fuoco**: fire; **con fuoco** means with fire
- **furia**: fury
- **furioso**: furiously

## [\[edit\]](#) G

- **G.P.**: Grand Pause; indicates to the performers that the entire ensemble has a rest of indeterminate length, often as a dramatic effect during a loud section
- **gaudioso**: with joy
- **gemendo**: groaningly
- **gentile**: gently
- **geschwind** (Ger): quickly
- **geteilt** (Ger): See **divisi**
- **getragen** (Ger): sustained
- **giocoso** or **gioioso**: gaily
- **giusto**: strictly, exactly, e.g. **tempo giusto** in strict time
- **glissando** (simulated Italian): a continuous sliding from one pitch to another (a true glissando), or an incidental scale executed while moving from one melodic

- note to another (an effective glissando). See [glissando](#) for further information; and compare **portamento** in this list.
- **grandioso**: grandly
  - **grave**: slowly and seriously
  - **grazioso**: gracefully
  - **gustoso**: with happy emphasis and forcefulness

## [\[edit\]](#) H

- **H** (Ger): B natural in [German](#); **B** means B flat
- **Hauptstimme** (Ger): main voice, chief part; i.e., the contrapuntal line of primary importance, in opposition to **Nebenstimme**
- **hemiola** (English, from Greek): the imposition of a pattern of [rhythm](#) or [articulation](#) other than that implied by the time signature; specifically, in triple time (for example in 3/4) the imposition of a duple pattern (as if the time signature were, for example, 2/4). See [Syncopation](#).
- **hervortretend** (Ger): prominent, pronounced
- **Homophony**: A musical texture with one voice (or melody line) accompanied by chords; also used as an adjective (homophonic). Compare with [polyphony](#), in which several voices or melody lines are performed at the same time.

## [\[edit\]](#) I

- **immer** (Ger): always
- **imperioso**: imperiously
- **impetuoso**: impetuously
- **improvvisando**: with improvisation
- **improvvisato**: improvised, or as if improvised
- **in altissimo**: in the highest; i.e., play or sing an octave higher
- **incalzando**: getting faster and louder
- **insistendo**: insistently, deliberate
- **in modo di**: in the art of, in the style of
- **intimo**: intimately
- **intro**: opening section
- **irato**: angrily

## [\[edit\]](#) J

- **Jazz standard** (or simply "standard"): a well-known composition from the jazz repertoire which is widely played and recorded.

## [\[edit\]](#) K

- **keyboardist** (Eng) : a musician who plays any instrument with a keyboard. In Classical music, this may refer to instruments such as the piano, pipe organ, harpsichord, and so on. In a jazz or popular music context, this may refer to instruments such as the piano, electric piano, synthesizer, Hammond organ, and so on.
- **kräftig** (Ger): strongly
- **Klangfarbenmelodie** (Ger): "tone-color-melody", distribution of pitch or melody among instruments, varying timbre

## [\[edit\]](#) L

- **lacrimoso**: tearfully; i.e., sadly
- **laissez vibrer, l.v.**: allow the sound to continue, do not damp; used frequently in harp music, occasionally in piano or percussion. For percussion & electric guitar, "let ring" is more common.<sup>[1]</sup>
- **lamentando**: lamenting, mournfully
- **lamentoso**: lamenting, mournfully
- **langsam** (Ger): slowly
- **largamente**: broadly; i.e., slowly (same as **largo**)
- **largetto**: somewhat slowly; not as slow as **largo**
- **Larghissimo**: very slowly; slower than **largo**
- **largo**: broadly; i.e., slowly
- **leap** (skip): a **melodic** interval greater than a major 2nd, as opposed to a step. Melodies which move by a leap are called "disjunct". **Octave** leaps are not uncommon in **florid** vocal music.
- **lebhaft** (Ger): briskly, lively
- **legato**: joined; i.e., smoothly, in a connected manner (see also **articulation**)
- **leggiero, or leggermente**: lightly, delicately
- **leggerissimo**: very lightly and delicately
- **lent** (Fr): slowly
- **lento**: slowly
- **liberamente**: freely
- **libero**: free, freely
- **l'istesso**: see *lo stesso*, below
- **loco**: [in] place; i.e., perform the notes at the pitch written, generally used to cancel an **8va** or **8vb** direction. In string music, also used to indicate return to normal playing position (see **Playing the violin**).<sup>[1]</sup>
- **lontano**: from a distance; distantly
- **lo stesso** (or commonly, but ungrammatically, **l'istesso**): the same; applied to the manner of articulation, tempo, etc.
- **lugubre**: lugubrious, mournful
- **luminoso**: luminously
- **lunga**: long (often applied to fermatas)
- **lusingando**: coaxingly

## [\[edit\]](#) M

- **ma**: but
- **ma non troppo**: but not too much
- **maestoso**: majestically, in a stately fashion
- **magico**: magically
- **magnifico**: magnificent
- **main droite** (French): [played with the] right hand (abbreviation: MD or m.d.)
- **main gauche** (French): [played with the] left hand (abbreviation: MG or m.g.)
- **malinconico**: melancholy
- **mancando**: dying away
- **mano destra**: [played with the] right hand (abbreviation: MD or m.d.)
- **mano sinistra**: [played with the] left hand (abbreviation: MS or m.s.)
- **marcatissimo**: with much accentuation
- **marcato**, **marc.**: marked; i.e., with accentuation, execute every note as if it were to be accented
- **marcia**: a march; **alla marcia** means in the manner of a march
- **martellato**: hammered out
- **marziale**: in the march style
- **mässig** (German): moderately (also: mäßig)
- **MD**: see **mano destra** and **main droite**
- **melancolico**: melancholic
- **[melisma](#)**: the technique of changing the note (pitch) of a syllable of text while it is being sung
- **measure**: the period of a musical piece that encompasses a complete cycle of the time signature, e.g., in 4/4 time, a measure has four quarter-note beats
- **medley**: piece composed from parts of existing pieces, usually three, played one after another, sometimes overlapping.
- **meno**: less; see **meno mosso**, for example, under **mosso**
- **[messa di voce](#)**: in singing, a controlled swell, i.e. **[crescendo](#)** then **[diminuendo](#)**, on a long held note, especially in early & baroque music<sup>[1]</sup>
- **mesto**: mournful, sad
- **meter** (or **metre**): the pattern of a music piece's rhythm of strong and weak beats
- **mezza voce**: half voice; i.e., with subdued or moderated volume
- **mezzo**: half; used in combinations like **mezzo forte (mf)**, meaning moderately loud
- **mezzo forte**: half loudly; i.e., moderately loudly. See **[dynamics](#)**.
- **mezzo piano**: half softly; i.e., moderately softly. See **[dynamics](#)**.
- **[mezzo-soprano](#)**: a female singer with a range usually extending from the A below middle C to the F an eleventh above middle C. Mezzo-sopranos generally have a darker vocal tone than sopranos, and their vocal range is between that of a **[soprano](#)** and that of an **[contralto](#)**.
- **MG**: see **main gauche**
- **misterioso**: mysteriously
- **mobile**: flexible, changeable

- **moderato**: moderate; often combined with other terms, usually relating to tempo; for example, *allegro moderato*
- **modesto**: modest
- **moll** (German): minor; used in [key signatures](#) as, for example, a-moll (A minor), b-moll (B♭ minor), or h-moll (B minor) (see also **dur** (major) in this list)
- **molto**: very
- **morendo**: dying; i.e., dying away in dynamics, and perhaps also in tempo
- **mosso**: moved, moving; used with a preceding *più* or *meno* (see in this list), for faster or slower respectively
- **MS**: see **mano sinistra**
- **moto**: motion; usually seen as **con moto**, meaning with motion or quickly
- **munter** (German): lively
- **muta [in...]**: Change: either a change of instrument, e.g. flute to piccolo, horn in F to horn in B♭; or a change of tuning, e.g. guitar **muta 6 in D**. Note: does *not* mean "mute", for which [con sordina](#) or **con sordino** is used. <sup>[1]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) N

- **narrante**: narratingly
- **natural**: a symbol (♮) that cancels the effect of a sharp or a flat (see in this list)
- **naturale** or **nat.**: natural; i.e., discontinue a special effect, such as **col legno**, **sul tasto**, **sul ponticello**, or playing in harmonics
- **N.C.**: no chord, written in the chord row of music notation to show there is no chord being played, and no implied harmony
- **Nebenstimme** (Ger): under part; i.e., a secondary contrapuntal part, always occurring simultaneously with, and subsidiary to, the **Hauptstimme**
- **nicht** (Ger): not
- **niente**: "nothing", barely audible, dying away
- **nobile** or **nobilmente**: in a noble fashion
- **nocturne** (Fr): a piece written for the night
- **notes inégales** (Fr): unequal notes; i.e., a principally Baroque performance practice of applying long-short rhythms to pairs of notes written as equal
- **notturmo**: same as **nocturne** (see above)
- **number opera**: an opera consisting of "numbers," e.g. [arias](#), intermixed with [recitative](#)

## [\[edit\]](#) O

- **obbligato**: required, indispensable
- **octave**: interval between one musical pitch and another with half or double its frequency.
- **omaggio**: homage, celebration
- **one-voice-per-part**, or **OVPP**: the practice of using solo voices on each musical line or part in choral music.

- **organ trio**: in jazz or rock, a group of three musicians which includes a [Hammond organ](#) player and two other instruments, often an [electric guitar](#) player and a [saxophone](#) player.
- **ossia** or **oppure**: or instead; i.e., according to some specified alternative way of performing a passage, which is marked with a footnote, additional small notes, or an additional staff
- **ostinato**: obstinate, persistent; i.e., a short musical pattern that is repeated throughout an entire composition or portion of a composition
- **ottava**: octave; e.g. **ottava bassa**: an octave lower

## [\[edit\]](#) P

- **parlando** or **parlante**: like speech, enunciated
- **Partitur** (Ger): full orchestral score
- **passionato**: passionately
- **pastorale**: in a pastoral style, peaceful and simple
- **pausa**: rest
- **pedale** or **ped**: In piano scores, this instructs the player to use press damper pedal to sustain the note or chord being played. The player may be instructed to release the pedal with an asterisk marking (\*). In organ scores, it tells the organist that a section is to be performed on the [bass pedalboard](#) with the feet.
- **penseroso**: thoughtfully, meditatively
- **perdendosi**: dying away; decrease in dynamics, perhaps also in tempo
- **pesante**: heavy, ponderous
- **peu à peu** (Fr): little by little
- **pianissimo** or **pp** (usually): very gently; i.e., perform very softly, even softer than **piano**. This convention can be extended; the more *ps* that are written, the softer the composer wants the musician to play or sing, thus **ppp** (pianississimo) would be softer than **pp**. Dynamics in a piece should be interpreted relative to the other dynamics in the same piece. For example, **pp** should be executed as softly as possible, but if **ppp** is found later in the piece, **pp** should be markedly louder than **ppp**. More than three **ps** (**ppp**) or three **fs** (**fff**) are uncommon.
- **piano** or **p** (usually): gently; i.e., played or sung softly (see [dynamics](#))
- **piano-vocal score**: the same as a [vocal score](#), a piano arrangement along with the vocal parts of an opera, cantata, or similar
- **piacevole**: pleasant
- **piangevole**: plaintive
- **più**: more; see **mosso** for an example
- **pizzicato**: pinched, plucked; i.e., in music for bowed strings, plucked with the fingers as opposed to played with the bow; compare [arco](#) (in this list), which is inserted to cancel a pizzicato instruction
- **pochettino** or **poch.**: very little
- **poco**: a little, as in **poco più allegro** (a little faster)
- **poco a poco**: little by little
- **poetico**: poetic discourse

- **poi**: then, indicating a subsequent instruction in a sequence; **diminuendo poi subito fortissimo**, for example: getting softer then suddenly very loud
- **portamento**: carrying; i.e., 1. generally, sliding in pitch from one note to another, usually pausing just above or below the final pitch, then sliding quickly to that pitch. If no pause is executed, then it is a basic glissando; or 2. in piano music, an [articulation](#) between [legato](#) and [staccato](#), like [portato](#), in this list
- [portato](#) or **loure**: carried; i.e., non-legato, but not as detached as staccato (same as **portamento** [2], in this list)
- **posato**: settled
- [potpourri](#) or **pot-pourri** (Fr): potpourri (as used in other senses in English); i.e., a kind of musical form structured as ABCDEF... etc.; the same as [medley](#) or, sometimes, [fantasia](#)
- **precipitato**: precipitately
- **prestissimo**: extremely quickly, as fast as possible
- **presto**: very quickly
- **prima volta**: the first time; for example **prima volta senza accompagnamento** (the first time without accompaniment)
- **primo** or **prima** (the feminine form): first

## [\[edit\]](#) Q


- **quarter tone**: Half of a semitone; a pitch division not used in most Western music notation, except in some contemporary art music or experimental music. Quarter tones are used in Western popular music forms such as jazz and blues and in a variety of non-Western musical cultures.
- **quasi** (Latin and Italian): as if, almost, e.g. **quasi recitativo** like a [recitative](#) in an opera, or **quasi una fantasia** like a [fantasia](#)

## [\[edit\]](#) R

- **rallentando** or **rall.**: Broadening of the tempo (often not discernible from *ritardando*); progressively slower
- **rapido**: fast
- **rasch** (Ger): fast
- **religioso**: religiously
- **repente**: suddenly
- **restez** (Fr): stay; i.e., remain on a note or string
- **retenu** (Fr): hold back; same as the Italian *ritenuto* (see below)
- **ridicolosamente**: humorously, inaccurate, and loosely
- **rinforzando** (**rf**): reinforced; i.e., emphasized; sometimes like a sudden **crescendo**, but often applied to a single note
- **risoluto**: resolutely
- **rit.**: an abbreviation for **ritardando**; <sup>[2]</sup> also an abbreviation for **ritenuto** <sup>[3]</sup>
- **ritardando**, **ritard.**, **rit.**: slowing down; decelerating; opposite of *accelerando* (see in this list)

- **ritenuto, riten., rit.:** suddenly slower, held back (usually more so but more temporarily than a **ritardando**, and it may, unlike **ritardando**, apply to a single note)
- **ritornello** : a recurring passage for orchestra in the first or final movement of a solo concerto or aria (also in works for chorus).
- **rolled chord:** see **arpeggiato** in this list
- **roulade** (Fr): a rolling; i.e., a florid vocal phrase
- **rondo:** a musical form in which a certain section returns repeatedly , interspersed with other sections: ABACA is a typical structure or ABACABA
- **rubato:** robbed; i.e., flexible in tempo, applied to notes within a musical phrase for expressive effect
- **run:** a rapid series of ascending or descending musical notes which are closely spaced in pitch forming a scale
- **ruvido:** roughly

## [[edit](#)] S

- **saltando:** bouncing the bow as in a staccato arpeggio, literally means "jumping"
- **sanft** (Ger): gently
- **scatenato:** unchained, wildly<sup>[4]</sup>
- **scherzando, scherzoso:** playfully
- **scherzo:** a light, "joking" or playful musical form, originally and usually in fast [triple metre](#), often replacing the [minuet](#) in the later [Classical period](#) and the [Romantic period](#), in symphonies, sonatas, string quartets and the like; in the 19th century some scherzi were independent movements for piano, etc.
- **schleppen** (Ger): to drag; usually *nicht schleppen* ("don't drag"), paired with *nicht eilen* ("don't hurry") in [Gustav Mahler's](#) scores
- **schnell** (Ger): fast
- **schneller** (Ger): faster
- **schwungvoll** (Ger): lively, swinging, bold, spirited
- **scordatura:** out of tune; i.e., an alternative [tuning](#) used for the [strings](#) of a [string instrument](#)
- **secco**, or **sec** (Fr): dry
- **segno:** sign, usually [Dal Segno](#) (see above) "from the sign", indicating a return to the point marked by 
- **segue:** carry on to the next section without a pause
- **sehr** (Ger): very
- **semitone:** the smallest pitch difference between notes (in most Western music) (e.g., F–F#)
- **semplice:** simply
- **sempre:** always
- **senza:** without
- **senza misura:** without [measure](#)
- **senza sordina**, or **senza sordine** (plural): without the [mute](#); compare **con sordina** in this list; see also [Sordino](#). **Note:** **sordina**, with plural **sordine**, is strictly correct Italian, but the forms **con sordino** and **con sordini** are much more commonly

used as terms in music. In piano music (notably in Beethoven's [Moonlight Sonata](#)), **senza sordini** or **senza sordina** (or some variant) is sometimes used to mean *keep the [sustain pedal](#) depressed*, since the sustain pedal lifts the dampers off the strings, with the effect that all notes are sustained indefinitely.

- **serioso**: seriously
- **shake**: a jazz term describing a trill between one note and its minor third; or, with brass instruments, between a note and its next overblown harmonic.
- **sharp**: a symbol (♯) that raises the pitch of the note by a semitone. The term may also be used as an adjective to describe a situation where a singer or musician is performing a note in which the intonation is an eighth or a quarter of a semitone too high in pitch.
- **sforzando** or **sfz**: made loud; i.e., a sudden strong accent
- **si** (Fr): seventh note of the series ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, in fixed-doh solmization. (See Solfège).
- **siciliana**: a [Sicilian](#) dance in 12/8 or 6/8 meter<sup>[5]</sup>
- **sign**: see segno
- **silenzio**: silence; i.e., without reverberations
- **simile**: similarly; i.e., continue applying the preceding directive, whatever it was, to the following passage
- **sipario**: curtain (stage)
- **slargando** or **slentando**: becoming broader or slower (that is, becoming more **largo** or more **lento**)
- **smorzando** or **smorz.**: extinguishing or dampening; usually interpreted as a drop in dynamics, and very often in tempo as well
- **soave**: smoothly, gently
- **sognando**: dreamily
- **solo break**: a jazz term that instructs a lead player or [rhythm section](#) member to play an improvised solo [cadenza](#) for one or two measures (sometimes abbreviated as "break"), without any accompaniment. The solo part is often played in a rhythmically free manner, until the player performs a pickup or lead-in line, at which time the band recommences playing in the original tempo.
- **solemne**: solemn
- **solo**, plural **sol**: alone; i.e., executed by a single instrument or voice. The instruction **sol** requires more than one player or singer; in a [jazz big band](#) this refers to an entire section playing in harmony.
- **sonata**: a piece *played* as opposed to *sung*.
- **sonatina**: a little sonata
- **sonatine**: a little sonata, used in some countries instead of sonatina
- **sonore**: sonorous
- **soprano**: the highest of the standard four voice ranges (bass, tenor, alto, soprano)
- **sordina**, **sordine** (plural): a [mute](#), or a [damper](#) in the case of the [piano](#). **Note**: **sordina**, with plural **sordine**, is strictly correct Italian, but the forms **sordino** and **sordini** are much more commonly used as terms in music. See also **con sordina**, **senza sordina**, in this list.
- **sordino**: see **sordina**, above
- **sospirando**: sighing

- **sostenuto**: sustained, lengthened
- **sotto voce**: in an undertone i.e. quietly
- **spiccato**: distinct, separated; i.e., a way of playing the violin and other bowed instruments by bouncing the bow on the string, giving a characteristic staccato effect
- **spinto**
- **spiritoso**: spiritedly
- **staccato**: making each note brief and detached; the opposite of legato. In [musical notation](#), a small dot under or over the head of the note indicates that it is to be articulated as staccato.
- **stanza**: a verse of a song
- **stornello** originally truly 'improvised' now taken as 'appearing to be improvised,' an Italian 'folk' song, the style of which used for example by Puccini in certain of his operas.
- **strepitoso**: noisy
- **stretto**: tight, narrow; i.e., faster or hastening ahead; also, a passage in a [fugue](#) in which the [contrapuntal](#) texture is denser, with close overlapping entries of the subject in different voices; by extension, similar closely imitative passages in other compositions
- **stringendo**: tightening, narrowing; i.e., with a pressing forward or acceleration of the tempo (that is, becoming **stretto**, see preceding entry)
- **subito**: suddenly (e.g., subito pp, which instructs the player to suddenly drop to pianissimo as an effect)
- **sul ponticello**: on the bridge; i.e., in string playing, an indication to [bow](#) (or sometimes to [pluck](#)) very near to the [bridge](#), producing a characteristic glassy sound, which emphasizes the higher [harmonics](#) at the expense of the [fundamental](#); the opposite of **sul tasto**
- **sul tasto**: on the fingerboard; i.e., in string playing, an indication to [bow](#) (or sometimes to [pluck](#)) over the [fingerboard](#); the opposite of **sul ponticello**. Playing over the fingerboard produces a warmer, gentler tone.
- **sur la touche** (Fr): sul tasto
- **syncopation**: a disturbance or interruption of the regular flow of downbeat rhythm with emphasis on the sub-division or "Up" beat. As in [Ragtime](#) music.

## [\[edit\]](#) T

- **tacet**: silent; do not play
- **tempo**: time; i.e., the overall speed of a piece of music
- **tempo di marcia**: march tempo
- **tempo di sturb de neighbors**: occasionally seen on jazz charts
- **tempo di valse**: waltz tempo
- **tempo giusto**: in strict time
- **tempo primo**, **tempo uno**, or **tempo I** (sometimes also written as **tempo I<sup>o</sup>**): resume the original speed
- **tempo rubato**, means "robbed time"; an expressive way of performing a rhythm; see "rubato"

- **teneramente**: tenderly
- **tenerezza**: tenderness
- **tenor**: the second lowest of the standard four voice ranges (bass, tenor, alto, soprano)
- **tenuto**: held; i.e., touch on a note slightly longer than usual, but without generally altering the note's value
- **ternary**: having three parts. In particular, referring to a three-part musical form with the parts represented by letters: ABA
- **tessitura**: the 'best' or most comfortable pitch range, generally used to identify the most prominent / common vocal range within a piece of music
- **timbre**: the quality of a musical tone that distinguishes voices and instruments
- **time**: in a jazz or rock score, after a rubato or rallentando section, the term "time" indicates that performers should return to tempo (this is equivalent to the term "a tempo")
- **tranquillo**: calmly, peacefully
- **tremolo**: shaking; i.e., a rapid repetition of the same note, or an alternation between two or more notes (often an octave on the piano). String players perform tremolo with the bow by rapidly moving the bow while the arm is tense. It can also be intended (inaccurately) to refer to **vibrato**, which is a slight undulation in pitch. It is notated by a strong diagonal bar across the note stem, or a detached bar for a set of notes (or stemless notes).
- **tre corde** or **tc** (or sometimes inaccurately **tre corda**): three strings; i.e., release the soft pedal of the piano (see **una corda**)
- **triplet** (shown with a horizontal bracket and a '3'): Three notes in the place of two, used to subdivide a beat.
- **troppo**: too much; usually seen as **non troppo**, meaning moderately or, when combined with other terms, not too much, such as **allegro [ma] non troppo** (fast but not too fast)
- **tutti**: all; i.e., all together, usually used in an orchestral or choral score when the orchestra or all of the voices come in at the same time, also seen in Baroque-era music where two instruments share the same copy of music, after one instrument has broken off to play a more advanced form: they both play together again at the point marked **tutti**. See also: **ripieno**.

## [\[edit\]](#) U

- **un**, **uno**, or **una**: one, as for example in the following entries
- **una corda**: one string; i.e., in **piano** music, depress the soft pedal, altering, and reducing the volume of, the sound. In some pianos, this literally results in the hammer striking one string rather than two or three. (For most notes on modern instruments, in fact it results in striking two rather than three strings.) Its counterpart, **tre corde** (three strings; see in this list), is the opposite: the soft pedal is to be released.
- **un poco**: a little
- **unisono** or **unis** (Fr): in unison; i.e., several players in a group are to play exactly the same notes within their written part, as opposed to splitting simultaneous

- notes among themselves. Often used to mark the return from [divisi](#) ([see in this list](#)).
- **ut** (Fr): first note of the series ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, in fixed-doh solmization. (See [Solfège](#)).

## [\[edit\]](#) V

- **vamp till cue**: a jazz, fusion, and [musical theatre](#) term which instructs rhythm section members to repeat and vary a short [ostinato](#) passage, [riff](#), or "[groove](#)" until the band leader or conductor instructs them to move onto the next section
- **veloce**: with velocity
- **velocissimo**: as quickly as possible; usually applied to a [cadenza](#)-like passage or run
- **vibrato**: vibrating; i.e., a more or less rapidly repeated slight alteration in the **pitch** of a note, used to give a richer sound and as a means of expression. Often confused with [tremolo](#), which refers either to a similar variation in the **volume** of a note, or to rapid repetition of a single note.
- **vif** (Fr): Quickly, lively
- **vittorioso**: victoriously
- **virtuoso**: (noun or adjective) performing with exceptional ability, technique, or artistry
- **vivo**: lively
- **vivace**: very lively, up-tempo
- **vivacissimo**: very lively
- **vocal score** or **piano-vocal score**: a [music score](#) of an [opera](#), or a vocal or [choral](#) composition with orchestra (like [oratorio](#) or [cantata](#)) where the vocal parts are written out in full but the [accompaniment](#) is reduced to two [staves](#) and adapted for playing on [piano](#)
- **voce**: voice
- **volante**: flying
- **V.S. (volti subito)**: turn suddenly; i.e., turn the page quickly. While this indication is sometimes added by printers, it is more commonly indicated by orchestral members in pencil as a reminder to quickly turn to the next page.

## [\[edit\]](#) W

- **wenig** (Ger): a little, not much
- **wolno** (Polish): loose, slowly; found as a directive in *The Elephant* from [The Carnival of the Animals](#) by [Saint-Saëns](#)

## [\[edit\]](#) Z

- **Zählzeit** (Ger): beat
- **zart** (Ger): tender
- **Zartheit** (Ger): tenderness

- **zärtlich** (Ger): tenderly
- **Zeichen** (Ger): sign
- **Zeitmaß**, also spelled **Zeitmass** (Ger): time-measure, i.e., tempo
- **zelo, zeloso, zelosamente**: zeal, zealous, zealously
- **ziehen** (Ger): to draw out
- **ziemlich** (Ger): fairly, quite, pretty, or rather
- **zitternd** (Ger): trembling; i.e., **tremolando**
- **zögernd** (Ger): doubtful, delaying; i.e., **rallentando**

## [\[edit\]](#) References



1. <sup>^</sup> [a b c d e f](#) *Collins Music Encyclopedia*, 1959.
2. <sup>^</sup> [musicdictionary](#); [Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary](#); *American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th edition; Gardner Read, *Music Notation*, 2nd edition, p. 282.
3. <sup>^</sup> [Dolmetsch Online, "Tempo"](#); *Oxford American Dictionary*; *Collins English Dictionary*.
4. <sup>^</sup> [Carl Orff, Carmina Burana](#)
5. <sup>^</sup> [Definition of Siciliano at Dictionary.com](#)