

Music Glossary of Terms

A

a cappella

To sing, individually or as a group, unaccompanied (without any instruments).

adagio

To be played slowly.

allegro

Performed quickly and happily.

andante

Performed at medium speed.

B

bars

The way in which written music is divided up (a bit like musical sentences).

bass clef

A sign on a piece of written music. On piano music, it identifies the notes to be played with the left hand.

beat

The steady timing in a piece of music (what you might clap along to). Also see pulse.

C

chord

Three or more notes (pitches) played together at the same time.

crotchet

A symbol used in written music notation that represents a note that lasts for one beat.

crotchet rest

A pause that lasts for one beat.

D

duet

A piece of music or song that is performed by two people.

F

duration

The length of a sound.

dynamics

The loudness or softness at which musicians play a section or piece of music.

flat

In written music, a flat lowers the pitch of a note by half a step.

forte

Performed loudly.

H

harmony

Two or more notes (pitches) played or sung together.

I

improvisation

When a piece, or a part of a piece, of music is made up on the spot by one or more musicians.

K

key

A series of notes around which pieces of music and songs are written.

M

melody

A sequence of notes (a tune).

minim

A written note that lasts for two beats.

minim rest

A pause that lasts for two beats.

O

octave

A range of eight whole notes, for example: Middle C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C.

ostinato

A repeated rhythm or phrase.

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P

pentatonic

A musical scale made up of five notes, missing out the fourth and seventh notes from the eight-note scale.

piano

Not just the instrument! Used in written music to mean play quietly.

pitch

Pitch is how high or low a sound is.

pulse

The steady beat in a piece of music (what you might clap along to) can be referred to as the pulse.

Q

quaver



In written music, a symbol used to show a note that lasts for half a beat.

R

rest

A pause where no notes are played or held.

rhythm

A pattern of long and short notes (like the pattern of words in a song).

S

semibreve



A symbol used in written music to show a note that lasts for four beats.

semibreve rest



A symbol used in written music to show a pause that lasts for four beats.

sharp



In written music, this mark heightens the pitch of a note by half a step.

solo

A section or piece of music or song performed by one person.

staccato

A short note or notes played sharply where the sound is not allowed to ring out.

stave



The five lines that musical notes are written on.

T

tempo

The speed at which a piece or section of music is played.

texture

The way different elements of music are layered together.

timbre

The character or sound quality of a note. Different musical instruments have different timbres.

time signature



Used in written music, the time signature explains how many beats there are in a bar.

treble clef



A sign on a piece of music. On piano music, it shows the notes to be played with the right hand.