

Italian terms — A to Z

Every term in this pack, alphabetically, with the page it is explained on. The three following sheets are graded: **page 2** is what you meet in the first few years, **page 3** the terms that appear once you play in an ensemble, **page 4** the ones that turn up in orchestral parts and late Romantic scores.

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Beginner terms

The terms printed in almost every piece you will play in the first few years — speed, volume, and how a note is to be touched. Learn these and most of a score becomes readable without help.

a tempo — back to the original speed

accelerando *accel.* — getting gradually faster

adagio — slow, at ease

allegretto — moderately quick; lighter than allegro

allegro — fast and cheerful

andante — at a walking pace

cantabile — in a singing style

coda — the closing section, added at the end

con — with

crescendo *cresc.* — getting gradually louder

da capo *D.C.* — repeat from the beginning

dal segno *D.S.* — repeat from the sign

decrescendo *decresc.* — getting gradually quieter

diminuendo *dim.* — getting gradually quieter

dolce — sweetly

e, ed — and

fermata — hold the note beyond its written value

fine — the end

forte *f* — loud

fortissimo *ff* — very loud

glissando *gliss.* — slide from one pitch to another

grave — very slow and solemn

largo — broad and slow

legato — smoothly joined, no gap between notes

lento — slow

marcato *marc.* — each note marked and emphasised

mezzo forte *mf* — moderately loud

mezzo piano *mp* — moderately quiet

moderato — at a moderate speed

molto — very (*molto legato*)

non troppo — not too much

ostinato — a pattern repeated persistently

pianissimo *pp* — very quiet

piano *p* — quiet

pizzicato *pizz.* — plucked, not bowed

poco — a little

poco a poco — little by little

presto — very fast

rallentando *rall.* — gradually slowing down

ritardando *rit.* — gradually slowing down

senza — without

sforzando *sf, sfz* — a sudden strong accent

simile *sim.* — carry on in the same manner

solo — alone; the part that leads

sostenuto — sustained, notes held to full length

staccato *stacc.* — short and detached

subito — suddenly (*subito forte*)

tacet — this part is silent

tenuto *ten.* — held for its full value

tutti — everyone plays

vivace — lively and quick

Two things worth knowing early. *Rallentando* and *ritardando* mean the same thing in practice, and no composer is consistent about which they use. And the tempo words are moods as much as speeds — *allegro* is cheerful before it is fast, which is why *allegro* in Brahms and *allegro* in Mozart do not sound the same.

Intermediate terms

Character words, and the instructions that appear once you play with other people — mutes, bowing, divisi, and the many shades of getting faster or fading away.

affettuoso — tenderly, affectionately

agitato — agitated, restless

al niente — fading away to nothing

allargando — broadening: slower and fuller together

animato — animated, with life

appassionato — with passion

arco — take up the bow again after *pizzicato*

attacca — go straight on with no break

ben — well, thoroughly (*ben marcato*)

calando — dying away: quieter and slower

col legno — struck with the wood of the bow

come prima — as it was at first

comodo — at a comfortable, unhurried speed

con brio — with spirit and vigour

con moto — with movement, pressing on

con sordino — with the mute fitted

deciso — decisively

divisi div. — the section splits into separate parts

energico — energetically

espressivo espr. — expressively

giocoso — playfully, jokingly

grazioso — gracefully

incalzando — pressing forward, growing urgent

l'istesso tempo — the same speed, though the notation changes

leggero — lightly, delicately

maestoso — majestically

mano destra m.d. — right hand

mano sinistra m.s. — left hand

meno mosso — less movement, slower

misterioso — mysteriously

morendo — dying away, to silence

mosso — moved, motion (see *più* and *meno mosso*)

perdendosi — losing itself: fading and slowing

pesante — heavily, with weight

più mosso — more movement, faster

portamento — carrying one pitch slightly into the next

prima volta — the first time (of a repeat)

quasi — as if, almost (*quasi recitativo*)

risoluto — resolutely, firmly

rubato — with flexible, borrowed time

scherzando — jokingly, teasing

segue — continue at once with what follows

semplice — simply, without decoration

sempre — always (*sempre staccato*)

sotto voce — in an undertone, held back

spiccato — a light bouncing bowstroke

stringendo — tightening, pressing faster

sul ponticello — bowed close to the bridge; glassy

tranquillo — calmly

una corda — the piano's soft pedal, one string

volti subito v.s. — turn the page quickly

Fading, four ways. *Diminuendo* changes volume only. *Calando* and *perdendosi* take the tempo with them. *Morendo* and *al niente* go all the way to nothing — which means the player needs somewhere quiet to arrive, so do not ask for it after a *fortissimo* two beats earlier.

Advanced terms

The terms that turn up in orchestral parts, late Romantic scores and specialist string and harp writing. Several are instructions to a particular instrument rather than general directions — worth knowing before you write them into a part.

a battuta — return to strict time after freedom

a tutta forza — with all possible force

ad libitum *ad lib.* — freely, at the player's discretion

affrettando — hurrying, becoming anxious

alla breve — two beats to the bar, cut time

all'ottava *8va* — play an octave higher than written

arpeggiando — spread the chord as an arpeggio

bisbigliando — whispering; the harp's finger tremolo

col canto — follow the singer's line, not the beat

colla parte — follow the soloist

con fuoco — with fire

con slancio — with dash, thrown forward

doppio movimento — twice as fast

flautando — flute-like; bowed lightly over the fingerboard

fortepiano *fp* — loud, then immediately quiet

lacrimoso — tearfully

lamentoso — mournfully

loco — back to normal register after *8va*

lunga pausa — a long pause or rest

lusingando — coaxingly, flattering

martellato — hammered; a heavy detached stroke

mezza voce — at half voice, half power

morbido — soft and mellow (not morbid)

nobilmente — nobly

ossia — an alternative version of the passage

ottava bassa *8vb* — play an octave lower

parlando — speech-like, half spoken

piangevole — plaintively

rinforzando *rfz* — a sudden reinforcing of tone

ritmico — rhythmically, strictly in time

ruvido — roughly, coarsely

saltando — a leaping, rebounding bowstroke

scordatura — an instrument deliberately tuned otherwise

secco — dry, cut off with no resonance

senza sordino — take the mute off

smorzando *smorz.* — extinguishing; fading and slowing

sonore — sonorously, full-toned

sopra — above; the hand that crosses over

staccatissimo — as short as the note can be made

strepitoso — noisily, boisterously

subito piano *sub. p* — suddenly quiet, without warning

sul tasto — bowed over the fingerboard; pale, veiled

tasto solo — play the bass line alone, add no chords

tempo giusto — at a strict and suitable speed

tempo primo — the first tempo again

tre corde — release the piano's soft pedal

unisono *unis.* — back in unison after *divisi*

veloce — swiftly

vibrato — a slight wavering of pitch, for warmth

volante — flying; light and rapid

Instructions cost time. *Con sordino*, *scordatura*, *col legno* and a return to *arco* all need bars to carry out — a mute takes a couple of seconds to fit, retuning takes far longer. Write the instruction where the player has rests, and cancel it explicitly when you want the ordinary sound back.