

Musical terms

Most are Italian, because Italy wrote the rules down first. They are instructions to the player: how fast, how loud, how to touch the note, and how to feel about it.

THE DYNAMIC RANGE, QUIETEST TO LOUDEST

Six steps



TEMPO — HOW FAST

<i>Largo</i>	Very slow and broad
<i>Adagio</i>	Slow, at ease
<i>Andante</i>	At a walking pace
<i>Moderato</i>	Moderate — neither fast nor slow
<i>Allegro</i>	Fast and cheerful
<i>Presto</i>	Very fast
<i>Rallentando</i>	Gradually slowing down
<i>Accelerando</i>	Gradually speeding up
<i>A tempo</i>	Back to the original speed
<i>Rubato</i>	Bend the pulse expressively

ARTICULATION — HOW TO TOUCH IT

<i>Legato</i>	Smoothly, notes joined
<i>Staccato</i>	Short and detached
<i>Tenuto</i>	Hold the note its full length
<i>Accent</i>	Lean on this note
<i>Slur</i>	Play the joined notes as one gesture

DYNAMICS — HOW LOUD

<i>Pianissimo</i>	Very quiet · <i>pp</i>
<i>Piano</i>	Quiet · <i>p</i>
<i>Mezzo piano</i>	Moderately quiet · <i>mp</i>
<i>Mezzo forte</i>	Moderately loud · <i>mf</i>
<i>Forte</i>	Loud · <i>f</i>
<i>Fortissimo</i>	Very loud · <i>ff</i>
<i>Crescendo</i>	Gradually getting louder
<i>Diminuendo</i>	Gradually getting quieter
<i>Sforzando</i>	A sudden strong accent
<i>Subito</i>	Suddenly — usually paired

EXPRESSION — HOW TO FEEL

<i>Cantabile</i>	In a singing style
<i>Dolce</i>	Sweetly, gently
<i>Grazioso</i>	Gracefully
<i>Maestoso</i>	Majestically
<i>Con brio</i>	With spirit and fire