Dynamics: how loud

Quick reference · 15 terms

pianissimo **pp**
Indicating that the piece is to be played very softly.
Literally: very gentle · in 890 of 1,462 songs

piano **p**
Softly, as a dynamic in a piece of music.
Literally: gentle · in 1,300 of 1,462 songs

mezzo piano **mp**
moderately soft
Literally: half-gentle · in 153 of 1,462 songs

mezzo forte **mf**
Louder than mezzo piano, but softer than forte.
Literally: half-strong · in 746 of 1,462 songs

forte **f**
Loudly, as a dynamic in a piece of music.
Literally: strong · in 1,026 of 1,462 songs

fortissimo **ff**
Indicating that the piece is to be played very loudly.
Literally: very strong · in 347 of 1,462 songs

crescendo **cresc.**
An instruction to play gradually more loudly, denoted by a long, narrow angle with its apex on the left (<), by musicians called a hairpin.
Literally: growing · in 1,287 of 1,462 songs

decrescendo **decresc.**
An instruction to play gradually more softly.
Literally: shrinking · in 17 of 1,462 songs

diminuendo **dim.**
A dynamic mark directing that a passage is to be played gradually more softly
Literally: dwindling · in 1,241 of 1,462 songs

sforzando **sfz**
A mark that indicates that a note is to be played with a strong initial attack.
Literally: strained · in 327 of 1,462 songs

fortepiano **fp**
loud, then immediately soft
in 75 of 1,462 songs

dolcissimo
Very soft.
in 40 of 1,462 songs

mancando
Dying away

niente
totally silent, as a musical direction (abbreviated to n. or ∅ in sheet music)

smorzando
Fading away.
in 21 of 1,462 songs

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musictheoryprint.com/charts/italian-music-terms

Tempo: how fast

Quick reference

Tempo (how fast)

grave below 40 BPM
Slow and solemn tempo (slower than largo)
Literally: grave, solemn · in 10 of 1,462 songs

largo 40–60 BPM
A very slow tempo.
Literally: broad · in 18 of 1,462 songs

adagio 66–76 BPM
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played rather slowly, leisurely and gracefully.
Literally: ad agio, at ease · in 54 of 1,462 songs

andante 76–108 BPM
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played in a moderately slow tempo; faster than adagio but slower than moderato.
Literally: walking · in 239 of 1,462 songs

moderato 108–120 BPM
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played at a moderate tempo.
Literally: moderate · in 148 of 1,462 songs

allegro 120–156 BPM
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played in a quick, lively tempo, faster than allegretto but slower than presto.
Literally: joyful; lively and fast · in 163 of 1,462 songs

vivace 156–176 BPM
At a brisk, lively tempo.
Literally: vivacious · in 29 of 1,462 songs

presto 168–200 BPM
Very fast or quickly; a directive for the musician(s) to play in a very quick tempo.
Literally: prompt, quick; ready for action · in 17 of 1,462 songs

prestissimo above 200 BPM
Extremely fast, the fastest possible tempo.
Literally: very prompt, very quick · in 1 of 1,462 songs

adagietto
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played slightly faster than adagio.
Literally: a bit at ease

adagissimo
Very slowly.

alla marcia
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played in the style of a march, usually with a 2/4 or 4/4 beat with an accent on the downbeat
Literally: as a march · in 5 of 1,462 songs

allegretto
To be played rather fast and lively.
Literally: a little bit joyful · in 171 of 1,462 songs

allegrissimo
A direction in musical notation indicating that the piece should be played very fast and lively.

andantino
Of a tempo that is slightly faster than andante but slower than moderato.
Literally: a little bit walking · in 96 of 1,462 songs

comodo
Comfortably, that is, at moderate speed.
Literally: comfortable · in 1 of 1,462 songs

giusto
strict, exact.

larghetto
Slower than adagio but not as slow as largo; nearly andantino.
Literally: broad-ish · in 17 of 1,462 songs

lento
Slow (45–60 bpm).
Literally: slow · in 129 of 1,462 songs

veloce
(To be played) with great rapidity.
in 2 of 1,462 songs

Changes of tempo

ritardando **rit.**
Gradually decelerating the tempo of a piece of music, especially at the end of the piece.
Literally: retarding · in 582 of 1,462 songs

rallentando **rall.**
slackening; becoming slower (used as a musical direction).
Literally: slowing down · in 273 of 1,462 songs

accelerando **accel.**
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played at an increasing speed.
Literally: accelerating · in 119 of 1,462 songs

a tempo
return to normal tempo from a deviation (e.g. ritenuto, rallentando, accelerando, etc.)
Literally: to time · in 513 of 1,462 songs

rubato
A tempo in which strict timing is relaxed, the music being played near, but not on, the beat.
in 21 of 1,462 songs

fermata
The holding of a note or rest for longer than its usual duration.
in 910 of 1,462 songs

affrettando
In a rushing or hurrying manner; as if pressing onwards.
Literally: hasty, hurried · in 2 of 1,462 songs

allargando
Decreasing in tempo; getting slower.
Literally: broadening · in 69 of 1,462 songs

l'istesso tempo
Indicates that the following movement should be played at the same tempo as the last, often employed when switching from simple to compound metres or vice versa, to clarify that the tempo stays the same in reference to the beats felt, not the time signature.
Literally: the same time · in 4 of 1,462 songs

lentando
archaic form of rallentando.
Literally: slowing · in 1 of 1,462 songs

ritenuto
(of a passage in a musical score) immediately slower, held back at a slower rate of pace.
in 91 of 1,462 songs

slargando
Becoming broader or slower (that is, becoming more largo or more lento)
in 3 of 1,462 songs

stringendo
A passage in music to be played gradually faster; a section of music with in which the tempo slowly increases.
in 37 of 1,462 songs

Meanings and literal translations: Wiktionary and Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0; shared under the same licence. Real-score counts: OpenScore Lieder Corpus (CC0). musictheoryprint.com/charts/italian-music-terms BPM ranges are the ones listed in the sources and differ between books.

Expression: what it should feel like

Quick reference · 41 terms

dolce
Sweet, soft
Literally: sweet · in 225 of 1,462 songs

cantabile
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played in a lyrical manner
Literally: singable, songlike · in 21 of 1,462 songs

espressivo espress.
To be played in an expressive manner.
Literally: expressive · in 173 of 1,462 songs

maestoso
majestically
Literally: majestic · in 19 of 1,462 songs

giocoso
Merry; playful.
Literally: jocose, jestful · in 5 of 1,462 songs

grazioso
graceful, flowing
Literally: gracious, graceful · in 31 of 1,462 songs

con brio
With spirit, with vigor; vivaciously (used as a musical direction).
Literally: with brightness · in 9 of 1,462 songs

con fuoco
Passionate, lively, enthusiastic
Literally: with fire · in 14 of 1,462 songs

sotto voce
A direction in a score that a passage in a piece should be played softly, or sung in a low voice, when applied to vocal music.
Literally: under the voice · in 13 of 1,462 songs

tranquillo
Calm, peaceful
Literally: tranquil, calm · in 61 of 1,462 songs

agitato
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played in a restless agitated style.
Literally: agitated · in 56 of 1,462 songs

pesante
heavy, ponderous
Literally: heavy · in 17 of 1,462 songs

leggiero
lightly
in 70 of 1,462 songs

morendo
Fading away in volume or tempo.
Literally: dying · in 45 of 1,462 songs

a piacere
At pleasure.
in 20 of 1,462 songs

abbandonatamente
With abandonment; so as to make the time subordinate to the expression.
Literally: with abandonment

affettuoso
With feeling; in a loving, tender way.
Literally: affectionate, with affect · in 2 of 1,462 songs

amoroso
tender; loving
Literally: loving · in 1 of 1,462 songs

animato
A passage to be played in a lively, animated manner.
Literally: animated · in 70 of 1,462 songs

appassionato
(to be played) passionately
in 35 of 1,462 songs

bravura
A highly technical or difficult piece, usually written for effect.
Literally: skill

capriccioso
capriciously

con amore
played gently, with tenderness
Literally: with love · in 2 of 1,462 songs

dolente
Sorrowfully, as if the player were mourning.

doloroso
plaintively; pathetically
in 2 of 1,462 songs

furioso
Rapidly and with passion.
Literally: furious

grandioso
A tempo mark directing that a passage is to be played in a grand and noble style
Literally: grand · in 3 of 1,462 songs

gustoso
in a tasteful, agreeable manner

lacrimoso
Sadly, unhappily, grievingly.
Literally: lachrymose

lamentoso
In a mournful, grieving manner.
Literally: lamenting

leggero
Lightly, delicately, or gently.
in 1 of 1,462 songs

mesto
sad, mournful
in 3 of 1,462 songs

parlando
A piece of music to be sung or played in the style of a recitative.
in 4 of 1,462 songs

pomposo
Ceremonious and dignified.

precipitato
precipitately

risoluto
(To be played) boldly, resolutely
Literally: resolute · in 10 of 1,462 songs

scherzando
In a playful or sportive manner.
Literally: joking, jestful · in 11 of 1,462 songs

semplice
(To be played) simply, without embellishments.
in 21 of 1,462 songs

sostenuto
played in a sustained manner beyond the note's normal value
in 74 of 1,462 songs

spiritoso
In a lively or spirited manner

zeloso
Zealous, energetic, enthusiastic; typically an annotation to direct the style of play.
in 1 of 1,462 songs

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