

Music symbols and their meanings

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Staff and clefs

	Staff UK: Stave Five lines and four spaces on which notes are written. The higher a note sits, the higher its pitch.
	Ledger line UK: Leger line A short extra line above or below the staff for notes too high or too low to fit on the five lines.
	Treble clef (G clef) Curls around the second line, which becomes G above middle C. For higher parts: violin, flute, right hand of the piano, soprano.
	Bass clef (F clef) Its two dots surround the fourth line, which becomes the F below middle C. For lower parts: cello, bass, left hand of the piano.
	C clef (alto or tenor clef) The centre of the clef is middle C. On the middle line it is the alto clef (used for viola); on the fourth line it is the tenor clef.
	Treble clef with 8 below UK: Octave treble clef A treble clef that sounds an octave lower than written. Used for tenor voices and guitar music.
	Brace A curly bracket joining the staves played by one performer, such as the two staves of piano music (the grand staff).
	Bracket A square bracket joining the staves of instruments that play together, for example a string quartet, in a score.
	Bar line (measure line) UK: Bar line A vertical line that divides the staff into measures (bars).
	Double bar line Marks the end of a section, or a change of key signature, time signature or style.
	Final bar line A thin line and a thick line: the end of a piece or movement.

Notes and rests

Each row shows the note and the rest of the same length. Beats are counted in quarter notes, as in 4/4.

	Double whole note / rest UK: Breve / breve rest Twice as long as a whole note: 8 beats. Rare today.
	Whole note / rest UK: Semibreve / semibreve rest 4 beats. The whole rest hangs from the fourth line; it also marks a complete empty measure.
	Half note / rest UK: Minim / minim rest 2 beats. The half rest sits on the middle line.
	Quarter note / rest UK: Crotchet / crotchet rest 1 beat in 4/4.
	Eighth note / rest UK: Quaver / quaver rest Half a beat: two eighth notes fill one beat.
	Sixteenth note / rest UK: Semiquaver / semiquaver rest A quarter of a beat: four to a beat.
	Thirty-second note / rest UK: Demisemiquaver / demisemiquaver rest An eighth of a beat: eight to a beat.
	Sixty-fourth note / rest UK: Hemidemisemiquaver / rest A sixteenth of a beat. Rare.
	Dot (augmentation dot) UK: Dot A dot after a note or rest adds half its value: a dotted half note lasts 3 beats in 4/4.
	Tie A curve joining two notes of the same pitch into one note as long as both together.
	Triplet (tuplet) Three notes played in the time of two of the same kind. Other tuplets work the same way (a 5 is five in the time of four).

Accidentals

	Sharp Raises the note by one semitone (half step). The effect lasts to the end of the measure.
	Flat Lowers the note by one semitone (half step).
	Natural Cancels an earlier sharp or flat, or the sharp or flat of the key signature, for that note.
	Double sharp Raises the note by two semitones (a whole step).
	Double flat Lowers the note by two semitones (a whole step).

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Music symbols and their meanings

Time signatures, dynamics, articulation and ornaments · page 2 of 3 · musictheoryprint.com

Time signatures

4 4	Time signature (4/4) The top number is how many beats are in a measure; the bottom number says which note value is one beat (4 = quarter note).
3 4	3/4 time Three quarter-note beats per measure, the pattern of a waltz.
6 8	6/8 time (compound) Six eighth notes per measure felt as two beats, each a dotted quarter note divided into three.
C	Common time (C) Another way to write 4/4.
♩	Cut time (alla breve) A C with a vertical line: 2/2, two half-note beats per measure.

Dynamics

ppp	Pianississimo (ppp) Extremely soft.
pp	Pianissimo (pp) Very soft.
p	Piano (p) Soft.
mp	Mezzo piano (mp) Moderately soft.
mf	Mezzo forte (mf) Moderately loud.
f	Forte (f) Loud.
ff	Fortissimo (ff) Very loud.
fff	Fortississimo (fff) Extremely loud.
sfz	Sforzando (sfz) A sudden, strong accent on one note or chord.
fp	Forte-piano (fp) Loud, then immediately soft.
<	Crescendo (hairpin) Gradually louder. The lines open to the right; the wider the opening, the louder it gets.
>	Diminuendo or decrescendo (hairpin) UK: Diminuendo (hairpin) Gradually softer. The lines close towards the right.

Articulation

	Staccato A dot above or below the notehead: play the note short and detached.
	Staccatissimo A small wedge: play the note very short and sharp.
	Tenuto A short horizontal line: hold the note for its full value, with a slight stress.
	Accent A horizontal wedge: play the note with more force than the notes around it.
	Marcato A pointed accent (^): play the note strongly and clearly marked.
	Portato (tenuto-staccato) A dot with a line: notes slightly separated and lightly stressed, not as short as staccato.
	Slur A curve over notes of different pitches: play them smoothly connected (legato). A tie joins notes of the same pitch.

Ornaments

	Trill Alternate quickly between the written note and the note above it (the next note of the key) for the length of the note.
	Turn Play the note above, the written note, the note below, then the written note again.
	Inverted turn The turn upside down: the note below, the written note, the note above, then the written note.
	Mordent (lower mordent) Play the written note, the note below it, and the written note again, quickly. Baroque sources sometimes swap the names of the two mordents.
	Inverted mordent (upper mordent) Play the written note, the note above it, and the written note again, quickly.
	Acciaccatura (slashed grace note) A very short note with a slash through the stem, played as quickly as possible just before or on the beat.
	Appoggiatura (grace note) A small note without a slash that leans on the main note: it takes part of the main note's length from the beat.
	Arpeggio (rolled chord) A wavy vertical line beside a chord: play its notes one after another, lowest first, instead of together.

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Music symbols and their meanings

Repeats, tempo, expression and other signs · page 3 of 3 · musictheoryprint.com

Repeats and navigation

	Start repeat sign Marks where a repeated section begins. Without it, go back to the beginning of the piece.
	End repeat sign Go back to the start repeat sign (or the beginning) and play the section again.
	Repeat the last measure UK: Repeat the last bar Play the previous measure again (also called simile).
	First and second endings UK: First and second time bars Play ending 1 the first time, then repeat; the second time skip ending 1 and play ending 2.
	Segno (sign) A marker to jump back to: D.S. (dal segno) means go back to this sign.
	Coda (tail) The closing section. At "To Coda" jump to the coda sign and play to the end.
<i>D.C.</i>	Da capo (D.C.) Go back to the beginning. "D.C. al Fine" means repeat from the start and stop at Fine.
<i>D.S.</i>	Dal segno (D.S.) Go back to the segno sign. "D.S. al Coda" means repeat from the sign and jump to the coda at "To Coda".
<i>Fine</i>	Fine "The end" (pronounced FEE-nay): where the piece finishes after a D.C. or D.S.

Tempo and expression markings

Words are mostly Italian. The Italian music terms list explains 216.

	Metronome mark The tempo in beats per minute: here 120 quarter-note beats every minute.
<i>Adagio</i>	Adagio Slow, at ease.
<i>Andante</i>	Andante At a walking pace.
<i>Allegro</i>	Allegro Fast and lively.
<i>Presto</i>	Presto Very fast.
<i>rit.</i>	Ritardando (rit.) or rallentando (rall.) Gradually slow down.
<i>accel.</i>	Accelerando (accel.) Gradually speed up.
<i>a tempo</i>	A tempo Return to the original speed after a change of tempo.
<i>rubato</i>	Rubato Flexible tempo: time is taken in one place and given back in another.
<i>cresc. / dim.</i>	Crescendo / diminuendo (cresc. / dim.) The same as the hairpins, written as words: gradually louder / gradually softer.
<i>legato</i>	Legato Smooth and connected, with no gaps between the notes.
<i>dolce</i>	Dolce Sweetly and gently.

Other signs

	Fermata (hold) UK: Pause (fermata) Hold the note or rest longer than written. How much longer is up to the performer or conductor.
	Breath mark Take a breath here (singers and wind players), or leave a tiny gap in the sound.
	Caesura A break in the sound of no fixed length, after which the beat resumes. Often called "railroad tracks".
<i>8va</i>	8va (ottava alta) Play an octave higher than written. A dashed line shows how far it applies.
<i>8vb</i>	8vb (ottava bassa) Play an octave lower than written, for as long as the dashed line lasts.
	Pedal down / pedal up Piano: press the sustain pedal at the pedal mark and release it at the star.
	Down bow / up bow Strings: the staple shape is a down bow (frog towards the tip); the V is an up bow (tip towards the frog).

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