

Glossary of Music Terms

Accompaniment: The underlying sounds used to support a melody line

Acoustic: *See playing methods*

Arrangement: a new version of an existing piece of music

Beat/pulse: beat and pulse are used synonymously to refer to the regular heartbeat of the music – the ‘steady beat’. Like a heartbeat, a steady beat underlying the music

Body percussion: sounds which can be made using parts of the body, eg clapping, tapping knees, etc

Call and response: a style of music in which a leader sings or plays a short melody (the call) and a chorus of singers/players respond with an answering short melody (the response)

Chord: two or more notes played at the same time

Conductor: the person elected to lead a group of singers or instrumentalists

Crescendo: getting louder

Dimensions/elements: the inter-related building blocks of music (formerly referred to in the English National Curriculum as elements): duration, dynamics, pitch, structure, tempo, texture, and timbre (see individual definitions)

Diminuendo: getting quieter

Dot notation: a simple form of Western staff notation. Dots are placed in height and distance relation to each other to indicate pitch and duration

Drone: a sound or sounds played constantly throughout all or part of a piece of music as an accompaniment

Duet: a song or piece of music for two parts of equal importance

Duration: the word used in music to refer to the length of a sound or silence

Dynamics/volume: the loudness of the music, usually described in terms of loud/quiet

Elements: *see Dimensions*

Free/arrhythmic: music which has no discernible steady beat

Genre: the type of music, e.g. pop, jazz, folk, classical

Glissando: a slide up or down from one musical note to another, in the manner of a rapid, sliding scale

Graphic notation: a form of notation in which the composer freely invents symbols which give an impression of sound

Graphic score: a score in which musical intention is recorded by means of graphic symbols

Improvisation: a piece of music which is created spontaneously

Improvise: to invent music as you go along

Leap: the space between two musical notes which is greater than a step (*see Step movement*)

Major: one of the most common types of eight-note musical scale. Often described as having a happy sound (*see also Minor*)

Melodic phrase/phrase: a small unit of a melody, often corresponding to a line of a song

Melodic shape: this is a little like the outline of the song or piece of music, picture a line that goes up steeply when the melody suddenly jumps to a much higher sound, or that goes down slowly when the melody gently falls. This "line" gives the contour or shape of the melodic line

Melody: a tune

Metre: the grouping of beats into twos, threes, fours, etc, for instance in waltz music the beats are grouped in threes, whereas in march music they are grouped in twos or fours

Minor: one of the most common types of eight-note musical scale. Often described as having a sad sound (*see also Major*)

Notations: ways of writing music down – examples include graphic notation and staff notation

Ostinato (plural ostinatos/ostinati): a short rhythmic or melodic pattern which is repeated over and over

Pictorial symbols: a simple form of notation in which a picture is used to represent a sound, e.g. car picture = motor sounds

Pitch: refers to the complete range of sounds in a piece of music from the lowest to the highest (high sounds, low sounds)

Pitch movement: the steps and leaps by which a melody moves up and down in pitch

Pizzicato: the technique of playing a string instrument, e.g. violin, by plucking the strings rather than playing them with the bow

Playing methods: acoustic (non-electronic) sounds are made by shaking, scraping, tapping, or blowing a soundmaker

Pulse: *see Beat*

Rest: a silence

Rhythm: patterns of long and short sounds played within a steady beat

Rhythmical: music which is underpinned by a steady beat

Rhythm pattern: a short section of rhythm

Score: a written representation of music designed to record a composer's intention

Solo: a piece of music for one singer or instrumentalist

Soundmaker: any sound source used as a musical instrument

Step movement: notes of a melody which move stepwise up or down

Structure: how a piece of music/song is built up, e.g. verse-chorus-verse-chorus. Most music is underpinned by a structure which may be as simple as beginning, middle and end

Symbol: any written representation of a sound

Tempo (plural tempi): the speed at which music is performed, usually described in terms of fast/slow

Texture: layers of sound, such as those created by a melody accompanied by a drum beat. Can be one sound or several sounds

Timbre: all instruments, including voices, have a particular sound quality which is referred to as timbre, e.g. smooth sound, spiky sound, scratchy sound

Tremolo: the rapid repetition of notes, producing a quavering effect. It can either be on one note or between two notes

Tuned percussion: percussion instruments which make sounds with a defined pitch, e.g. glockenspiel

Untuned percussion: percussion instruments which make sounds of indefinite pitch, e.g. hand drum

Volume: *see Dynamics*