

## Basic Dynamic Markings

The two basic dynamic indications in music are:

- **p** or piano, meaning "soft".
- **f** or forte, meaning "strong".

More subtle degrees of loudness or softness are indicated by:

- **mp**, standing for mezzo-piano, meaning "moderately soft".
- **mf**, standing for mezzo-forte, meaning "moderately strong".

Beyond **f** and **p**, there are also:

- **pp**, stands for "pianissimo", and meaning "very soft".
- **ppp** stands for "pianissimo possibile" ("softest possible")
- **ff** stands for "fortissimo", and meaning "very strong"
- **fff** stands for "fortissimo possibile" meaning "loudest possible".
- **fff** or **ff** are **not** to be interpreted as "**blastissimo**" i.e. singing as loud as you can, as this will result in a total deterioration of vocal quality and control.

### Note:

Best advice as far as vocal volume is concerned is:

1. **Never** sing as loud as you can.
2. In a choral setting if you can't hear the singer beside you, you are singing **too loud**.

## Words/phrases indicating changes in dynamics

(In Italian unless otherwise indicated)

- **al niente**: to nothing; fade to silence. Sometimes written as "n"
- **calando**: becoming smaller
- **calmando**: become calm
- **crescendo**: becoming stronger
- **dal niente**: from nothing; out of silence
- **decrescendo** or **diminuendo**: becoming softer
- **fortepiano**: loud and accented and then immediately soft
- **fortissimo piano**: very loud and then immediately soft
- **in rilievo**: in relief (French en dehors: outwards); indicates that a particular instrument or part is to play louder than the others so as to stand out over the ensemble.
- **perdendo** or **perdendosi**: losing volume, fading into nothing, dying away
- **mezzoforte piano**: moderately strong and then immediately soft
- **morendo**: dying away (may also indicate a tempo change)
- **marcato**: stressed, pronounced
- **pianoforte**: soft and then immediately strong
- **sforzando piano**: with marked and sudden emphasis, then immediately soft
- **sotto voce**: in an undertone (whispered or unvoiced)[6]
- **smorzando**: dying away



## Articulations

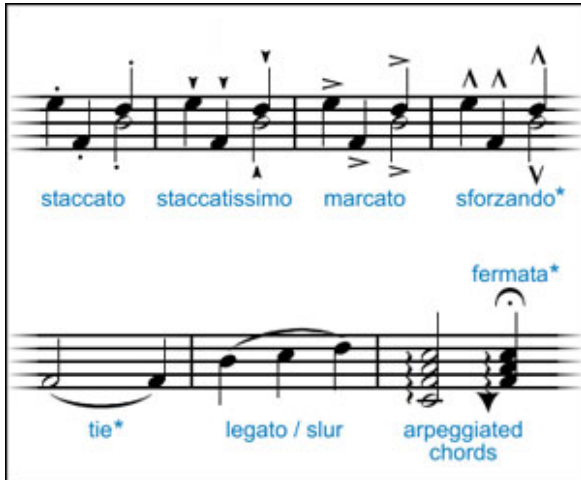
In music, articulation refers to the musical direction performance technique which affects the transition or continuity on a single note or between multiple notes or sounds.

Types of articulations

There are many types of articulation, with each having a different effect on how the note is played. Some articulation marks include the slur, phrase mark, staccato, staccatissimo, accent, sforzando, rinforzando, and legato. Each articulation is represented by a different symbol placed above or below the note (depending on its

position on the staff).

- **Slur** a symbol indicating that the notes it embraces are to be played or sung without separation.
- **Tie** is a curved line that joins two notes of the same pitch.
- **staccato** signifies a note of shortened duration and separated from the note that may follow by silence.
- **staccatissimo** indicates that the notes are to be played or sung extremely separated and distinct.
- **martellato** - hammered out
- **accent** is an emphasis using louder sound, typically most pronounced on the attack of the sound.
- **tenuto** indicates that a note should receive emphasis.
- **sforzando** indicates a forceful, sudden accent and is abbreviated as **sfz**.
- **rinforzando rfz** (literally "reinforcing") indicates that several notes, or a short phrase, are to be emphasized.
- **legato** indicates that musical notes are played or sung smoothly and connected.



### Basic tempo markings

From fastest to slowest, the common tempo markings are:

- Prestissimo 200 - 208  
Vivacissimo  
Allegro
- Presto 168 - 200  
Vivo
- Vivace 140
- Allegro 120-168  
Allegretto
- Moderate 108-120  
Andantino
- Andante 76-108  
Adagietto
- Larghetto 60 - 66  
Lento
- Adagio 66 - 76
- Largo 40-60  
Lentissimo  
Adagissimo  
Larghissimo

All of these markings are based on a few root words such as 'allegro', 'largo', 'adagio', 'Vivace', 'presto' 'andante' and 'lento'. By adding the -issimo and -etto endings, each word is amplified or diminished (respectively)

### Common Qualifiers

- assai - very, as in Allegro assai (but also understood by some as "enough")
- con brio - with vigor
- con moto - with motion
- non troppo - not too much, e.g. Allegro non troppo (or Allegro ma non troppo) means "Fast, but not too much.
- non tanto - not so much

- molto - very, as in Molto Allegro or "Adagio Molto"
- poco - slightly, as in Poco Adagio
- piu - more, as in Piu Allegro; used as a relative indication when the tempo changes
- meno - less, as in Meno Presto

In addition to the common "Allegretto," composers freely apply Italian diminutive and superlative suffixes to various tempo indications: Andantino, Larghetto, Adagietto, Larghissimo.

### **Mood markings with a tempo connotation**

Some markings that primarily mark a mood (or character) also have a tempo connotation:

- Vivace - lively (which generally indicates a rather fast movement)
- Maestoso - majestic or stately (which generally indicates a solemn, slow movement)
- Sostenuto - Sustained, sometimes with a slackening of tempo.

### **Terms for change in tempo**

Composers may use expressive marks to adjust the tempo:

- Accelerando - speeding up (abbreviation: accel.)
- Ritardando - delaying (abbreviation: rit. or, better, "ritard.")
- Meno Mosso - less movement or slower
- Piu Mosso - more movement or faster
- Rallentando - slowing down, especially near the end of a section (abbreviation: rall.)
- Ritenuto - slightly slower; temporarily holding back.  
(Note that the abbreviation for ritenuto can also be "rit". Thus a more specific abbreviation is "riten.")
- Stretto - rushing ahead; temporarily speeding up
- Rubato - free adjustment of tempo for expressive purposes

While the base tempo indication (such as "Allegro") appears in large type above the staff, these adjustments typically appear below the staff or (in the case of keyboard instrument) in the middle of the grand staff.

They generally designate a gradual change in tempo; for immediate tempo shifts, composers normally just provide the designation for the new tempo. (Note, however, that when Piu Mosso or Meno Mosso appears in large type above the staff, it functions as a new tempo, and thus implies an immediate change.) Several terms control how large and how gradual this change is:

- poco a poco - bit by bit, gradually
- subito - suddenly
- poco - a little
- molto - a lot

After a tempo change, a composer may return to a previous tempo in two different ways:

**A tempo** - returns to the base tempo after an adjustment (e.g. "ritardando ... a tempo" undoes the effect of the ritardando).

**Tempo Primo** or **Tempo I** - denotes an immediate return to the piece's original base tempo after a section in a different tempo (e.g. "Allegro ... Lento ... Tempo I" indicates a return to the Allegro). This indication often functions as a structural marker in pieces in binary form.

These terms also indicate an immediate, not a gradual, tempo change. Although they are Italian, composers typically use them even if they have written their initial tempo marking in some other language.

### **Tempo markings in other languages**

Although Italian has been the prevalent language for tempo markings throughout most of classical music history, many composers have written tempo indications in their own language.

#### **French tempo markings**

Several French composers have written markings in French, among them baroque composers Francois Couperin and Jean-Philippe Rameau as well as impressionist composers Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Common tempo markings in French are:

- Grave - slowly and solemnly
- Lent - slowly
- Modere - at a moderate tempo
- Vif - lively
- Vite - fast

- Tres - very, as in Tres vif (very lively)
- Moins - less, as in Moins vite (less fast)

### **German tempo markings**

Many composers have used German tempo markings. Typical German tempo markings are:

- Langsam - slowly
- Mäßig - moderately
- Lebhaft - lively (mood)
- Rasch - quickly
- Schnell - fast

One of the first German composers to use tempo markings in his native language was Ludwig van Beethoven. The one using the most elaborate combined tempo and mood markings was probably Gustav Mahler. For example, the second movement of his Symphony No. 9 is marked *Im tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers, etwas tappisch und sehr derb*, indicating a slowish folk-dance-like movement, with some awkwardness and vulgarity in the execution. Mahler would also sometimes combine German tempo markings with traditional Italian markings.