





# Elementary Music Glossary



Compiled by Jeri Crosby

- Accent:** ( > ) Emphasis placed on a note. (Natural accents occur in meter, with strongest pulses on beat one.)
- Beat:** The steady, underlying pulse in the music.
- Body Percussion:** Rhythmic sounds made on and with the body, such as clapping, stomping, patting, clicking, etc.
- Canon:** (round) A melody harmonically layered upon itself by dividing performers and starting at different times.
- Chord:** A set of three (triad) or four notes which are harmonically related, constructed of thirds (skips in a scale, e.g. C-E-G, G-B-D-F). Notes of a chord may be played simultaneously or in succession of one another (arpeggio).
- Descant:** A countermelody sung or played in a higher pitch range than the main melody (performed simultaneously).
- Dynamics:** The various levels of volume in music, which may be consistent or change gradually or suddenly.
- forte ( *f* )** : loud
  - piano ( *p* )** : soft
  - crescendo ( <math>\langle \! \langle \! \langle </math> )** : gradually get louder
  - decrescendo ( <math>\rangle \! \rangle \! \rangle </math> )** : gradually get softer
  - mezzo ( *m* )** : (met'-so) medium. Not used alone; modifies *forte* or *piano* ( *mp* , *mf* )
  - issimo** : very (added as a suffix to *piano* or *forte*). Examples: fortissimo ( *ff* ) , pianissimo ( *pp* ).
- Fermata:** (  $\frown$  ) Hold the note until satisfied (or until the conductor signals).
- Flat:** (  $\flat$  ) A flat lowers a pitch one half-step.
- Form:** Structure or organization of the music (motifs, phrases, sections, movements, AB, ABA, rondo, etc.)
- Theme and Variations (A A'A''A''')**: A form in which the same section (theme) is presented several times with a different variation of it each time.
  - AB (verse/refrain):** A two-part, or binary, form with contrasting sections.
  - Solo/Chorus (call/response):** A form consisting of the alternation between a solo and a responding chorus or individual.
  - ABA (ternary):** A three-part form with a contrasting middle section.
  - Rondo (ABACA):** A form that keeps bringing back the "A" section after each new section.
  - Coda:** A special ending.
  - Introduction:** A "preface" to the music.
- Found Sounds:** Using everyday objects to make music, for example, cans, bottles, desks, pencils, hardware, etc.
- G-Clef:**  Signifies the treble clef or notes of the upper half of the piano, indicates the G-line in the treble staff.
- Harmony:** two or more pitches sounding at the same time.
- Head Voice:** Refers to singing notes that resonate in the head (higher range).
- Interval:** The distance between two pitches. These distances are referred to as **half-steps** (closest neighbor in chromatic scale), **whole-steps** (two half-steps, also called a second), or a number (such as third, fourth, fifth) based on the distance between the lower note (counts as "one") and upper note within the scale.
- Iconic Notation:** The use of non-traditional symbols to represent elements of music such as pitch, rhythm, form.
- Key Signature:** Zero, one, or more sharps/flat symbols placed next to the clef to indicate which notes are to be raised/lowered a half step. Enables one to locate do and/or la in the music. (Last sharp = ti; last flat = fa.)
- Leger Line:** An extra "piece" of staff line used to indicate pitches that go above or below the regular five-line staff.
- Measure:** A group of beats (determined by *meter*) set apart with bar lines:  $\frac{4}{4}$  
- Melody:** A sequence of single pitches that move up or down, or repeat.
- Melodic Contour:** The "shape" of a melody as its phrases rise and/or fall in pitch; inspires movement and mapping.
- Meter:** A regular, recurring pattern of strong and weak beats, usually in twos, threes, or fours. (See *time signature*.)
- Natural Voice:** An unforced voice, free from strain or distortion.

**Note Values:** Quarter notes (♩) are the basic unit of time in most elementary music. Half notes (♭) receive twice the time value. Whole notes (♩) receive four times the time value. Two eighth notes (♪) equal the time of one quarter note, and four sixteenth notes (♩) equal the time of one quarter note. Corresponding rests symbolize silences: quarter rest (♩), half rest (♭), whole rest (♩), eighth rest (♪).

**Ostinato:** A short repeating pattern of rhythm and/or melody.

**Partner Song:** A melody which can be sung simultaneously with another because of similar harmonic structure.

**Pentatonic Scale:** The most common pentatonic scale includes do, re, mi, so, and la, which may be extended to higher or lower octaves. Fa and ti are omitted. C pentatonic scale: C D E G A c; F pentatonic: F G A C D f.


**Pitch:** Generally refers to high or low; specifically refers to a note (letter name or frequency).

**Rhythm:** A pattern of short and long sounds and silences. The rhythm is usually superimposed over an implied steady beat. Rhythm is the end result of starting with a beat, establishing a tempo for the beat, putting a pattern of accents on the beats (organizing them into a meter); then, working with those elements as a base, composing/ improvising a rhythmic pattern that rides on top of the beat, tempo, and meter. Lyrics generally influence and match the rhythm of a song.

**Rhythm Instruments:** Simple classroom instruments that are played by striking: drums, rhythm sticks, maracas, claves, triangles, cymbals, castanets, tambourines, tone bells, xylophones (Orff instruments), cow bells, jingle bells, etc.

**Sharp (♯)** A sharp raises a pitch one half-step.

**Singing Game:** A song that has a game to be played while singing it; e.g., *Ring Around the Rosy*, *London Bridge*, *Patty Cake*.

**Solfège:** The system that names pitches: do re mi fa so la ti.  
The hand signs for these symbols are: 

**Staff:** The five lines and four spaces used to diagram music.

**Style:** A type of music distinguished by its characteristic use of rhythm, timbre, melody, lyrics, texture, harmony, form, dynamics, and tempo; e.g., jazz, blues, gospel, classical, country, rock, popular. (Genre)

**Syncopation:** The occurrence of an accent on a normally unaccented beat (or part of the beat).

Examples: ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ |

**Tempo:** The speed of the beat in music. (**Tempi:** The plural of tempo.)

**Allegro:** A lively pace.

**Andante:** A walking pace.

**Moderato:** A medium pace.

**Largo:** A slow pace.

**Accelerando:** A gradual speeding up of the established tempo.

**Ritardando: (rit.)** A gradual slowing down of the established tempo.

**Texture:** The layers of sound in music, and the type of layer each one is (melodic, harmonic, percussive, etc.).

**Unison (monophonic):** One layer of sound (a single melodic line).

**Melody with accompaniment (homophonic):** A predominant melody with some type of accompaniment. The accompaniment can be an ostinato, chords, harmony, descant, etc.

**Competing Melodies (polyphonic):** Melodies of equal importance occurring simultaneously. Common examples are rounds, canons, and partner songs.

**Timbre:** (tam'-br) The unique qualities of a sound, often referred to as the tone "color" or quality. The timbre of a voice or instrument can be rough, nasal, squeaky, bright, sweet, etc. The timbre of a trumpet, for example, is uniquely different from the timbre of a flute or a violin.

**Time Signature:** ( $\frac{2}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$ ) A fraction-looking symbol at the start of a piece of music which indicates its **meter** – the number of beats and type of note values in each measure. The top number indicates how many beats per measure; the bottom number is an abbreviation for the type of note to receive one beat (4 stands for  $\frac{1}{4}$  or quarter note).