



# Musical terms and directions for performance

Source: James Murray Brown, *A Handbook of Musical Knowledge*, Revised Edition (Trinity College London, 1987)

## Grade 2, Grade 3 and Grade 4

### Words showing strength of tone:

<i>Pianissimo</i> ( <i>pp</i> )	Very soft
<i>Mezzo piano</i> ( <i>mp</i> )	Moderately soft
<i>Piano</i> ( <i>p</i> )	Soft
<i>Mezza voce</i> ( <i>mv</i> )	Medium tone
<i>Mezzo forte</i> ( <i>mf</i> )	Moderately loud
<i>Forte</i> ( <i>f</i> )	Loud
<i>Fortissimo</i> ( <i>ff</i> )	Very loud
<i>Crescendo</i> or 	Gradually becoming louder
<i>Decrescendo</i> } or 	Gradually becoming softer
<i>Diminuendo</i> }	
<i>Sforzando</i> ( <i>sf</i> ) }	Accented
<i>Forzando</i> ( <i>fz</i> ) }	
<i>Rinforzando</i> ( <i>rf</i> )	Strengthening the tone

### Words showing speed:

<i>Grave</i>	Extremely slow, solemn
<i>Lento</i>	Slow
<i>Largo</i>	Broad
<i>Larghetto</i>	Rather broad
<i>Adagio</i>	Slow, leisurely
<i>Andante</i>	Going at an easy pace
<i>Andantino</i>	At a moderate pace, but not so slow as <i>Andante</i>
<i>Moderato</i>	Moderate speed
<i>Allegretto</i>	Rather fast
<i>Allegro</i>	Fast
<i>Vivace</i>	Lively
<i>Presto</i>	Very quick
<i>Prestissimo</i>	Very quick indeed, as fast as possible

### The following other words relating to speed are also often met with:

<i>Accelerando</i> ( <i>accel.</i> )	Getting gradually faster
<i>Rallentando</i> ( <i>rall.</i> )	Getting gradually slower
<i>Calando</i>	Softer and slower
<i>Ritardando</i> ( <i>ritard., rit.</i> )	Retarding the speed
<i>Ritenuto</i> ( <i>riten.</i> )	Held back
<i>A tempo</i>	In time
<i>Ad libitum</i> ( <i>ad lib.</i> ) or <i>A piacere</i>	At the performer's pleasure
<i>Meno mosso</i>	Slower at once
<i>Più mosso</i>	Quicker at once

The signs > and ^ above notes are called Accents, and are used to mark strongly accented notes.

## Grade 3 and Grade 4

### Terms relating to tone:

<i>Mancando</i>	Failing or waning tone
<i>Smorzando</i> }	Dying away
<i>Morendo</i> }	
<i>Più forte</i>	More loudly
<i>Più piano</i>	More softly
<i>Meno forte</i>	Less loudly
<i>Meno piano</i>	Less softly
<i>Perdendosi</i>	Losing itself by getting softer and slower

### Terms relating to speed:

<i>Largamente</i>	Broadly, massively
<i>Adagietto</i>	Rather leisurely
<i>Tempo ordinario</i>	Ordinary speed
<i>Tempo comodo</i>	Convenient, i.e. comfortable speed
<i>Vivacissimo</i>	Extremely lively
<i>Tosto</i>	Quick; rapid
<i>Celere</i>	Quick; nimble

<i>Veloce</i>	Swiftly
<i>Stringendo (string.)</i>	Pressing onwards, hurrying the speed
<i>Stretto</i>	
<i>Affrettando</i>	
<i>Tempo Giusto</i>	In strict, or exact time
<i>Doppio Tempo,</i> <i>or Doppio Movimento</i>	In double time, i.e. twice as fast as the preceding movement
<i>L'istesso tempo</i>	In the same time as the preceding movement. This term is used when the time signature is changed, but the <i>beats</i> are still to be of the same length as before.
<i>Tempo Primo</i>	At the same speed as at first
<i>Più lento</i>	More slowly

## Grade 4

### Italian words indicating expression, etc:

<i>Agitato</i>	In an agitated manner
<i>Animato</i>	Animated
<i>Appassionato</i>	Impassioned
<i>Cantabile; Cantando</i>	In a singing style
<i>Capriccioso</i>	Fanciful; capricious
<i>Con anima</i>	With soul, i.e. life
<i>Con brio</i>	With vivacity, brilliance
<i>Con espressione</i>	With expression
<i>Con energia</i>	With energy or force
<i>Con fuoco</i>	With fire
<i>Con grazia</i>	With grace
<i>Con moto</i>	With motion, i.e. rather fast
<i>Con spirito</i>	With spirit
<i>Con tenerezza</i>	With tenderness
<i>Deciso</i>	Decided, i.e. with firmness
<i>Delicato</i>	Delicately; refined
<i>Dolce</i>	Sweetly, gently
<i>Energico</i>	In an energetic manner
<i>Espressivo</i>	Expressively
<i>Forza</i>	Force or emphasis
<i>Furioso</i>	Impetuously; with fury
<i>Giusto</i>	Right; exact; strict
<i>Grandioso</i>	Grandly
<i>Grazioso</i>	Gracefully; daintily
<i>Legato</i>	Smoothly and connectedly
<i>Leggiero</i>	Lightly
<i>Maestoso</i>	Majestic
<i>Marcato</i>	Marked
<i>Martellato</i>	With great force; hammered
<i>Mesto</i>	In a pensive, sad manner
<i>Mosso</i>	Moved, i.e. fast
<i>Pesante</i>	Heavily; in a ponderous manner
<i>Piacevole</i>	In a pleasing manner
<i>Pomposo</i>	Pompously
<i>Risoluto</i>	In a resolute manner
<i>Rubato</i>	Robbed (flexible in time); see <i>tempo rubato</i>
<i>Scherzando; Scherzoso</i>	In a sprightly, playful manner
<i>Semplice</i>	Simply
<i>Serioso</i>	Seriously
<i>Sonore</i>	Sonorous
<i>Sostenuto</i>	Sustained
<i>Sotto voce</i>	In a subdued manner; in an undertone
<i>Tempo rubato</i>	Robbed time; the slight alterations by acceleration or retardation which a performer makes for the purpose of expression
<i>Teneramente; Con tenerezza</i>	Tenderly
<i>Tranquillo</i>	Tranquilly
<i>Vivo; Con vivacita</i>	With vivacity

**Grade 4**  
**... continued**

**Italian Adjectives, Prepositions, etc., used before other words:**

<i>A</i>	At; for; with; to; by; in
<i>Al, All', Alla</i>	In the style of; to the
<i>Assai</i>	Very, fairly
<i>Bene or Ben</i>	Well
<i>Con</i>	With
<i>Da</i>	From
<i>Dal</i>	From the; <i>Dal segno</i> , from the sign
<i>Di</i>	Of the
<i>Il or La</i>	The
<i>Ma</i>	But
<i>Meno</i>	Less
<i>Mezzo</i>	Half
<i>Molto or Di molto</i>	Much; very much
<i>Non</i>	Not
<i>O</i>	Either; or
<i>Più</i>	More
<i>Pochettino</i>	Very little
<i>Poco or Un poco</i>	A little
<i>Quasi</i>	Almost; as it were; as if
<i>Sempre</i>	Always
<i>Senza</i>	Without
<i>Sul'; Sull'; Sulla</i>	On the
<i>Tanto</i>	As much
<i>Troppo</i>	Too; too much
<i>Un or Una</i>	A; an; one

The above words are often found in conjunction with the other words already listed. Examples of these compound terms are:

<i>Allegro animato</i>	Quick; animated
<i>Allegro comodo</i>	A convenient <i>Allegro</i> —comfortably fast
<i>Allegro con anima</i>	Quick, with life (spirit)
<i>Allegro con fuoco</i>	Quick, with fire
<i>Allegro moderato</i>	Moderately quick
<i>Allegro molto</i>	Very quick
<i>Allegro non tanto</i>	Not so quick
<i>Allegro non troppo</i>	Not too quick
<i>Allegro vivace</i>	Lively and brisk
<i>Poco a poco cresc.</i>	Getting louder little by little
<i>Andante con moto</i>	A trifle faster than <i>Andante</i> alone
<i>Andante quasi Allegretto</i>	Faster than <i>Andante</i> , almost as if <i>Allegretto</i>
<i>Ben marcato</i>	Well marked
<i>Meno allegro</i>	Less quick
<i>Sempre più crescendo</i>	Continually increasing in tone
<i>Presto assai</i>	Very quick

**Italian words conveying general directions to the performer:**

*Bis* (Italian and Latin) Twice. Short passages, such as a single bar or two bars which are to be played or sung twice, have the Latin word *Bis* (i.e. twice) written over or under a slur:



<i>Come</i>	Like; as; how
<i>Come prima</i>	As at first
<i>Come sopra</i>	As above
<i>Da Capo</i>	From the beginning. When the term <i>Da Capo</i> or <i>D.C.</i> occurs at any part of a piece, it signifies that the music is to be repeated from the beginning.

**Grade 4**  
**... continued**

*Da Capo al fine*  
*Da Capo al Segno*  
*Da Capo senza ripetizione*  
*Dal Segno*  
*Fine*

From the beginning to the word *Fine*  
From the beginning to the sign  $\text{S}$   
From the beginning, without repetition  
From the sign  $\text{S}$

The end. A pause when placed over a double bar in the middle of a piece means that the piece is to end there, after a *Da Capo*. The word *Fine* is frequently used for this purpose instead of the pause:



*Pedal or ped. (English)*

In organ music this word is used to indicate the notes to be played by the organist's feet. In piano music it indicates that the *right* pedal is to be pressed down with the foot, and kept in that position until the \* (or a change of harmony) occurs, when the pedal should be raised. The words *Senza sordini* are generally understood in piano music to mean 'without dampers' (i.e. with a free use of the right pedal); and *Con sordini* to mean 'with dampers' (i.e. without the right pedal). In modern music the words *Una Corda* indicate the use of the left pedal; and the words *Tre Corde* show where it should be raised. The student must not confuse the two words *mites* and *dampers*. A mute is any contrivance for merely decreasing the average intensity of a sound; a damper is a piece of mechanism which stops the vibration of the sound-producing apparatus, and so causes actual silence.

*Poco a poco*  
*Repeat marks*

Little by little

Dots when written *before* a double bar indicate that the music is to be repeated from the previous double bar, or from the beginning of the piece:



Dots when placed *after* a double bar indicate that the music to the following double bar is to be repeated:



*R.H. and L.H.*

Repeat marks are only used for long passages intended for repetition. For short passages of a bar or so, the word *Bis* is used. These letters indicate the use of the Right Hand or Left Hand in piano music:

<i>Mano Destra (It.)</i>	M.D. = R.H.
<i>Mano Sinistra (It.)</i>	M.S. = L.H.
<i>Main Droite (Fr.)</i>	M.D. = R.H.
<i>Main Gauche (Fr.)</i>	M.G. = L.H.

*Segno*  
*Simile*  
*Tenuto (Ten.)*  
*Volta*

A sign. *Al Segno* means 'to the sign'. *Dal Segno* 'from the sign'.  
In the same manner

Held or sustained

Turn; time. The signs *1ma volta* (1st time) and *2da volta* (2nd time), or simply the figures 1 and 2, are often used in conjunction with repeats; the bar or bars marked 1 are then to be omitted at the repetition, and the bar or bars marked 2 played instead:



*Volti Subito (V.S.)*

Turn over quickly to the next page

## Supplementary list of Italian Terms

This list is for reference only and knowledge of these terms is not explicitly required for Grade Examinations in the Theory of Music.

<i>Affetto</i>	With affection	<i>Maggiore</i>	Major key
<i>Affettuoso</i>	With tender feeling	<i>Marcia</i>	A march
<i>Alla Capella</i>	In the style of unaccompanied church music	<i>Menuetto</i>	A Minuet
<i>Amabile</i>	Amiably	<i>Minore</i>	Minor key
<i>Amoroso</i>	Lovingly	<i>Moto</i>	Movement, as in <i>Andante con moto</i>
<i>Ancora</i>	Again	<i>Nei, Nel, Nell', Nella, Nelle, Nello</i>	In the
<i>Ardito</i>	With spirit and boldness	<i>Obbligato (Obb.)</i>	Indispensable; some part which cannot be omitted in performance
<i>Arioso</i>	A short melody	<i>Ostinato</i>	Continuous; persisted in
<i>Attacca</i>	Go on immediately	<i>Parlando; parlante</i>	In a speaking manner
<i>Barcarola</i>	A boat-song	<i>Patorale</i>	In a pastoral style
<i>Burlesco</i>	Comic; funny	<i>Pizzicato (pizz.)</i>	Plucked. Direction to string player to pluck the strings instead of playing them with the bow
<i>Cadenza</i>	A florid, ornamental passage, generally intended as a means of technical display	<i>Poi</i>	Then
<i>Cantilena</i>	A song-like melody	<i>Questo</i>	This
<i>Col, Colla</i>	With the	<i>Scherzo</i>	A playful piece
<i>Col arco</i>	With the bow (stringed instruments)	<i>Sciolto</i>	Free; unrestrained
<i>Colla parte; colla voce</i>	The accompanist to keep closely with the solo part, or voice	<i>Segue</i>	Then follows, i.e. go on with what comes next
<i>Come prima</i>	As at first	<i>Sentimento</i>	Sentiment
<i>Con amore</i>	Lovingly	<i>Sino</i>	Up to; as far as; until. <i>D.C. sin' al segno</i> therefore means 'from the beginning as far as the sign'.
<i>Con delicatezza</i>	With delicacy; in a refined manner	<i>Si replica</i>	To be repeated
<i>Con dolore; con duolo</i>	With grief	<i>Sordino</i>	A mute (of a stringed instrument)
<i>Con sordini</i>	With mutes. In <i>old piano</i> music this meant 'to release the right pedal'; in <i>modern piano</i> music, it sometimes means 'to use the left pedal'. In ORCHESTRAL MUSIC <i>mutes</i> are sometimes used to damp or deaden the sound of Violins, Horns, Trumpets, and Trombones. When these are required in performance, the direction <i>con sordini</i> is placed above the part so to be played; when they are to be removed the contrary direction, <i>senza sordini</i> , is given.	<i>Spianato</i>	Without pathos; smooth; even; calm
<i>Di bravura</i>	In a florid style; brilliantly	<i>Staccatissimo</i>	As short as possible
<i>Di chiaro</i>	Clearly	<i>Staccato</i>	Short
<i>Di nuovo</i>	Anew; again	<i>Strepitoso</i>	In a loud, boisterous manner
<i>Divisi</i>	Divided (largely used in orchestral music)	<i>Sul G, D or A</i>	On the G, D or A string of a violin
<i>Dolente; doloroso</i>	With grief	<i>Sul ponticello</i>	Play near the bridge (violin)
<i>Dopo</i>	After	<i>Tacet</i>	Be silent
<i>E poi</i>	And then	<i>Tedesca</i>	In a German manner
<i>Feroce</i>	Fiercely	<i>Tema</i>	A theme, generally for Variations
<i>Giocososo</i>	Jocosely; humorously	<i>Tempo di (Menuetto)</i>	In the time of (a Minuet)
<i>Giojoso</i>	Mirthful; joyous	<i>Trio</i>	The central section of a three part design where the first part normally returns after the <i>Trio</i> . The first section may well be a Minuet or a Scherzo. <i>Trio</i> may also be a piece for three instruments or voices. This was the origin of the term.
<i>Gustoso</i>	Tastefully	<i>Tutti</i>	All; every performer is to take part
<i>Impetuoso</i>	Impetuously	<i>Variazione</i>	Variations
<i>Lagrimoso</i>	Tearfully; mournfully	<i>Vigorouso</i>	Vigorously
<i>Languido</i>	Languid	<i>Volante</i>	In a light, flying manner
<i>Leggieramente</i>	Getting gradually lighter		