

Italian Music Terms and Meaning

Tempo		
Tempo markings indicates a speed of play. The beats-per-minute (BPM) is a general guide. In modern music, a <i>metronome mark</i> is often used showing the number of BPM (such as ♩ = 120).		
Term	Meaning	BPM
<i>adagietto</i>	rather slow, slightly faster than adagio	72-76
<i>adagio</i>	slow	66-76
<i>allegretto</i>	moderately fast, slightly slower than allegro	112-120
<i>allegro</i>	fast	120-168
<i>allegro moderato</i>	moderately fast, slightly slower than allegro	116-120
<i>allegro</i>	fast	120-168
<i>allegro moderato</i>	moderately fast, slightly slower than allegro	116-120
<i>andante</i>	walking pace	76-108
<i>andante moderato</i>	moderate walking pace, faster than andante	92-112
<i>andantino</i>	moderate tempo, slightly faster than andante	80-108
<i>grave</i>	very slow	25-45
<i>larghetto</i>	rather slow and broad, slightly faster than largo	60-66
<i>larghissimo</i>	extremely slow, slower than largo	25 and below
<i>largo</i>	very slow and broad	40-60
<i>lento</i>	slow	45-60
<i>moderato</i>	moderately	108-120
<i>prestissimo</i>	extremely fast, faster than presto	200 and above
<i>presto</i>	very fast	168-200
<i>vivace</i>	fast and lively	140-176
<i>vivacissimo</i>	very fast and lively, faster than vivace	172-176
Tempo changes		
Tempo changes define the rate of change and duration of the change. Words for gradual changes can be extended with dashes to indicate the duration of the change, for example " <i>rit. _ _ _</i> ".		
Term	Abbreviation	Meaning
<i>a piacere</i>		at pleasure, the tempo may be decided by the performer
<i>a tempo</i>		resume previous tempo

<i>rallentando</i>	rall.	gradually slower
<i>ritardando</i>	rit., ritard.	gradually slower
<i>ritenuto</i>	riten.	immediately slower
<i>rubato</i>		in free time, no steady beat
<i>stringendo</i>		gradually faster, literally "tightening"
<i>accelerando</i>	accel.	gradually faster

Dynamics

Dynamic markings that indicate the relative variation in loudness and do not refer to specific volume levels. Dynamic markings are usually written below the staff or centered between the two staves in the grand staff.

Term	Symbol	Meaning
<i>pianississimo</i>	ppp	as soft as possible
<i>pianissimo</i>	pp	very soft
<i>piano</i>	p	soft
<i>mezzo piano</i>	mp	moderately soft
<i>mezzo forte</i>	mf	moderately loud
<i>forte</i>	f	loud
<i>fortissimo</i>	ff	very loud
<i>fortississimo</i>	fff	as loud as possible

Dynamic changes

List of dynamic changes. The hairpins () are used for dynamic changes over just a few bars, while *cresc.* and *dim.* are used for changes over a longer period. Word directions can be extended with dashes to indicate the duration of the change.

Term	Symbol	Meaning
<i>crescendo</i>	cresc. or	gradually louder
<i>diminuendo</i>	dim. or	gradually softer
<i>fortepiano</i>	fp	loud, then immediately soft
<i>sforzando, forzando, sforzato</i>	sfz, sf or fz	suddenly accented (applied to a note or chord)
<i>rinforzando</i>	rfz or rf	reinforced (applied to a note, chord or phrase)
Techniques		

Common terms for playing techniques. The terms instruct the performer to use a certain playing technique in order to produce the desired sound.

Term	Abbreviation	Meaning
<i>arpeggio</i>	arp.	chord notes played in succession rather than simultaneously
<i>glissando</i>	gliss.	a continuous slide from one note to another
<i>legato</i>		notes played with a smooth connection between them
<i>mano destra</i>	m.d.	right hand
<i>mano sinistra</i>	m.s.	left hand
<i>con sordino</i>		with a mute or (on piano) without the sustain pedal
<i>senza sordino</i>		without a mute or (on piano) with the sustain pedal pressed
<i>pizzicato</i>	pizz.	plucked with the finger rather than bowed
<i>portamento</i>	port.	a smooth slide from one note to another
<i>tutti</i>		performed by the entire ensemble
<i>staccato</i>	stacc.	shortened and sharply separated notes
<i>staccatissimo</i>	staccatiss.	shortened and extremely separated notes
<i>vibrato</i>		a rapid repeated slight change in the pitch of a note
Moods		

The terms help the performer to capture the mood of a piece through variations in tempo, dynamics and articulation.

Term	Meaning	
<i>agitato</i>	agitated	
<i>animato</i>	animated, lively	
<i>cantabile</i>	in a singing style	
<i>con amore</i>	with love	
<i>con brio</i>	with spirit, with vigor	
<i>con fuoco</i>	with fiery manner	
<i>con moto</i>	with movement	
<i>dolce</i>	sweet	

<i>doloroso</i>	sorrowful	
<i>energico</i>	energetic	
<i>espressivo</i>	expressive	
<i>grazioso</i>	graceful	
<i>leggiero</i>	light, nimble	
<i>maestoso</i>	majestic	
<i>marcato</i>	marked, accented	
<i>risoluto</i>	decisive, strong	
<i>scherzando</i>	playful	
<i>sostenuto</i>	sustained	
<i>tenuto</i>	held, sustained	
<i>tranquillo</i>	calm	
Repeats		

The directions are used as navigation markers to tell the performer to repeat a certain section of the piece.

Term	Symbol	Meaning
<i>Fine</i>		the end of a piece
<i>Coda</i>		the concluding passage of a piece
<i>Segno</i>		the beginning or end of a repeat
<i>Da Capo</i>	D.C.	repeat from the beginning
<i>Da Capo al Fine</i>	D.C. al Fine	repeat from the beginning to the word <i>Fine</i>
<i>Da Capo al Coda</i>	D.C. al Coda	repeat from the beginning to the sign (sometimes replaced by <i>To Coda</i>), then skip to the concluding Coda passage
<i>Da Capo al Segno</i>	D.C. al Segno	repeat from the beginning to the sign
<i>Dal Segno</i>	D.S.	repeat from the sign
<i>Dal Segno al Fine</i>	D.S. al Fine	repeat from the sign to the word <i>Fine</i>
<i>Dal Segno al Coda</i>	D.S. al Coda	repeat from the sign to the sign (sometimes replaced by <i>To Coda</i>), then skip to the concluding Coda passage
General		

The terms are commonly used in conjunction with other terms, such as: *allegro molto* (very fast) and *con amore* (with love).

Term	Meaning	
<i>ad libitum</i>	at pleasure (often in regard to tempo and style)	
<i>assai</i>	very	
<i>con</i>	with	
<i>ma</i>	but	
<i>ma non tanto</i>	but not so much	
<i>ma non troppo</i>	but not too much	
<i>meno</i>	less	
<i>molto</i>	very	
<i>non</i>	not	
<i>più</i>	more	
<i>poco</i>	little	
<i>poco a poco</i>	little by little	
<i>senza</i>	without	
<i>simile</i>	in a similar way	
<i>subito</i>	suddenly, quickly	