Lesson 1  How Loud? How Soft?

We have learned that notes tell music readers how high or low to sing or play a musical sound, and how long or short to sing or play a musical sound. There is one more thing we need to know when we sing or play music: how loud or soft to sing or play it. Musical symbols known as dynamics tell us how loud or soft to perform music.

The dynamic symbol for loud is called forte (FOR-tay), and looks like the letter f.

The dynamic symbol for soft is called piano (Pe-AH-no, the same as the musical instrument) and looks like the letter p.

The dynamic symbol for very loud is two forte symbols. This is called fortissimo (for-TEE-see-mo).

The dynamic symbol for very soft is two piano symbols. This is called pianissimo (pe-ah-NEE-see-mo).

There are dynamics for medium loud and medium soft, too. For medium loud, an “m” is placed in front of the forte symbol. The “m” stands for mezzo (MET-zo), an Italian word meaning medium or moderately. So the symbol is called mezzo forte (MET-zo FOR-tay).

The symbol for medium soft is mezzo piano (MET-zo pe-AH-no).

The words for the dynamic symbols are all Italian. Now you know five Italian words: forte (loud), piano (soft), fortissimo (very loud), pianissimo (very soft), and mezzo (medium).

Dynamics are usually placed below a staff, like this. The music is performed at one dynamic level until a different dynamic is shown.

Here's a chart of dynamics, from softest to loudest:

\[ \text{pp} \quad \text{p} \quad \text{mp} \quad \text{mf} \quad \text{f} \quad \text{ff} \]

软弱 ---------------------------------------- 最响亮
Sometimes music gradually changes from soft to loud, or from loud to soft. The most common dynamic symbols to show a change in volume look like this:

A crescendo (creh-SHEN-doh) sign means to gradually get louder.

A decrescendo (deh-creh-SHEN-doh) sign means to gradually get softer. Sometimes this sign is called a diminuendo (dih-min-you-EHN-doh).

Sometimes crescendo and decrescendo signs are called wedges or hairpins. But music readers usually call them crescendo and decrescendo signs.

Crescendo and decrescendo signs are usually placed below the staff, like this:

Sometimes you might see the words crescendo, decrescendo, or diminuendo (or their abbreviations shown below) instead of the symbols.

to gradually get louder = crescendo = cresc.

to gradually get softer = decrescendo = decresc.

or diminuendo or dim.
MORE MUSICAL SYMBOLS AND TERMS

LESSON 3 How Fast? How Slow?

You have learned that musical notes can be high or low, long or short, and loud or soft. You also need to know how fast or how slow the music should be played or sung. This is called the tempo of the music.

Often, a word or two at the beginning of a piece of music will tell you how fast it should be played. But sometimes, tempo markings, like dynamic markings, are shown with Italian words. Here are some common tempo markings:

- **Largo** (LAHR-go) = very slow
- **Adagio** (Ah-DAH-jhee-oh) = slow
- **Andante** (Ahn-DAHN-tay) = a moderate speed, often called a walking tempo
- **Moderato** (Mohd-air-AH-to) = moderately, but faster than andante
- **Allegro** (Ah-LEG-roh) = fast
- **Vivace** (Vee-VAH-chay) = very fast
- **Presto** (PRESS-roh) = very fast, faster than vivace

There are musical terms (and abbreviations) for changes in tempo, too:

- **Ritardando** (ree-tahr-DAHN-doh) or rit. = gradually slower
- **Rallentando** (ralh-ehn-TAHN-doh) or rall. = gradually slower
- **Accelerando** (ack-shell-air-AHN-doh) or accel. = gradually faster
- **a tempo** (ah TEHM-po) = return to previous tempo

Tempo markings are usually placed above the staff. Changes in tempo are usually placed below the staff.

Here's a chart of tempos from slowest to fastest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Largo</th>
<th>Adagio</th>
<th>Andante</th>
<th>Moderato</th>
<th>Allegro</th>
<th>Vivace</th>
<th>Presto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>slowest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fastest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sometimes you will see other musical symbols placed above or below a notehead. These markings are called articulations. Articulations tell music readers how a note should be played or sung. In this lesson and in the next lesson you will learn several articulations.

This is a staccato (stah-KAH-toh) dot. A note with a staccato dot should be played or sung very short. It should be separated from the note after it.

Here's an example of a piece of music using short, staccato notes.

Musical rule - Staccato dots are always placed near the notehead. If the stem is down, the staccato dot is above the notehead. If the stem is up, the staccato dot is below the notehead.

Here's a musical symbol which is the opposite of a staccato dot.

This is a fermata (fehr-MAH-tah). A note with a fermata above it is held much longer than the note would normally be held. In fact, the beat or pulse of the music stops, and doesn't start again until the performer stops holding the note with the fermata.

Musical rule - A fermata is always placed above the note and above the staff.
Lesson 5  Accent, Tenuto, and Marcato

This mark (>) is called an accent (AK-sent). An accent means the note should be played or sung loudly.

The notes with accents should be played or sung louder than the others.

This mark (−) is called a tenuto (teh-NOO-toh) mark. It has two meanings.

1) A tenuto mark can mean to play a note slightly louder, but not quite as loudly as an accent.
2) It can also tell the music reader to play or sing a note for its full value.

Musical Rule — Accents and tenuto marks are always placed near the notehead. If the stem is down, the accent or tenuto mark is above the notehead. If the stem is up, the accent or tenuto mark is below the notehead.

This mark (A) is called marcato (mar-KAH-toh). It means to play a note very loudly...even louder than an > accent.

Musical Rule — Marcato marks are always placed above the note. It doesn't matter if the stem goes up or down, the marcato mark is always above.

Look at some of the articulations in this piece of music. Notice that articulations can be combined.

Copyright © MMIII by Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.
Note: the purchase of this book carries with it the right to photocopy this page.
Limited to one school only. NOT FOR RESALE.