

Talking About Music - A Dictionary

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This document is a short dictionary of words which may help you to talk about music. It was originally intended for non-musicians who need to communicate with music professionals, but it is useful for anyone who wants to develop a larger verbal arsenal for talking about music.

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PART I: Structure - Large and Small

Composers usually discuss their work on two different levels: large and small. "Large scale" discussions usually revolve round discussions of structure - how a piece is divided into sections, how those sections are arranged, the 'arc' of an entire work, etc. "Detailed level" discussions are usually about the choices made from moment to moment in a composition - a particular note, chord, sound, or rhythm which may occur at any point in time and how that choice leads the music forward to the next moment.

large scale, global level, structural, or form - All of these terms refer to how the piece is put together as a whole.

detailed level, small scale - When talking about the "detail level", musicians are usually talking about the choices that the composer has made from moment to moment. Almost always, these detailed choices are made with an eye towards a large-scale structure. For example, a particular sound might be chosen to help build (or relax) tension in the work towards (or away from) some high point. Or, a composer will throw in "something different" just to mix things up a bit, i.e. to make sure the work does not get too repetitive, predictable, or boring.

Note that the 'detail level' is just that - detailed. Therefore, you may wish to skip any section below which discusses small details, and just leave these choices to the musicians and composers involved in your project. However, if you are listening to music and at some point it sounds 'wrong', knowing some of the details may help you figure out exactly what aspect of the music may not sound right to you.

Labeling large structures

When talking about 'large structures', usually a composer is referring to an entire piece of music, for example, a entire song, a movement from a symphony, etc.

form, structure - Most musical works are divided into a series of sections, which together make up the "form" of the work. Usually, all sections of a work will be connected in some way or another (see "glue" below). Furthermore, sections are usually arranged in a way to be pleasing to the listener. For example, each section could build intensity from the previous section. Or, perhaps a section is included to provide a **break**, i.e. something new and interesting to listen to.

The **form** of a piece is the same as it's **structure**.

A, A', B, B', A'', etc. - Composers label sections with letters, A, B, C, D, etc. When two sections are the same (or very nearly the same), they will be given the same letter. For example, if a song has an "AABA" form, then this means that it has four sections, and that the same music is used for sections 1, 2, and 4, with contrasting music for section 3. Sometimes, a composer will take the music for one section and then vary it to make something slightly different (but clearly related) to the original section. When this is done, they will label the new section with an apostrophe, such as **A'** (read: "A-prime"). Sometimes (for example, a theme and variations) the original music may be varied multiple times. Each time it is

varied, another apostrophe is added to the section label (for example: A", A³, A⁴ - read: "A-double-prime", "A-triple-prime", "A-quadruple-prime", etc.) .

departure, return - Very often composers will use a contrasting section to depart from music which has been established. Later, the same composer will return to the original music. There are dramatic implications to departure and return: the **departure** represents the excitement/anxiety/stress/instability of leaving 'home', and the **return** represents the satisfaction of returning to familiar musical territory after having been away. An example of departure and return is in the AABA form. The "B" section represents a departure, and the final "A" section represents the return to the original musical material.

high point, climax, arc - Oftentimes, musical compositions will have a large scale **arc**. The work will build in intensity and excitement to some **high point** (also called the **climax**), and then will quickly finish up.

growth, the 'long line' - More generally, composers will use words like "growth" and "the long line" to describe whatever it is that carries the listener through the composition. Music is often thought of like a "stream running downhill". The listener gets into a boat and is carried downstream by the music. This sense of inevitability of music, the "being carried inevitably to the end" (which can be achieved in many different ways) is discussed as the "growth" or the "long line" of the music.

frame - Sometimes a work will have small amount of music at the beginning which is repeated at the end. Usually this is done as an attention grabbing device, to startle the audience and get them to listen right away. When it is repeated at the end, it has a way of rounding out and completing the entire work.

Sometimes when this is done, it is called a **frame** for the work, i.e. a small amount of music which comes at both the beginning and the end of a piece and is used to frame it.

introduction, coda - Very often, compositions will start with some ambiguous, introductory music to "get the audience in the mood", before the substantive music is presented. This is called the **introduction**. Similarly, composers will often tack on extra music to the end of a composition to make sure that the ending feels full and satisfying. This is called the **coda**.

Specifically, introductions and codas are both sections of music (see 'form' above). What makes them special is 1) they both have very specific functions, 2) they occur only at the beginning or end of a work, and 3) they are not repeated within the work.

transition - Sometimes, composers will create special music to help transition from one section to another. For example, the shift from a slow, soft section to a fast, loud section may be too abrupt for the average listener. When this is the case, a composer may write a short transition to carry the ear from one section to the other. Said another way, transitions give the listener a chance to "catch up" before important new music is presented. Transitions can also have the function of highlighting the similarities between two different sections of music.

glue / cohesiveness - When talking about a large work, composers are often worried about the **glue** that holds the whole work together. Composers are usually very concerned that every section in a work sounds like it belongs in the work. Sometimes it is very difficult to identify what provides a work this cohesiveness. It can be a harmonic plan, instrumentation, common sound world, musical attitude, common mood or temperament, types of melodies, motives (see below), or simply the composer's style (a combination of all the above).

narrative, non-narrative - Most music, especially the works of classical and romantic composers, is "narrative". That is, the music carefully leads the listener from moment to moment, like a story in a book. Typically, musical themes (i.e. melodic fragments) will be reused and changed as the music progresses, and the music will use melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic elements to build to a clear climax.

Non-narrative music is any music which does not have a strong sense of melody or line. For example, a non-narrative piece might instead present a series of sound images. These sound images may blend smoothly from one to the other, or they may shift, jarringly, back and forth. And finally, it is certainly possible to have music which contains both narrative and non-narrative aspects. For example, occasional glimpses of structured narrative emerging from sound images.

Structure within (or between) sections

In addition to the structure of an entire composition, composers are intensely concerned with structure within each section. Each section usually has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and sections are often divided up into a series of musical thoughts, called **phrases**.

phrase - A phrase is a complete musical thought. It is most closely analogous to a written sentence within a book. While it's possible for a section to only have a single phrase, that's usually not the case. Phrases are usually short, like 5-10 seconds, although much shorter and much longer are, of course, possible. Phrases usually end in a some kind of arrival point (aka **cadence** - a momentary point of rest), which is the goal of the phrase itself. Don't worry if the arrival point feels unsatisfying. The only truly satisfying arrival point should occur at the end of the piece (and sometimes not even then). As long as the music has momentarily paused, then you've probably reached the end of a phrase.

When listening to music, if you have a hard time telling where one phrase begins and another ends, don't despair. Music which contains very clear phrases often sounds **square**, simple, and, frankly, boring. Therefore, composers are always finding ways to obscure the beginnings and endings of phrases, so that one phrase blends smoothly into the next and carries the listener easily along with it. Very often, one part of the music (for example, the melody) will come to the end of the phrase while another part of the music (for example, the accompaniment) has already started the next one (see **elision** below).

cadence, arrival point, goal - These are all the same thing. A **cadence** is a moment of rest where the music has, even if temporarily, reached some sort of goal or point of completion.

Cadences occur at the ends of phrases, sections, and at the end of the composition as a whole.

Some composers may consider a cadence to be a very specific kind of musical chord progression which is used to end a phrase (if this is the case, then use the words **arrival point** or **goal** instead). But I think that most composers are more flexible in their interpretation, allowing a cadence to be any method for completing a musical thought and coming to a moment of rest.

question / answer (also known as **antecedent / consequent**) - Music is very closely related to the spoken word. Composers often think of music as a rhetorical language, in other words, a way of posing questions, answering questions, making statements, persuading the listener to a musical argument, etc.

Often phrases will sound as if they are posing a question. For example, a phrase may end "up" (i.e. on a note which goes up rather than down). Similarly, phrases can also sound as if they are answering a question. Many times, these types of phrases are paired together. For example, the music may ask a question, and then (in the next phrase) will provide the answer. One can hear this most clearly in the works of early classical composers such as Mozart or Haydn.

Question phrases are also called **antecedent** phrases and **answer** phrases can also be called **consequent** phrases. **Antecedent** and **consequent** are more specific and allow for pairs of phrases that do not necessarily sound like questions and answers.

half-cadence - When a musical phrase ends in a question mark, composers will call this a "half-cadence". Half cadences feel unsatisfying -- the listener will always want the implied question to be answered by another phrase. For this reason, half cadences are also very useful, because they draw the ear forward and give the listener a reason to continue paying attention.

As with other types of cadences, **half cadence** can mean a very specific chord progression to some composers. If this is the case, you may wish to refer to phrases which "end in a question mark" rather than saying "a phrase which ends in a half cadence".

deceptive cadence - Generally, a deceptive cadence is any phrase which ends un-expectedly. Deceptive cadences can be very special and distinctive, creating "oh wow" moments in music.

More specifically, deceptive cadences typically require a melody and an accompaniment. A cadence is **deceptive** if the melody ends up on the proper note to end the phrase, but the accompaniment contains unexpected harmony underneath. For example, if your song is in C-Major, you might expect the phrase to end up on a C Major chord, with the melody playing a 'C'. If, however, the melody ends up on a 'C', but the harmony is an A-Minor chord, then this is an unexpected harmony and therefore a deceptive cadence.

Deceptive cadences are also an example of how composers blur one phrase into the next. In a deceptive cadence, the melody is finishing off the phrase, while the harmony/accompaniment has already moved ahead, to the beginning of the next phrase.

extension / delay - Extension and delay are very similar concepts. Both are used most often at the ends of phrases.

Extension implies that the end of a phrase is extended, thus emphasizing the ending. For example, this can be easily done by simply repeating the last few notes of the phrase over and over, until the ending feels "satisfying enough". Of course, composers have lots and lots of ways to extend endings. Beethoven was especially good at it. Extensions are most often at the ends of sections rather than phrases in the middle of sections.

Delay implies that the end of the phrase is delayed, usually by a temporary excursion. So, if you expect the phrase to end at a certain point, but at the last minute the music temporarily takes you someplace (but then finally ends), that is a delay.

elision - is the process of combining two phrases or sections so that their endings and beginnings overlap. If, for example, the second section has already begun before the first section has ended, this is an example of **elision**, and the two sections have been **elided together**.

The more advanced the composer, typically, the more elision is used to make music seamless and flow smoothly from beginning to end. Here are two ways in which elision can work in music: 1) The next section starts up before the first one is ended - this can sound either like an "interruption," or music which swells to the point where it takes the forefront. 2) The previous section is still "tailing off" after the next section has already started. This second method can often sound as if the first section is still "echoing" while the second section has already begun in earnest.

melody, the tune - Melody is that single line of music which is more prominent than the rest of the music, also called the 'tune'. Melody is perhaps the trickiest and least understood part of music. Why is one melody "catchy" and another one "boring" ? No one really knows.

What is certain is that when music has melody, it is the melody which determines the structure of the composition within a section. A melody line can usually be divided up into phrases and small sub-sections, like sentences and paragraphs in a block of text.

Note that this does not mean the composer created the melody first. Very often, a composer will write an accompaniment pattern, and then create a melody which goes over it.

Also, it is important to realize that the melody and the rest of the music work together. Not all melodies work with all harmonies, chord patterns, or rhythmic patterns (and vice-versa). It is up to the composer to create a melody which works well with the rest of the music, or, alternatively, which purposefully does **not** work with the rest of the music.

rhetoric, non-rhetorical - All of the ideas in this section, when combined together, make up the "rhetorical language" of music. All of this: phrases, questions, answers, cadences, goal points, etc. is the "rhetoric" of music.

However, not all music is composed this way. Music may be "non-rhetorical", i.e. completely abstract without these small scale structures. For example, a piece of music may present sound images which create an atmosphere or a mood, without having to resort to melodies, phrases, cadences, and so on.

Music doesn't have to always be "going somewhere", it can just exist. Furthermore, some music is composed of "sound objects" which are artfully placed within a sonic landscape. Many composers feel that such music is closer to nature and therefore more beautiful. Such music could be enjoyed in much the same way that you might enjoy the sound of a babbling brook, falling rain, blustery winds, or the crackling of molten lava cooling.

through-composed - When a composition has no repeated sections and little formal structure it is called **through composed**. In such works, every moment is freshly composed from start to finish.

But it would be a mistake to say that through-composed music has no structure whatsoever. Nearly all music has some sense of departure and return, and often the structure of seemingly unstructured music will become clear as you listen to it more and more.

PART II: Musical Character

When talking about music, discussing musical character can either be really fun or really frustrating. What's fun about it is that anyone can do it. There are no standard musical terms for discussing the character of a music, and so any description is allowed and the more creative the better!

But what can be frustrating is not being able to put your finger on the exact right word to describe the music. The words in this section are just a starting point. Feel free to expand upon them.

Basic Characteristics

energy - Music is energy. Compositions are often referred to as having **high energy** or **low energy**. Composing music is a process of manipulating the flow of energy through a composition. Very often composers will talk about **building energy** (for example, towards the climax of the work) and **releasing energy** (i.e. giving the listener a chance to take a breath before launching into the next thing).

sounds like <xxx> - You should never be afraid to say "This work sounds like <xxx>" as long as <xxx> is **not** another composer. Comparing one composer to another is considered to be poor taste (and not that useful) in most composer circles.

However, saying that a composition is like "dawn at the beginning of a hot summer day", "sharks at a feeding frenzy", or "the dance of planets through the cosmos" is great! Just be creative and have fun with it.

human characteristics - Human characteristics, as long as they aren't too general or intellectual, can be used to describe music. For example, all of the following are good descriptions of musical character: obsessive, flighty, fixated, crazy, eccentric, naïve, child-like, temperamental, unpredictable, conventional, gentle.

emotions - Emotions are also good descriptions of music as long as they are not too general or intellectual. Good examples include: angry, violent, delightful, loving, tender, irritating, reverential, sleepy, excited, anxious, sentimental, nostalgic.

Some opposites

The following are some common opposites used to describe musical character. Note that of the following, **light** and **heavy** are used the most frequently.

light - has the following characteristics: lower volume, higher notes, softer, smoother instruments (e.g. flute is lighter than trumpet), fewer instruments, gentler articulations, more silences, fewer simultaneous instruments playing at the same time.	heavy - has the following characteristics: loud, lower notes, stronger and harsher instruments, more instruments, less silence, harsher articulations, many instruments playing simultaneously.
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stable - recognizable, repeating patterns, unchanging harmonies (or harmonic patterns) and keys. The melody may change, but generally all of the other elements in the sound world are either held constant or repeat in recognizable patterns.	unstable - constantly changing patterns, harmonies, and keys. Unstable music does not repeat (very much) and goes from place to place quickly without stopping or returning to music from earlier in the composition.
stasis - More stable than "stable". Music which is in "stasis" is unchanging almost to the point of boredom. Also often used for slower music with long held notes.	motion - Has many meanings: 1) a synonym for "unstable", 2) fast tempo, 3) fast repeated notes, 4) sounds like transportation (i.e. trains, planes, running, galloping, etc.)
grounded - Music often has a "home place," usually a collection of sounds, harmonies, or a key which feels the most relaxed and satisfying. Grounded music 1) has a "home place" which is firmly established, and 2) spends a lot of time in its "home place". In addition, it generally feels stable, solid, and understandable.	suspended - This is tricky. Music which is purposefully held away from its home place (see "grounded") for extended periods of time is called "suspended". The feeling for the listener is very much the same as being suspended by a rope above the ground. Also, in order for music to feel "suspended" it must also be fairly stable (see above). It just has to be held in a place which has not quite yet returned to "home".
sparse - lots of rests, lots of space, infrequently occurring musical "events" (i.e. new notes or sounds), small number of instruments playing simultaneously, generally slow.	dense - usually means "many things going on simultaneously" (many instruments playing many complex patterns simultaneously). But it can also be used as a synonym for "intense" (see below).
smooth - no sharp contrasts, gentle attacks to notes, longer notes, slower tempo (though not always), gradual transitions from section to section or phrase to phrase, melody lines with few (if any) skips or leaps, i.e. mostly stepwise	jagged - sharp contrasts, harsh attacks, often shorter notes and somewhat faster tempi, sharp (or non-existent) transitions from section to section and phrase to phrase, widely ranging melody lines with large skips and leaps

Miscellaneous useful descriptive words

Here are some other, generally useful descriptions of musical character.

angular - mostly a synonym for "jagged" above, but more focused on the themes or melodies used in the work. Usually contains widely ranging melodies with large skips and leaps that often go up and down and up and down.

lyrical - means "singing". Any music that sounds like it could be easily sung is lyrical. Usually focused on the melody lines and themes in the music.

square, blocky - Often used pejoratively, square or blocky music is considered to be "too regular", with very clear, regular sections and phrases that are all about the same size. **predictable** is also often used.

clashing - most often used for harmonies and melodies. Clashing is where two recognizable sounds are put together to create harsh (i.e. dissonant) sounds via their juxtaposition. When

two things clash, generally the components can still be heard, as well as the harsh sounds of their combination.

crashing - harsh, violent, aggressive music.

wandering, stumbling - music which is unstable (see above). These words further imply that the music has no clear direction or goal.

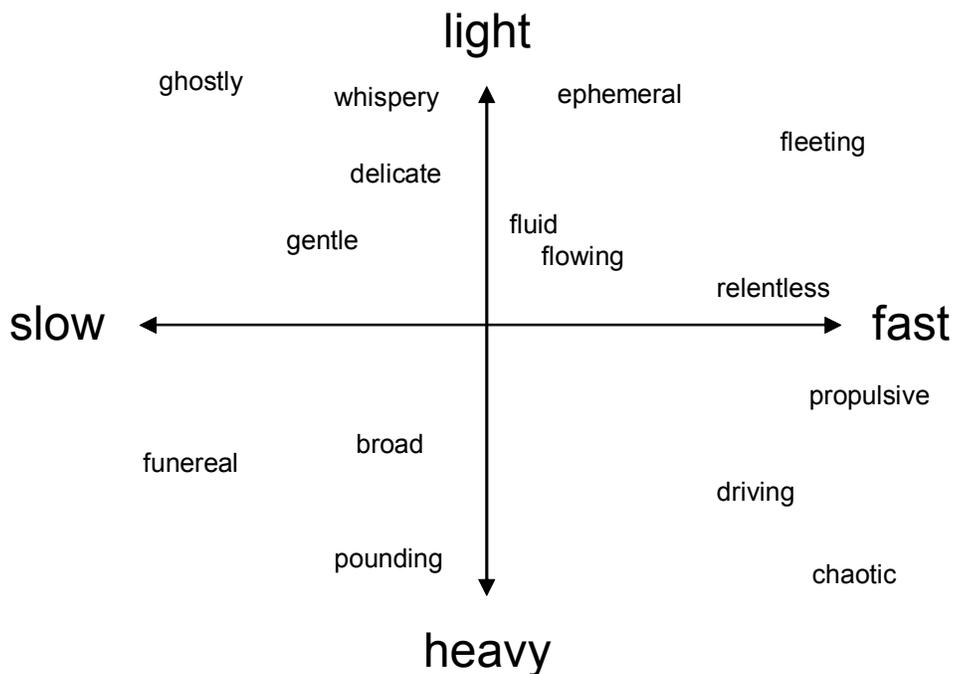
intensity - Compositions are intense when they are complex (i.e. many instruments and a lot of different things going on), abstract, and dissonant. Also, any music which requires extra effort on the part of the listener (such as formal training, very careful listening, multiple listenings, etc.) is considered to be intense.

Curiously, "intensity" has little relation to the speed or volume of the composition.

bite - For any music that has some attitude to it, typically with harsh, grating sounds, strong attacks, etc.

When using any of these words, feel free to use adverbs. For example, "delightfully wandering", "crazy stumbling", "joyfully clashing", etc.

Additional character words which describe various combinations of tempo (slow/fast, see below) and weight (light/heavy - see above) can be found in the graph below.



Tempo

One of the major elements of musical character is tempo.

Unfortunately, tempo is a tricky subject. Fundamentally, the "tempo" is the speed of the composition, i.e. how fast or slow it is. Unfortunately, every composition really has two tempi: 1) the number of "beats per minute" at which the performer is playing -- this is the technical/mathematical speed of the work sometimes this is called the "metronome setting", and 2) the speed at which the composition "feels".

So, it is possible to have a composition with a very slow "metronome setting" which still feels very fast, and vice versa. Because musicians use the generic word "tempo" for both the metronome setting and the feeling of the work, it can easily become confusing.

tempo - Generally, the "tempo" is a synonym for "metronome setting" (see below), but it can also mean simply how fast a work "feels".

Note that it is perfectly OK to say "faster tempo," "slower tempo," "extremely fast tempo," etc. Musicians say these sorts of things all the time.

metronome setting - The physical number of beats per second in the composition. For example, a tempo of "110" is 110 musical beats (i.e. pulses) per minute. Metronome settings can vary from 20 to 300 or more.

Two metronome settings are the most useful: 60 (i.e. one beat every second) and 120 (i.e. two beats every second). It is not uncommon to see musicians looking at their watch to determine the speed of 60 or 120. Other tempo can usually be determined in relation to these two speeds.

Note that music can have a relatively slow metronome setting but still feel fast, and vice versa. The speed that the composition "feels" is often determined by how much the beat is sub-divided, i.e. how many small, fast, little notes are stuffed into a single beat.

metronome - a physical device which counts off beats per second for musicians, and is often used when practicing.

beat - The "beat" is usually what you tap with your foot when listening to a composition. Each tap of your foot represents one "beat". Similarly, when watching a conductor, each motion of the baton ('baton' is French for 'stick') is a "beat".

Unfortunately, any precise definition of "beat" is very complex and probably beyond the scope of this dictionary. What makes it difficult is that a beat can be subdivided by the composer into multiple smaller values, or multiple beats can be joined together to make longer notes. Often times, especially with more modern compositions, it can be literally impossible to determine the beat.

However, it is perfectly acceptable to say "add a few beats," "remove a beat or two," or "just a half a beat longer" anytime you need to ask a composer to make the music just a bit shorter or longer.

strong beats, weak beats, on beats, off beats - Some beats are stronger (have more emphasis) than others. Usually, the first beat in a group of 2, 3, or 4 (depending on the composition) is called the **strong beat**, while the beats which follow it are called the **weak beats**.

For example, hear in your head a slow waltz accompaniment: oom-pah-pah, oom-pah-pah, etc. In this example, the "oom's" are the strong beats and the "pah's" are the weak beats.

Sometimes, strong and weak beats will be called **on beats** and **off beats**. As in "on the strong beat" or "off of the strong beat". Similarly, musicians will say that a note which occurs between two beats is "off the beat".

down beat - Usually once every other strong beat (or so), there will be an even stronger beat, called the "down beat". Down beats occur at the starts of **measures** (see Part VII - Written Music). Measures are small blocks of time (usually a few seconds long) which are strung together to create the composition, and the first beat of every measure is the down beat.

Other descriptions of tempo

There are hundreds, if not thousands of words to describe tempo, especially when you consider that each language (Italian, English, French, German, Russian, etc.) has its own set of terms. The following terms are the most commonly used by composers.

Fixed tempo descriptions, from slower to faster:

largo - very slow

adagio - slow

andante, walking tempo - These both mean the same thing: a tempo where beats occur about as fast as footfalls when you walk at a normal speed.

moderato - moderate

allegro - Italian for "lively". Generally a fast tempo, but not blazingly fast.

vivace - animated

presto - fast

Changes in tempo (i.e. speeding up or slowing down the tempo):

accelerando - gradually get faster

ritardando, ritard - gradually get slower

piu mosso - Italian for "more movement", i.e. suddenly speed up.

meno mosso - Italian for "less movement", i.e. suddenly slow down.

molto meno mosso - suddenly get a lot slower

Other tempo terms:

ma non troppo - Italian for "not too much". Often used with tempo designations, such as "allegro ma non troppo" (a favorite of Beethoven), as in "fast, but not too fast".

Of course, when talking to musicians, feel free to simply say: "fast, but not too fast".

poco a poco - Italian for "little by little". Most often used when the tempo is getting gradually faster or slower (i.e. *accelerando* or *ritardando*). For example, "poco a poco *accelerando*" meaning "little by little, accelerate".

Of course, feel free to simply say it in English, as in: "get faster, little by little".

Finally, don't be afraid to coin your own terms for tempo. For example, all of the following are perfectly good terms for tempo: peppy, aggressive, crazy fast, like a rocket, zooming, elephantine, glacial, ambling, sauntering, big-band swing, slinky jazz, funk-rock, up-tempo jazz, etc.

PART III: Sound

This section discusses sound at its most basic level. These terms will be no good when discussing music in general (for that, use Parts I or II above). Instead, you will need these terms to discuss specific musical needs you may have for specific points in time.

For example, suppose you are creating an art installation and you are projecting symbols on the wall which get brighter and dimmer. You may wish to have music which is high (i.e. high notes) and which gets louder/softer as the lights get brighter/dimmer.

But you may also need to use these terms to analyze what is "wrong" about a piece of music. Perhaps the composer has chosen the wrong instruments? Perhaps the music feels too dry? Perhaps the notes conflict with dialog when they are too high?

But first, a word or two about "notes" and "sound":

note - A "note" is an actual sound performed or sung by an actual performer. A "note" has volume (how loud or soft it is), pitch (how high or low it sounds), timbre (what instrument is playing), and articulation (exactly how it is being played, the attack and decay of the sound).

In general, composers will use "note" when a sound has pitch (see below for a discussion of pitch).

sound - Sometimes it is very difficult, if not impossible to determine the "pitch" or frequency of a note. When this is the case, composers will use the word "sound" instead, as in "when the chandelier falls, we'll play some loud sound".

Examples of sounds which have pitch: Piano, violin, clarinet, singer, etc. Examples of sounds which do not have pitch: snare drum, shushing or hissing, clicks, soft-shoe, knocking on the door, a window breaking, clapping, etc. Examples of sounds which have pitch but where the pitch is so complex it's impossible to determine exactly what it is: Cymbals, many types of gongs, water droplets, door creaking, etc.

strike, hit - Loud, sharp sounds. Used in place of "note". For example, someone might say "we'll put a big cymbal strike here, where she slaps him", or "the music is punctuated with brass hits."

Pitch = Frequency

pitch - As you probably know, sound is made up of waves which move through the air. When those waves occur in repeating patterns (hundreds of times a second), then humans hear the waves as "pitch".

As discussed above, sounds made by pianos, violins, singers, and clarinets (along with lots of other instruments) all have pitch.

Generally, you should not need to know anything about how specific pitches are labeled. But probably you should at least know about "Middle-C". This is the pitch which is in the center of the piano. In fact, middle-C is in the middle of just about everything. It is the note in the middle of the string section, in the middle of a standard SATB (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) choir, in the middle of a brass section, etc. Almost everyone can play or sing middle-C.

frequency - As stated above, when air waves occur in repeated patterns, hundreds of times a second, then humans hear the waves as having pitch. For example, if you play middle-C on the piano you will be creating air waves that repeat 262 times per second.

The "frequency" of a sound is the exact number of times per second that a wave is repeated. Higher pitches will have higher frequencies.

The most important frequency to know is "A-440". This is the primary reference pitch (designated with the letter **A**) or frequency (440 times per second) which is used to tune instruments. You will hear the oboe play a note of A-440 when an orchestra tunes before playing.

lower, higher - Use the words **higher** and **lower** when talking about pitch. Generally, non-professionals do not need to know the exact names of the pitches. Instead, just say "I want higher pitches" or "I want generally lower pitches" and leave the details to the composer or performer.

pitch range - Pitch range, or more simply just the **range**, identifies the highest and lowest note that a performer can produce. All singers and instrumentalists have a **pitch range**, and typically the better performer, the wider is their range.

Especially with singers, you will hear people talk about "high" ranges and "low" ranges. This simply means that they can sing pitches which are higher or lower than normal. For example, a **low soprano** or a **high soprano**. Of course this is true of instruments as well. The piccolo has a **high range** and the double-bass has a **low range**.

register - When talking about portions of a performer's range, you use the word **register**. Typically, discussions of register are pretty vague, as in **high register** (the pitches at the top of the performer's range), **low register** (low pitches), and **middle register**.

All of this discussion about register and range is important because most instruments and singers will sound different in different parts of their range. For example, low notes on the flute sound breathy and velvety, whereas high notes on the flute sound incisive and piercing.

So, just because a performer can play a note, doesn't mean that it can be done with the desired volume or quality. For example, when a composer writes for orchestra, part of their job is to choose the best instrument for each pitch, where the performer can easily play the pitch and will produce the right type of note for the character of the music being performed.

tessitura - For any passage of music, the **tessitura** is the average pitch, i.e. the middle pitch around which the music is centered.

Tessitura is usually used for singers, because music which has a higher tessitura usually requires more physical energy (and better vocal muscles) to sing than music which has a lower tessitura - especially when it is being sung for long periods of time.

Tessitura can either be described as a specific pitch (for example, "the tessitura of this passage is centered around the C above middle-C") or more generically, as in a **high tessitura** or a **low tessitura**.

So, where **range** is more absolute (which pitches can be played and which can not), **tessitura** is more relative (the pitches are centered around such-and-such).

wrong notes - Performers are just human, and so they make mistakes, just like the rest of us. When a performer plays the wrong pitch, we usually say that they are playing **wrong notes**. For example, they play a "B" instead of an "A". For a piano player, it would mean pressing the wrong key on the piano keyboard.

Fixing wrong notes is usually pretty easy. The performer just needs time to practice, so they can hear the music properly inside their head.

tuning, intonation - When a performer plays the wrong pitch, but it is just very slightly off, then this is not a wrong note, instead it is a note which is **out of tune**. When they play a lot of notes which are slightly off, then we say that they have **bad intonation** or have **intonation problems**.

Most instruments (violins, guitars, flutes, etc.) can make slight adjustments in pitch, by stretching a string, adjusting the length of a tube, etc. These slight adjustments are called **tuning** the instrument. This is what happens at the beginning of an orchestra concert: all of the players are tuning their instruments.

So sometimes, when a performer has bad intonation, it is just because their instrument is out of tune. But if not, fixing intonation problems can be very difficult. Most performers spend a great deal of time (years, decades) learning how to **play in tune**, and if they can't then probably you will need to get a new performer.

Dynamics = Volume

volume - Everyone knows what volume is. It's the dial on the radio or CD player which makes it louder or softer.

louder, softer - Whenever you talk about the volume of sound being produced, always be sure to say **louder** and/or **softer**. You could also say **more** and **less**, as in "please give me more sound".

But especially do **not** say lower, higher, down, or up -- as these terms are more typically used for talking about pitch (see above).

dynamics - is the musical category that encompasses all words that talk about volume levels. This can include specific volume levels (loud, soft, medium-loud, etc.) as well as changes in volume (gradually get softer, get suddenly louder, etc.)

Dynamic markings are musical symbols that composers and musicians write on music to identify how loud or soft to play the music.

dynamic range - Is a measure of the range of volume levels inside a piece of music. If a musical work has both very soft and very loud music (like most classical music), it has a wide dynamic range. If, however, it is mostly loud (like most rock music) and does not vary much in volume then it has a very narrow dynamic range.

Dynamic range is very important for **sound production**, i.e. the technology required to reproduce music on CDs, speakers, etc.

There are many terms used by musicians for volume levels:

fortissimo - very loud (abbrev: ff)
forte - Italian for "strong", means loud (abbrev: f)
mezzo forte - medium loud (abbrev: mf)
mezzo piano - medium soft (abbrev: mp)
piano - soft (abbrev: p)
pianissimo - very soft (abbrev: pp)

And there are also many terms for changes in volume:

crescendo - gradually increase in volume
decrescendo - gradually decrease in volume
molto - used for large changes in volume, as in "molto crescendo" and "molto decrescendo"
subito - used for sudden changes in volume, as in "subito forte" (suddenly get loud) and "subito pianissimo" (suddenly get very soft)
poco a poco - used for slow changes in volume, as in "poco a poco crescendo" (little by little get louder) and "poco a poco decrescendo" (little by little get softer)
swell - When the music "swells", it gets louder.

die away - When the music "dies away", it gets softer until you can't hear it anymore.

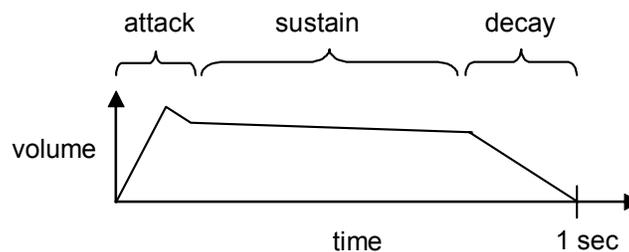
hairpins - Hairpins are symbols which people write into music to indicate that the sound is supposed to get louder or softer. They look like this:



Articulation = Attack and Decay

Do you have a piano nearby? Go to the piano and play a single note. Just one.

Suppose the note you played lasts for a second. If you look at the volume of sound that the piano produced during that second of sound, you might get a graph that looks something like this:



In other words, when you struck the key the sound got loud very fast (the **attack**), and then it stayed about the same for a while (the **sustain**), maybe getting slightly softer, and then it died away fairly quickly when you released the key (the **decay**).

articulation - The volume profile for a single note (as in the graph above), is called the note's "articulation". This includes the sharpness of the attack, the amount of sustain, and the length of the decay.

Performers, especially orchestra players, are experts at shaping notes, and much of the character of a piece of music comes from how the notes are articulated.

The following are used to specify the articulations for a series of notes:

staccato - Short, precise notes. Like saying "dot, dot, dot, dot, dot"

legato - Long, blended notes with no noticeable gaps between them. Like saying "rah-rah-rah-rah"

marcato - Very strong notes with harsh attacks, like saying "kak, kak, kak, kak"

separated - Notes with noticeable silent gaps between them.

But feel free to use any adjective you like. Some common adjectives are: **smooth, flowing, choppy, sustained, pointed, knocking, banging, pinging**, etc.

The following are used to specify the articulation for a single note:

accent - a note which is emphasized, in relation to others around it. This usually means that the note has a sharp attack, but can also mean a little more volume as well.

emphasis - like an accent, but not as strong. As in "give that third note a bit more emphasis".

sforzando - an especially strong accent.

forte-piano - literally means "loud-soft" in Italian. The note is held loud for a fraction of a second, and then is suddenly soft.

fermata - a note which is held out longer than normal (the sustain portion of the note is abnormally lengthy). These are also called **held notes**.

Words you might hear in popular musical styles include:

stinger - A loud "snap", usually at the end of a long note or at the end of a phrase. ????

bump - Usually low percussive "thumps". ????

hit - As in "brass hits", these are percussive notes with strong attacks usually used to punctuate a more flowing melodic line.

others???

Instrumentation = Timbre

timbre - Remember that sound is made up of waves which move through the air. In technical terms, timbre (pronounced "TAM-ber") is the shape of those traveling waves.

Timbre is the quality of the sound, or the type of the sound. Timbre is most closely associated with instruments. A flute has a different timbre from an oboe. The flute has a more rounded, breathy sound, whereas the oboe is a more woody, nasal sound. This is because the flute and oboe produce different sound waveforms. This means they have different timbres.

sound world, sound environment - Timbre is most critical when constructing a world of sound. The composer wants to choose a collection of sounds which work together to create an atmosphere within which the music will live.

For example, if you've heard hip-hop or rap music, you can easily envision the urban street environment which it creates using scratching, shouts, aggressive text declamation, and percussion.

Contrast the urban sound environment to one which is more mystical and ethereal, such as might be created by Kaija Saariaho (a modern art-music composer), or Enya (a new-age composer), or even Alanis Morissette (example: "Uninvited").

These different **sound worlds** are primarily created by carefully choosing instruments for their timbre - their sound qualities.

instrumentation - The list of instruments which are needed to perform a musical work.

Some common opposites:

The following words are often used when talking about timbre:

<p>wet, resonant - Used for sounds that resonate for a long time, meaning it takes a long time for the sound to die away, even after the instrument has been silenced. For example, playing the piano with the pedal held down. Also, standard instruments will sound wet if they play in a very resonant, echo-y space, such as a cave, or tile bathroom.</p> <p>Usually used for the entire sound of a musical work (i.e. all instruments put together, not just a single instrument).</p> <p>When discussing instruments, those which produce "wet" sounds are those which ring or resonate for a long time, such as bells, gongs, vibraphone, guitar (esp. electric guitar), etc.</p>	<p>dry - A dry sound or space is one that has no resonance, echo, or reverberation in the sound. Standard instruments will sound dry if they are played in a "dry space", such as outside in a field, in a tent (or some other space where all the walls are covered with fabric), or an "anechoic chamber", like a recording studio.</p> <p>Similarly, with instruments, dry sounds are those which do not resonate much. Examples include wood block, violin pizzicato, ratchet, snare drum, etc.</p>
<p>dark - Dark sounds are those which are more woody and mellow. Examples of instruments which are especially dark include double-bass, viola, bass voice, bassoon, French horn.</p> <p>Most instruments will sound darker as they play lower and lower pitches. For example, flute, clarinet, and alto voice all sound wonderfully dark when they produce low notes.</p>	<p>bright - Bright sounds are more sharp, piercing and metallic (imagine a metal plate being dropped on the ground) Examples include trumpet, violin, glockenspiel (in fact, most mallet instruments), bells, and oboe.</p> <p>Most instruments will sound brighter as they play higher and higher pitches. For example, violoncello and French horn can both sound very bright when they play high notes.</p>
<p>warm - Very similar to "dark", used for mellow, comforting sounds.</p>	<p>cool, icy - Often high-pitched, crystalline, and metallic.</p>
<p>lush - Rich and warm sonorities, often flowing music with many instruments, full sounds, and sweet harmonies.</p>	<p>spare - Very few instruments playing simultaneously, dry sounds, lots of silence.</p>
<p>sweet - Can be used for female voices that are light and innocent, or for music which is harmonious, consonant, and generally soothing.</p>	<p>harsh, grating - Abrasive music with lots of dissonance and scratchy ugly sounds.</p>

<p>muddy - when "lush" goes too far it becomes muddy, too many instruments playing legato music at the same time and in the same pitch range.</p>	<p>clear, clean - used when the music can be perceived and understood quickly and when the major lines and important points are clearly highlighted to the ear. Music without extraneous sounds, instruments, and melodies is usually very clean.</p>
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Some other common timbre descriptions:

nasal, pinched - Hold your nose and sing. Like that. Often used for oboe, English horn, and muted brass instruments (a **mute** is a cone that is stuck into the end of the instrument to make the sound more pinched and nasal).

brassy - Like brass instruments. Also used for very strong female voices in the middle register (like Ethel Merman or Liza Minnelli).

woody - Used for instruments that are made of wood, like clarinets, oboes, wood flutes, marimba, etc.

velvety, soft, breathy - Anything with lots of "h" and "s" in the sound, such as flute, soft whistling, very soft strings, etc.

noisy, dirty, scratchy, raspy - Anything with lots of noise (i.e. static, scratches, etc.) in the sound, such as very loud and harsh string playing, and some older singers who have had too many cigarettes.

A variety of other qualitative descriptions: Use these whenever appropriate

clangy, glistening, bell-like, crystalline, buzzy, razzzy, incisive, piercing, brushy, shriek, growly, mystical, ethereal, otherworldly, honk

PART IV: Texture

Texture in music is very similar in a lot of ways to texture in fabric. It can contain repeated patterns, multiple intertwining colors of thread, or it might be constructed to be pleasingly random.

Similarly, when musicians talk about musical texture, they could be discussing any of three very different musical concepts:

repeated patterns - Most music contains repeated patterns. When these patterns repeat frequently, they will start to feel like a texture. For example, just say "boom, ba-da boom ba-da boom, ba-da boom" over and over. You have just created a musical texture. Now imagine that someone is singing a song over your pattern, and you can see how a texture can be used to support a melody line.

In popular music, **drum loops** and **grooves** are examples of repeated patterns which serve as musical texture. In classical music, these sorts of repeated patterns are called **ostinato**.

vertical lines / accompaniment - A second meaning for "musical texture" is when talking about the number of distinct musical voices that are playing simultaneously. For example, a piece could have a single, solo voice. Or, it could have two singers singing a duet. Or it could have a single voice with a simple accompaniment of chords on piano or guitar. Or it could have lots of voices all going everywhere at the same time.

These are all forms of "vertical" texture, i.e. the number of independent lines of music playing or singing at the same time, stacked vertically on the musical page. This is in contrast to repeated patterns, which a form of "horizontal" texture, i.e. patterns which repeat over time (shown left to right on a musical page).

environmental sound worlds - A third form of texture is more of an **environmental** texture and can incorporate both vertical and horizontal forms of texture, as well as timbre (i.e. instrument) choices. This is more of an all encompassing form of texture, where the composer is careful to choose instruments, patterns, and voices to create an environment within which the music lives. For example, a composer might try and replicate the atmosphere of a pine forest with a babbling brook, or a monastic temple, or a NASCAR race in music.

Before we define the words appropriate for each of these three different concepts of texture, it is worth covering **vertical** and **horizontal** in more detail:

vertical - Music is unique in the human experience in that it can easily and naturally support **layering**. With layering, the composer can have multiple strains of music playing simultaneously. For example, the singer, the bass guitar, the drums, and the lead guitar can all be playing at the same time.

In any other art form or human experience, having four different things happening at the same time would be just a noisy mess (imagine watching four different TV programs at the

same time, or having four different pictures painted on top of each other with translucent paint). But in music, the composer can make all of the different layers work together, so that each one reinforces the others, to create a unified work of art.

Layers are called the "vertical" dimension of music because they are arranged vertically on a musical score. In the score excerpt below, there are seven instruments playing simultaneously: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet and trombone. These seven instruments are arranged vertically on the page, one on top of the other, showing the different layers of music being played simultaneously.

Another often-used word for **layer** is **line**. For example, if you have five singers, each singer might play a different line of music. "Lines" are often used when music is very intertwined.

A musical score excerpt for seven instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (C Tpt.), and Trombone (Tbn.). The score is written on seven staves, with the instruments listed on the left. The music is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. The score is marked with a dynamic of *f* (forte) and includes a rehearsal mark 'N' at the end. The page number '110' is visible in the top left corner.

horizontal - The horizontal dimension in music is **time**. In a musical score, such as the one above, time is shown progressing from left to right. All of the players start playing from the left hand side and progress to the right hand side going at the same rate of speed (usually following a conductor).

This means that a conductor can look at a score, and at any point in time (at any point from left to right in the score) can see exactly what every instrument should be playing.

Because repeated patterns occur in time (like the "boom, ba-da boom, ba-da boom" example above), they are shown horizontally across a musical score.

Repeated Patterns

Repeated patterns often serve as an "engine" or motoric force which propels the music forward. These types of patterns are often called **ostinato** or **grooves**.

ostinato - Simply means a short repeated musical pattern. **Ostinato** is typically used when talking about repeated patterns in classical music, and usually for patterns which serve as the foundation of the music (i.e. the accompaniment rather than the melody). For example, *The Rite of Spring* is known for its heavy reliance on ostinato.

groove - Used in commercial (i.e. pop, rock-n-roll, soul, etc.) music, grooves are repeated patterns usually made up of many instruments working together (typically drums, guitars, and other percussion) creating patterns that repeat, like, every few seconds or so.

Grooves will often start every pattern with a strong "thump" (i.e. drum beat, loud note, etc.) which launches the music forward into the pattern. It then will use other instruments to surprise and excite the ear, gaining interest and momentum into the next repetition of the pattern when it starts all over again.

Grooves are often used as the foundation layer of popular music, over which singers will sing the song.

loop / drum loop - In software programs such as Apple's GarageBand (just one example), you can download "loops". Loops are small fragments of music (a few seconds or less) which can be repeated and layered on top of each other to create grooves. Once you've created a good groove, you can then sing over top of it to make a song.

Since loops are most often used for percussion, you may hear them referred to as "drum loops".

It sounds easy, doesn't it? Create a pattern, loop it, and then sing on top and you can create your own song.

But in fact, professional musicians rarely repeat the pattern exactly the same way twice. If you listen closely, a good group will add notes, change pitches, stretch the pattern, compress the pattern, slightly delay notes, all to create variety and to support the intentions of the song.

vamp - A vamp is a short repeated, instrumental introduction to a song. They are often used in musicals and opera to provide flexibility for the singer. For example, the singer can finish up whatever they are doing on stage and then start singing at the end of any vamp repetition.

Vamps are also used just to set the stage for a song. Famous vamps include the instrumental introductions to "Singing in the Rain" and "New York, New York".

repeat - When used alone, a **repeat** is usually used to indicate a section of music that should be played two (or more) times. Only when a repeat is shorter (a few seconds or less) and is repeated many many times does it become a groove or an ostinato. If a repeat is only

repeated once (i.e. the section of music is played twice) and if it is longer (i.e. 10 seconds or more) then it becomes more an element of musical structure (see Part I) than texture.

motive - A motive is usually a short musical pattern that may be used over and over in a work of music, but not necessarily repeated in a strictly periodic fashion. The most famous motive would be the first four notes of Beethoven's Symphony #5, "dah-dah-dah dummmmm". If you listen carefully to the music that follows, that same pattern is used over and over, in different instruments, with different pitches, and at different speeds.

This is different than a groove or ostinato which repeats the same pattern using (mostly) the same pitches and same tempo with a regular periodicity. Motives are more like mosaic tiles, used over and over in different angles, colors, and positions to build up a larger picture.

Motives are more often used in classical music composition than popular music.

pattern transformations - Composers will often modify patterns as a composition progresses. This is done to increase excitement, propel the motion of the work forward, or to create variety. Typical pattern transformations include adding or removing notes to the pattern, making the pattern play slower or faster (**augmentation, diminution**), playing the pattern backwards (**retrograde**), turning it upside down (instead of pitches going up, they go down and vice-versa, called **inversion**), or dicing up the pattern into small pieces (**fragmentation**, or, if you want to be cool and up-to-date, '**liquefying**').

Lines or Layers of Music

This section contains terms which specify methods for playing notes together at the same time, the "vertical" dimension of music (see **horizontal** and **vertical**, above).

chord - A chord is a set of three or more notes played at the same time. One note is just a **note**, two notes make an **interval**, three or more notes make a **chord**. Chords are used everywhere in music. For example, many songs are simply a singer singing the melody while someone plays chords on the piano or on a guitar.

Chords are important in determining **harmony** (see Part V below).

melody, accompaniment - When music has multiple layers, often one line will be the most prominent. This is usually the line which is highest and/or the loudest, and is often called the **melody**. In a pop song, it is the person singing. In a violin concerto, it's usually the violin, etc.

The rest of the music, everything but the most prominent line, is called the **accompaniment**, because it accompanies the melody line. If there is a single person playing all of the rest of the music (for example, someone playing the piano to accompany a singer), that person is called the **accompanist**.

polyphonic - When music has multiple layers and the layers are very nearly equally important, it is called **polyphonic** music. Many choral works are polyphonic, most notably the choral music of Bach.

homophonic - Sometimes, in polyphonic music, the different instruments or singers will be tied tightly together, playing or singing different notes but together, in the same rhythmic patterns, and roughly at the same time creating a series of chords. This is called **homophonic** music. Examples of homophonic music include barbershop quartet songs and brass fanfares.

contrapuntal - When the different layers are more independent, playing different notes at different times with different rhythms and patterns, this is called **contrapuntal** music. Music which is polyphonic is also typically contrapuntal. The best examples of contrapuntal music are the preludes, fugues, inventions of J. S. Bach.

monophonic - If there is only a single instrument or singer singing or playing a single line, this is called **monophonic** or **solo** music. For example, a saxophone player in a subway station plays monophonic music.

Environmental Sound Worlds

All music tries to create a world of sound which evokes emotions and creates an environment that draws in the audience. Texture is a key component (perhaps the single most important component) in creating these worlds of sound.

Very often, modern music is less concerned with independent lines of music and more interested in the overall effect. Many times it may be hard to hear lines at all. Instead, the music may sound more like "clouds of shimmering sounds" gently shifting in color, or "speckled, disjointed organic patterns". Don't worry if this is the case. Not all music is made up of independent layers or lines or repeating patterns.

And so there are many, many different kinds of texture, most of which do not have specific musical terminology to describe them. When this is the case, refer to Part II above, "Musical Character", for help in describing these unique types of musical texture.

Here are some additional words to use when talking about texture:

dense - many instruments playing many different notes all at different times

thin, sparse - a small number of performers, playing notes only every so often

gnarly - highly complex, often non-repeating patterns (like the gnarled patterns in the grain of wood)

busy - fast, complex music, often used as a pejorative to indicate that the music is too complex

intricate - many intertwining lines of music

pulsing - slow repeated notes

PART V: Harmony

Harmony is about color. Pitches can be combined into chords to create sound colors which are bright or dark, warm or cool, steely or woody, or harsh or soft.

Harmony is also about tension and relaxation. Once a piece of music has established a "home" place, harmony can be used to create tension - like stretching a rubber band. This tension gives the audience a reason to keep listening: like dramatic tension, they will be listening for that satisfying conclusion when the music returns to its home place and the tension is relaxed (when the rubber band is let go and it relaxes back to its original position).

Harmony is also a difficult subject to discuss. Not only can the discussion be very dense, technical, and obscure, but it is also the source of a lot of heated confrontations between composers.

And harmony is really only a portion of the musical experience, and possibly not the most important portion. Issues of texture, timbre, instrumentation, and rhythm are all taking on larger and larger roles in music, while harmony, especially traditional, **common practice harmony**, is becoming less and less of a concern for most composers. The motto of Grunge music was that anyone could play with just two chords and attitude, and frankly a lot of great music has been written with very simple harmonies. Lots of modern art music has absolutely no harmony at all (just percussion).

So, don't get stuck on harmony.

Basic concepts

A complete discussion of harmony is clearly out of the scope of this document, but here are a few terms which will let you talk about harmony without getting too technical.

harmony - Harmony is the general discussion of how all of the notes in a piece of music work together. When you have notes playing at the same time, you will get chords and these chords will produce certain kinds of sounds (i.e. relaxed, tense, stable, warm, dissonant, etc.). Furthermore, there are certain sequences of chords (chord progressions) which are known to work well, smoothly transition from one to the other, and create a satisfying journey for the listener.

And so harmony covers all of this: how notes fit together to create chords, and how chords can progress from one to another to create satisfying patterns of sounds.

chord - A chord is a set of three or more notes played at the same time (one note is just a **note**, two notes make an **interval**).

A complete discussion of chords is well beyond the scope of this document, but there are a few types of chords which are worth knowing:

triads - By far the most common type of chords are triads, which contain three notes spaced at specific intervals. There are four types of triads, the most common of which are the **major** and **minor** triads (also called, more simply, the major and minor chords).

seventh chords - If you listen to lots of Jazz or soul music, you will hear lots of seventh chords. Seventh chords are triads with an additional note, making them four-note chords and often giving them a more sophisticated sound.

tonic - In most music, there is one note which is the **tonic** and serves as the most important and fundamental note of the composition. This note is the same as the key. For example, if the key is C Major (as in Symphony in C major) then the tonic note will be "C".

The tonic note exerts a gravitational pull on all of the notes in a composition. Most melodies will eventually lead towards the tonic note, and most compositions will both begin and end with the tonic note.

tonic triad - Also called simply the **tonic** or the **one chord** (as in the roman-numeral **I chord**), this is the most stable chord in a composition. Most musical compositions end with the tonic triad.

harmonic progression / chord progression - A sequence of chords played one after another. Composers use chord progressions to carry the listener on a journey, usually from a stable place in music, to some distance place, and then back again. The best chord progressions have a feeling of inevitability to them, as if the listener was being carried downstream on a raft by a smooth flowing river.

common practice harmony - One set of chord progressions has been in use for hundreds of years and was used and refined by all of the master composers (Bach, Beethoven, etc). This progression is called either **standard harmony** or **common practice harmony**. Simple versions of this basic harmony may be called "I-IV-V-I" (say "one-four-five-one") or "I-V-I" (say "one-five-one"). These roman numerals refer to specific types of chords which make up the progression.

Since Debussy, around 1880, this standard set of chord progressions has become less important and less frequently used.

12-bar blues - A standard chord progression used for Blues music which takes 12 bars to complete.

harmonic motion - How fast and frequently chords change as a composition progresses.

Harmonic motion is used by composers for many different purposes: 1) The frequency of chord changes can speed up as the music approaches the end of a section, pulling the listener forward, 2) Very regular, slow, and/or periodic chord changes can give a work a

very stable, almost hypnotic quality, 3) Very irregular and fast chord changes will make the music unstable.

Also, the speed of harmonic motion has a lot to do with the style or genre of a piece of music. For example, church hymns will sometimes change chords on every note, whereas romantic symphonies can go for very long stretches on the same chord. Some modern compositions have no chord changes at all.

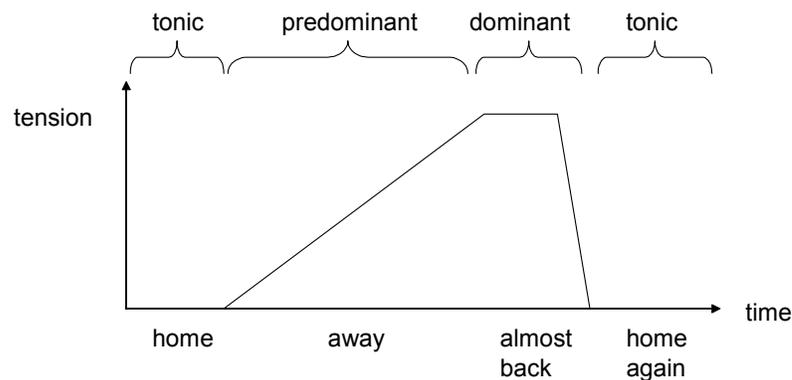
tonic, predominant, dominant - In common practice harmony (see above), there are three major harmonic functions or categories of chords: tonic, predominant, and dominant. While these terms are technical and rarely used, they are so useful for understanding harmony that it is well worth at least reading about them.

If you think of harmony as taking the listener on a journey, then **tonic** is home - this is where the journey both starts and ends. **predominant** is a complex and very rich category of many different chords and functions which can represent either the first steps away from home, or the preparation for dominant (i.e. the chords which indicate that dominant is coming). **dominant** (also called "five" as in "V" or "five-seven" as in "V⁷") is a very powerful collection of chords - it indicates to the listener that you are "almost home" and is the place of highest tension and anticipation.

And so, in music which is written in common practice harmonies, the listener is taken on a journey:

1. tonic - home, a comfortable stable place
2. predominant - taking the first steps away from home, visiting many different places, and then preparing to head back home
3. dominant - very nearly almost home, but not quite there yet
4. tonic - back home again

If this were graphed, it might look like this:



This basic **harmonic plan** underlies a lot of western music. It is used both within a single phrase (lasting a few seconds) as well as across an entire piece of music (from minutes to hours long). In this way, the entire work becomes a series of journeys, small journeys within larger journeys, within even larger excursions which make up the entire piece of music.

implied harmony - You might think that someone playing a solo instrument (such as flute or violin) without any accompaniment would have no harmony, since there are no chords. But in fact, even solo music has **implied harmony**, where the harmony may not be specifically stated, but is implied by the notes chosen to make up the melody line.

tonal, atonal - Do not use these words. The problem is that they mean many different things to many different people.

Tonal can mean any music which is: 1) relatively consonant and pleasant to listen to, 2) which uses a common-practice harmonic plan, 3) contains a clear tonic note (or reference pitch) which serves to ground the composition, or 4) uses triads.

Atonal can mean any music which is: 1) is merely harsh and ugly sounding, 2) is written in a very specific style called 12-tone serialism, 3) very carefully avoids any clear tonic notes or stable keys, 4) is constructed without using either the standard major or minor scales, or 5) is constructed without using any scales at all (just collections of intervals).

Another common misconception is that tonal and atonal are opposites of each other, i.e. every music which is not "tonal" must be "atonal", and vice-versa. This is wrong. Using the strictest definitions, there is lots of music which is neither tonal nor atonal (such as all renaissance music and a great deal of 20th century music). Using a more flexible definition, you can find many pieces which are *both* tonal and atonal (e.g. written using 12-tone serialism but with strong reference pitches or tonic notes).

So, as you can see, the terms are best avoided. At this point in history, they are too ambiguous to be useful.

General Descriptions of Harmony

stable, unstable - Stable harmonies are clear, unchanging, and feel like they are "settled". Unstable sounds change frequently, feel unsettled, and are often ambiguous (i.e. you don't know where you are or how to get back to the tonic chord). Music will often go from stable harmonies, through periods of increasing instability, before returning back to stable sounds again.

tension, resolution - Harmonies can be used to create an unresolved, tense feeling in music. When this feeling of **tension** dissipates, it is called the **resolution**.

consonance, dissonance - These terms are used to indicate how smooth or harsh the chord sounds. In practice, these terms are not that useful (composers hate them), because all music is a mixture of consonant and dissonant sounds.

grounded - is used for music which is never very far away from "home" (tonic), or where the home key and the tonic are very firmly established (usually by repetition or with a strong low note).

Fooling the Ear, Unexpected Uses of Harmony

Some of the best music has the element of surprise, moments when you expect something to happen, and instead you get something which is more interesting and more delightful. Some of these moments have specific technical names associated with them.

suspension - A suspension occurs when the melody lags **behind** the harmony (in the accompaniment). Specifically, you will get a suspension when the harmony has moved on to a new chord, but the melody is still playing a note which is more appropriate for the previous chord. Suspensions are wonderfully delicious, because the clash between the melody and the harmony is usually unexpected, and the delay makes the ultimate resolution of the melody line (i.e. when it finally "catches up" with the harmony) twice as satisfying.

anticipation - Anticipation is the opposite of suspension, and occurs when the melody is **ahead of** the harmony. This occurs when the melody has moved to a note appropriate to the new chord while the harmony still lags behind playing the old chord. Anticipations, while fun, are usually not as wonderful as suspensions, and therefore not used as much. You will often find them at the ends of pieces, anticipating the final cadence.

deceptive cadence - A deceptive cadence is a last-second harmonic surprise. This usually occurs when both the melody and the harmony are leading the ear to a specific place (usually the tonic chord). The composer can then create a deceptive cadence when the melody goes to the note which is expected, but the harmony goes someplace unexpected.

When used effectively, deceptive cadences can provide a wonderful "oh wow" feeling. But often they can be overused, at which point they become just another part of the harmonic plan.

Keys and Scales

scales - There are hundreds, if not thousands of different scales and keys. The most popular scales are the major and minor scales (with seven notes each), the pentatonic (five notes), the octatonic (eight notes), and the chromatic (twelve notes).

The idea of a scale is to limit the possible pitches from which to choose from, and so to provide a framework and a general "sound pallet" for the composition. The scale will usually determine the general feeling of the music and will often be a major factor in determining what chords and chord progressions will make up the harmony.

major scale - Contains seven notes. Often used for happy, positive, upbeat, or noble music.

minor scale - Contains seven notes. Often used for sad, mellow, or more passionate music.

octatonic scale - Contains eight notes. Often used for more modern, dissonant, expressionistic music, or merely for music which has a "quirky edge" to it.

pentatonic scale - Contains five notes. At times, pentatonic can sound ethnic or Asian, and at other times it can sound ethereal and new-agey. It's pretty much impossible to create bad or harsh sounds using a pentatonic scale.

blues scale - The same as a major or minor scale, but with alterations to make them sound more soulful and characteristic of the American south.

key - In traditional (i.e. common practice) music, the key identifies a type of scale (major or minor) plus the first note of the scale. For example, "C major" is a major scale which starts on C.

Certain keys will tend to feel "warmer" or "brighter" than other keys, especially when they are directly compared to each other. Composers may choose a certain key to emphasize a particular mood of a piece (this was much more often the case in the 18th century than it is today).

Otherwise, the key affects a variety of technical issues which are very important to performers and singers. The key can affect how easy it is to play the music, how bright or dark it sounds on the instrument, or even if it is possible to play the music at all (depending on the key, the music may be either too high or too low to be performed on a particular instrument).

transposition - When the music is converted from one key to another, this process is called "transposition". Musical is usually transposed to make it easier to perform.

key change - Very often music will change keys in the middle of the composition. This is done for a variety of reasons: 1) to add interest or variety (a new key can give music a much needed "lift" - i.e. an increase in energy), 2) to create a sense of departure from the original key, 3) to heighten the tension on the composition, or 4) to make the music more unstable or uncertain.

modes - Major and minor (also called "aeolian") are the two most common scale "modes" which are used. There are five other modes available (dorian, phrygian, lydian, mixolydian, and locrian). Music which is written in a mode will impart a unique character to the music, often giving it an ancient or rustic feeling.

modal - Modal music is music which is written in a mode other than simply major or minor.

PART VI: Songs and Song Form

From its very beginning, music has always been an extension of the human voice. Even today, the most popular and populous music are songs, and by far the largest number of performers are singers.

Song and Speech and In-between

Over the years, composers have explored many different vocal techniques and styles and are constantly exploring the boundaries between song and speech.

The terms in this section present a spectrum of different vocalization techniques, from natural talking to highly stylized formal song.

dialog - Standard dialog as written out in a play.

prose, monologue - Natural speech, but written out in full sentences and structured to communicate a point.

declamatory statements - Spoken statements like you might hear at a political speech. These are usually short, direct statements which are written with an ear towards making them rhythmically appealing.

poetry - Like you might hear at a poetry reading, poetry is spoken text that is carefully created to produce an intense emotional and/or visual impact. Poets will also carefully choose words for the rhythm of the language as well as the sounds (vowels, consonants, etc.) produced by the words.

rap - Rap music lives in a place between spoken text and song. It contains strong rhythms and occasional pitches, while (in the hands of the best rap artists) still retaining a flexibility which makes it close to declamatory speech.

sprechstimme - is a kind of "sing-song" speech. The rhythms are carefully specified by the composer as well as the pitches, but the singer is encouraged to merely touch on the pitches as they move from word to word. Sprechstimme was first popularized by Arnold Schoenberg in his *Pierrot Lunaire*. For another example, see *façade*, by William Walton.

chant - Chant is usually used for religious services, such as Catholic mass, ancient Hawai'ian hula, Arabic call to prayer, etc. While all words of the chant are sung, they are usually limited to just a few pitches, with most of the text chanted on a single pitch which then rises or falls at the ends of phrases or to emphasize key points. The singer often has a great deal of flexibility in chanting the rhythms of the song.

recitative - First invented in 1600 in an attempt to recreate Greek drama, **recitative** is the first form where all of the rhythms and pitches are precisely specified. Typically, the pitches and rhythms are chosen to be as similar to spoken text as possible, making recitative a heightened and more vocally powerful form of speech. Recitative deviates from song in that

the music does not usually have an independent life of its own away from the words. At times, recitative can be indistinguishable from chant, while at other times it can have an integrity that is very close to song.

The function of recitative is for singers in opera to get through large amounts of text without taking up a lot of time on stage. Recitative is closer to speech, so the words are easier to understand. Furthermore, recitative happens at a speed which is closer to normal speaking. This is different than song which is usually more metered, and contains musical pauses and repeats that will tend to take up a lot more time on stage than recitative. Finally, recitative is useful in large spaces (such as opera halls) because the singing voice carries further over long distances than the speaking voice.

arioso, songlet - Very often in musicals or opera, singers will break into song for just a few seconds to indicate a heightened emotional feeling or purpose. These song fragments will tend to have melodies and rhythms that are more musically distinct than recitative, but they will not last as long or have a sense of departure and return which you would typically find in a formal song.

song - Songs differ from everything listed above primarily in length and structure. Typically, all notes and rhythms are carefully specified. Also, most songs are composed to be "complete", that is, to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, so the listener is taken on a journey as they listen through the song and will have a satisfied feeling of completeness when it is over. In this way, a song is more cohesive as an independent unit than songlets or recitative.

Songs will often have other characteristics: repeated music, multiple sections, a sense of departure and return, repeated text, and the use of rhythmic and melodic motives (see part IV - Texture).

scat - Scat is at the end of the list because in many ways it is *beyond* standard song. With scat, the music has so completely taken over the text, that all meaning in the text is lost. The human voice becomes a musical instrument. The text is made up of nonsense syllables which are chosen for their sound and not for their meaning, and the singer improvises the melody, often rapidly and playfully, for the sheer delight of producing music.

Song Structure

This section covers terms used to describe the structure of songs. Most of these terms are specific to song forms. See Part I for more words used to describe structure, for all types of music.

AABA - The AABA form has four sections of music (A, A, B, and A). The first, second, and fourth sections all use (roughly) the same music, whereas the third section (the 'B' section, also called the 'bridge' - see below) has contrasting music.

With the AABA form, each section has a specific function. The first A serves to introduce the basic material used in the song. The second A is needed to firmly establish this material as our home base (and give the audience a better chance to remember it). The B material is

an excursion (a journey away from home) which leads the audience in new directions. The final A is a satisfying return to home.

Dramatically, the sections can be used to say the following: A: Here is what I want to say. A: Let me say it again. B: But here is some new, contrasting information. A: But still, here is what I want to say. The purpose of the B section is to provide new information which causes the audience to hear the A section from a different perspective.

A my professor once said: "A: I love you. A: I really love you. B: I want to kill you. A: But I love you."

bridge - In the AABA song form (see above), the "B" section is also called the **bridge**. The bridge of the song has the following characteristics: a) it contains music which contrasts with what came before, and the music is usually less stable and departs further from the main music than has been done previously, b) the words are different as well, and may also be structured differently (different number of syllables per line, etc.) c) it is often the emotional high-point of the song, d) it is often between two more stable and predictable sections (i.e. it 'bridges' them).

Bridges can, and often do, occur in verse/chorus forms (see below) as well, as in:
verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus, chorus

verse/chorus - The verse/chorus form is a very good form for storytelling in song. The (most basic) structure alternates between two sections: verse, chorus, verse, chorus...

In a typical verse/chorus song, each verse will have the same music but different words, and each chorus will have the same music with the same (or very nearly the same) words.

The idea in verse chorus is that each verse is a discourse on a subject from a new perspective or point in time. Each verse is then followed by a chorus which serves to emphasize and drive home the main point of the entire song. For example, a song could say the following:

V: A young girl has a crush on a teacher..., C: Don't stand so close
V: She is the teacher's pet, they get together..., C: Don't stand so close
V: Others accuse them of wrongdoing..., C: Don't stand so close

Or, each verse could be from a different perspective:

V: I used to be waited on and now I'm a maid..., C: Life goes on
V: I used to be slim and now I am ample..., C: Life goes on
V: I used to be rich and now I am poor..., C: Life goes on

Verse/chorus forms can also have a **bridge** (see **bridge** above). Typically, this bridge contains contrasting music and serves to provide an emotional high-point for the song.

introduction, coda - Introductions are special sections which occur at the beginning of the song and serve to 'set the stage' for the song. Introductions put the audience in the correct frame of mind and communicate information necessary for the audience to correctly understand and enjoy the song which follows.

The **coda** occurs at the end of the song. Usually it is a simple repetition of the main theme of the song as a final closing emphasis, but it can also be an opportunity for the singer to display some vocal virtuosity to finish the song with a flourish.

dance break - In musical theater, songs will be often interrupted by a **dance break**, where the singing stops (i.e. takes a break) allowing the characters on stage to dance for a while before the song continues. Musically, dance breaks typically use the same music as in the song, but modified to be more interesting and complex (to make up for the lack of singing).

mixed or compound forms - There are many variations in song forms and often it will be difficult to identify any song as specifically AABA, verse/chorus, or something else. A **compound form** has aspects of one form embedded inside of another form. Maybe each verse in a verse/chorus song has a nested AABA structure. Or perhaps each A inside an AABA form contains a verse and a chorus.

A **mixed form** may have aspects of many different forms, often strung together in a longer and more flexible manner.

strophic song - **strophic** songs will have many sections that repeat the exact same music but with different words over top. The most typical example of a strophic song is "Old Macdonald (had a farm)", where each repetition of the song contains different words. Simpler verse/chorus and AABA songs are all strophic to some extent.

through-composed - When a song has no sections that are clear repetitions of prior sections (musically), then it is called "through-composed". These songs are different for each new section of text.

Through-composed songs have the advantage that they can be more directly applicable to the text. As the text changes and goes on its journey, so can the music without any arbitrary need to repeat prior music. Many art songs are through-composed.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that through-composed songs have no structure whatever. Very often a through-composed song will provide other musical clues (texture, tonal center, harmony, timbre, cadence, etc.) as to where sections begin and end, and sections may "feel" similar, even if the melodic details may be different.

hook - In many songs one musical and/or textual phrase will be most often repeated. If this phrase is catchy and memorable then it is called the **hook**.

Hooks are the part of the song that most listeners will be able to remember once the song is over. Therefore, the hook is usually an intense distillation of the song's entire purpose.

Hooks will also usually occur at the beginning or the end of a section (i.e. not usually in the middle). In a verse/chorus song, hooks are typically in the chorus. In an AABA song, the hook is almost always in the A section.

PART VII: Written Music

It's useful to know the names of the basic symbols on a page of music. Even if you've never read music before, with a little practice it's fairly easy to **follow along**, reading the music off of the printed page as it is played by the performers.

Also, very often there is a correlation between the music as it looks visually on the page and how it sounds. For example, dense, or busy music will often look dense or busy on the page. Slow and sustained music will often look spacious and contain many long lines on the page.

But first, here is a page of music with many musical symbols identified:

The image shows a page of musical notation with various symbols identified by red arrows and labels. The notation includes a Tenor (T.) and Piano (Pno.) part. The labels and their corresponding symbols are:

- individual instruments or performers are listed with separate staves**: Points to the Tenor and Piano staves.
- time signature**: Points to the 4/4 time signature.
- metronome marking**: Points to the $\text{♩} = 140$ marking.
- bar line**: Points to the vertical line separating measures.
- a "measure" or "bar"**: Points to a single measure of music.
- dynamic marking (for volume)**: Points to the *mf* (mezzo-forte) marking.
- a "hairpin" (decrease volume)**: Points to a hairpin symbol indicating a decrease in volume.
- articulations**: Points to a fermata symbol over a note.
- staff**: Points to a single line of music.
- system**: Points to a group of staves.
- measure number**: Points to the number 5, indicating the start of a measure.
- a note with an accidental**: Points to a note with a flat sign.
- fermata**: Points to a fermata symbol over a note.
- clefs**: Points to the treble and bass clefs.
- notes**: Points to individual notes on the staff.
- rests**: Points to a whole rest symbol.
- lyrics**: Points to the text "Who ran o - ver a squir - rel".
- chords**: Points to a group of notes played together.
- ledger lines**: Points to lines below the staff.
- brace or bracket**: Points to a brace grouping notes.

Big Things: Staves, Measures, Systems

score - Sometimes called the **full score**, is the word for all of the pages of music for a composition put together, for all of the players who will be needed to perform the music. It is the most complete picture of the music and identifies everything that is to be played, by what player, how loud, and when. The **score** for a piece of music is roughly equivalent to the script for a play or the storyboard for a movie.

Sometimes, individual players will be given an excerpted version of the score, called a **part**, showing only the notes which they are required to play.

staff - (plural: staves) Each set of five horizontal lines is called a "staff". Notes placed higher on the staff will sound higher (i.e. higher frequencies) and notes placed lower on the staff will sound lower. Notes which are too high or too low to fit on the staff will be drawn with ledger lines (look at the bottom of the example above).

clefs - (  ) - The funny graphic symbols at the far left of each staff are called **clefs**. The purpose of the clef is to position all the pitches on the staff to determine exactly how high or low the notes on the staff will sound when played.

As an example, in the following music all three notes are the same note (middle C):



Clefs are used to make the music easier for performers to perform by placing the notes which they will perform most often in the middle of the staff. Therefore, the clef is chosen based on the range of the instrument, as well as what notes the instrument will be asked to play.

In the example above, the first clef (the G clef - ) places middle C at the bottom of the staff. This clef is used for the higher instruments (violin, soprano, flute). The second clef (the C clef, also called the alto clef - ) has middle C in the middle. This clef is used for instruments in the middle registers (viola, bassoon, sometimes cello). Finally, the last clef (the F clef or the bass clef - ) has middle C at the very top. Therefore, this clef is used for low instruments (trombone, tuba, bass, cello, etc.).

system - Multiple staves are connected together with a line on the far left-hand side into **systems**. Each **system** shows all of the performers who will be playing together, at the same time. Notes are lined up vertically across the staves, so you can always tell who will be playing what notes at what time in the music.

In the example page of music above, there are five "systems" of music on the page. After all performers have finished playing one system, they automatically move on to the next.

instrument - An "instrument" on a score correlates to a performer who plays or sings the notes that make up the music. In the example above, there are two instruments: A singer (who sings tenor voice) and a pianist.

The correlation between players and staves can be complicated, and is usually related to the type and history of instrument. For example, the piano, since it has such a wide range (i.e. can play both very low as well as very high notes) is written with two staves connected with a curly **brace** (also called a **bracket**), while the tenor voice (as shown above) only takes up a single staff.

In many scores, a single staff can be used by multiple performers (usually all playing the same instrument). For example, in large orchestra scores, all of the cellos will typically play the same notes (at the same time) and will therefore be written on a single staff. Similarly, an entire choir may take up only four staves, one for each section: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. More complicated divisions can occur for brass instruments (such as horns, which usually take up two staves for four performers).

Measuring Time

Measuring time in music is a very complex and involves many different factors such as tempo, metronome markings, beats, time signatures, note values, etc., a complete description of which is beyond the scope of this dictionary.

However, we will at least describe the basic symbols used to identify beats and tempo. Please see Part II - Musical Character, in the section on "Tempo" for a more details on measuring time in music.

measure - also known as a **bar**, is a fundamental unit of time (see Part II - Musical Character, in the section called "Tempo") and usually lasts a few seconds long. Measures are small units of time which are strung together to create a composition. Each measure starts with a down beat, usually the strongest beat in the measure, and may contain any number of additional beats. The example above contains nine measures.

Measures are separated by **bar lines**, the vertical lines which occur every so often between the notes in the music.

Double bar lines (two vertical lines, not shown in the example), are often used to indicate where one section ends and another begins, or where there is a dramatic change in the music (such as a new key).

A special double bar line (not shown), with one thin line and one thick line is used to indicate the end of a piece.

measure number - In all music measures are counted, starting with 1 for the first complete measure (sometimes pieces start with an incomplete measure). Many scores do not display the measure numbers (but it's nicer for the performer and the conductor if they do).

metronome marking - At the top of many scores you will find a **metronome marking**, which determines how long to play a specified note value. In the example above, the metronome marking at the top of the page is "140 for the quarter note" (see below for a description of note values and quarter notes). This means that the performers will play the music at a speed such that 140 quarter notes can be played, one after the other, in a minute (i.e. 60 seconds). This is pretty fast, by the way.

Usually the metronome marking gives the speed of a beat of music, but, for various mechanical reasons, it may be chosen to be multiple beats or a fraction of a beat.

tempo marking - (not shown in the example) Instead of a metronome marking, composers will often use a simple description of the tempo, such as "fast" or "slow", often written in Italian (e.g. "presto" and "adagio"). These descriptions can get pretty involved (such as "allegro ma non troppo" which means "lively but not too much") and can also help communicate some of the character of the music ("jaunty", "slow like death", "fast like the wind" etc.).

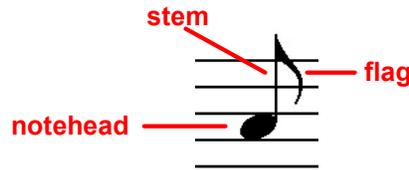
time signature - The time signature is a complicated beast. The top number is supposed to identify how many beats are in a measure of music. In the example above, the first measure has 4 beats while the second measure has five. Meanwhile, the bottom number is supposed to identify what note value (see below for a description of note values) is considered to be the length of a beat. In the example above, the lower number is always "4" which means that each beat is a quarter-note in length.

Unfortunately, there are many special cases where these simple rules do not apply (for example, when the top number is both divisible by 3 and divisible by 2, such as 6/8 the actual beat is twice as slow as specified... oh never mind).

Notes and Rests

notes - The fat dots (or open circles) on the staves are called "notes". Notes are placed either on a staff line, or between two lines. Notes placed higher on the staff will sound higher, notes placed lower on the staff will sound lower.

Each of the parts of a note also have a name:



accidentals - Sometimes the composer will want to specify a note which is just *slightly* higher or lower than the note as specified on the staff.

sharp (#) - The note is played slightly higher than normal.

flat (♭) - The note is played slightly lower than normal

natural (♮) - Used to cancel a sharp or a flat from a previous note, so the note will be played "naturally".

Often, if the music is very complex, you will see that many notes have accidentals.

key signature - Some music will have a cluster of accidentals at the beginning of each staff. This cluster of accidentals is called the **key signature** (see example below). The key signature has many purposes: 1) it determines which notes on the staff will be **always** played a bit higher or lower (unless otherwise specified), 2) it determines the type of scale which will be used to play the music (see above, Part V - harmony, the section on Scales and Keys), and 3) it determines the key - i.e. which pitch is the most important pitch, also known as the tonic.

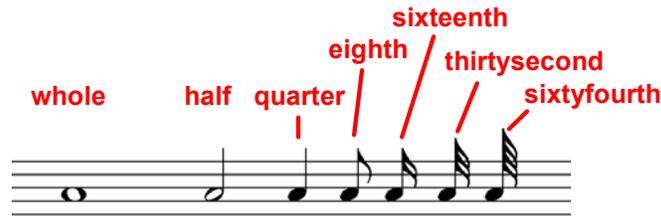
As an example, the following shows a key signature with two sharps. The arrows point to the notes which the performer will play slightly higher than normal.



Unfortunately, the exact key, scale, and tonic note can be difficult to determine from the key signature alone (you typically need to listen to and analyze the music a bit). In the above example, the music could be D major, B minor, or A mixolydian, or any of several other keys, scales, or modes.

note values - The type of note, whether the notehead is **filled** or **open**, if the note has a stem, and how many flags the note has determines how long the note will be held when played. This amount of time is called the note's **value**.

The following are the most common note values:



As you go from left to right in the above example, each note will take half as much time to play. For example, a performer can play two half notes in the same time it takes to play a single whole note. Two sixteenth notes can be played (one after the other) in the space of an eighth note. This also means that four sixteenth notes will last the same as a quarter note, or that 16 sixteenth notes will last as long as a single whole note.

Sometimes you will see a small dot to the *right* of the note. This increases the note's value by half. For example, a "dotted half note" will look like this: ♩. and will be held as long as a half note *plus* a quarter note, put together.

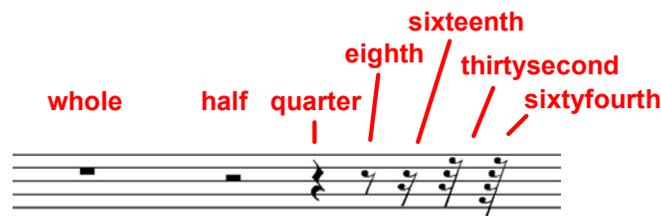
The actual physical time it takes to play any note is dependent on the metronome marking (see above) specified at the top of the page.

beams - The flags on faster notes will often be joined together with **beams**. This makes the rhythms in a piece of music easier to visualize, and gives the composer the opportunity to show groups of notes (where beams are broken). The following example shows the four fastest notes from above connected with beams:



rests - When a performer is silent, then we say that they are **playing a rest**. Silences can be specified to have values in the same way that notes have values (see above) to indicate exactly how long the performer should rest before playing the next note.

Sample rests and their values are shown as follows:



measure rest - When an instrument is expected to rest for an entire measure, a single rest (the same symbol as a whole note rest shown above) will be printed in the measure.

chords - When notes are stacked up on top of each other, sharing the same stem (if there is a stem), this is called a **chord**. Chords are important for specifying the harmony of a piece of music (see Part V - Harmony, above). And so we see in the above example that the Piano has a few chords specified in measure 7.

Be aware that harmony is more than just chords, however. Harmony can be specified by having multiple instruments playing together (i.e. multiple notes over multiple staves) or by a sequences of notes.

articulations - (see Part III - Sound, the section on Articulation, above) specify how the note is to be performed. Will it be struck hard? Will it be played the full value specified (i.e. a quarter note is held for the entire duration) or very short and spiky?

Articulations are special symbols which are placed below or above the notehead. It's important to realize that articulations are contextual. The different symbols will have different meanings depending on the style of music, the mood, when the piece was composed, the instrument playing the note, etc.

dot (.) - Play short. Notes with dots are played short with lots of space (i.e. silence) between them.

accent (>) - Play strong. Notes with **accent marks** are played louder than notes without accent marks. Often this may mean the note will sound harsh as well.

fermata - (\frown) The music should pause while holding the note (or rest). Fermatas allow the performer a chance to hold a note (for dramatic effect) before continuing. The actual length of time that a fermata is held is a function of the style of music, the speed of the piece, and a lot of other factors. Most fermatas are relatively short, and may pause the music for a fraction of a second, but some (i.e. Italian Opera) can be held for a very long time (many seconds).

Volume

See above Part III - Sound, the section on Volume for more information on dynamics and for a list of some common dynamic markings.

dynamic markings - Are notations in the text indicating, roughly, how loud or soft the music should be performed. Note that there is no notational method for specifying an exact volume level, and so all dynamic markings are subject to interpretation.

In the above example, *mf* stands for *mezzo forte*, meaning "medium loud", and *pp* stands for *pianissimo*, meaning "very soft".

hairpins - indicate to the performer that the volume should be gradually increased or decreased. Typically, a composer will specify the starting volume level (*mf* in the above example) as well as the ending volume level (*pp*).

Increasing volume can also be specified by simply writing the word ***crescendo*** (abbreviated ***cresc.***) while decreasing volume can be specified with ***decrescendo*** (abbreviated ***decresc.***).

Additional Words (to do later?):

break
octave
seductive,
linear, contour
doubling, doubling in octaves

pre-compositional decisions
pre-determined formulas, harmonic plans, patterns, etc.
style, genre, pastiche, parody

performance practice

Music Types:

waltz
tango
rag
jazz
?

Song Types

aria
bacchanal
carol
?

Genres:

funk, pop, romantic, classical,

other forms:

rondo, sonata, theme and variations, block structure (ala Stravinsky),

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