

Italian Musical Terms

The majority of musical terms are in Italian, so this page has quite a long list. The other common languages for musical terms are German and French.

Some of the words below have an audio file attached so you can hear how it is pronounced. Just click on the speaker icon.

Remember, there is often more than one way to pronounce some words. The examples given here are just one suggested pronunciation.

Musical Term	Abbreviation	English	Other information and examples of usage
a		at; to; by; for; in	eg: a tempo = in time (back to the previous speed).
a capella		unaccompanied	usually in choral music
a piacere		at pleasure	The performer is not bound to follow the given rhythm exactly.
accelerando	(accel.)	gradually getting faster	An increase in the speed of the music.
accento		accented; emphasised	
ad libitum	(ad lib.)	at choice; freely	1) A passage may be performed freely. 2) An instrument in a score may be omitted.
adagietto		rather slow	Usually a little faster than adagio
adagio		slowly	Often indicates a speed somewhere between andante and largo
affabile		friendly	
affettuoso		tenderly	
affrettando		hurrying	
agitato		agitated; restless	
al; alla		in the manner of	eg: alla marcia = in the style of a march
alla breve		with a minim beat	
allargando		broadening	
allegretto		fairly quick	Faster than Andante and usually slower than Allegro
allegro		fast	
alt		high	"in alt" is used in vocal music to refer to notes in the octave above the treble stave.
amabile		amiable; pleasant	
amore		love	
andante		walking speed	Moderately slow
andantino		like walking speed	This can mean either slightly slower or slightly faster than andante. It is ambiguous.
anima		soul; spirit	eg: con anima = with spirit
animando		becoming more lively	
animato		animated; lively	
appassionato		with passion	
arco		with the bow	An instruction to string players to use the bow.
arioso		like an aria	Play in the style of an aria (singing)
assai		very	eg: allegro assai = very fast
attacca		go straight on	Indicates an immediate move to the next section of music.
ben		well	
bis		twice	Indicates the repetition of a short passage.
bravura		skill; brilliance	
brio		vigour	eg: con brio = with vigour
calando		getting softer; dying away	Usually includes slowing down
cantabile		in a singing style	
cantando		singing	
capriccioso		in a whimsical or	

		fanciful style	
col; colla; colle		with	eg: colla voce = with the voice
come	🔊	as; similar to	eg: come prima = as before
comodo	🔊	convenient	eg: tempo comodo = at a comfortable speed
con	🔊	with	eg: con moto = with movement
crescendo	🔊 (cresc.)	gradually getting louder	
da capo	🔊 (D.C.)	from the beginning	An instruction to repeat the misc from the beginning.
dal segno	🔊 (D.S.)	from the sign	An instruction to repeat the misc from the sign.
deciso	🔊	with determination	
decrescendo	🔊 (decresc.)	gradually getting softer	
delicato	🔊	delicate	
diminuendo	🔊 (dim.)	gradually getting softer	
dolce	🔊	sweetly	eg: dolcissimo = as sweet as possible
dolente	🔊	sad; mournful	
dolore	🔊	grief	eg: doloroso = sorrowful
doloroso	🔊	sorrowful	
doppio movimento	🔊	twice as fast	
e; ed		and	
energico	🔊	energetic	
espressivo	🔊 (espr.)	expressive	
estinto	🔊	as soft as possible	
facile	🔊	easy	
felice	🔊	happy	
fermata		pause	
feroce	🔊	fierce	
fine	🔊	the end	Often used in conjunction with "da capo" or "dal segno" to indicate where to end the piece after repeating. eg: al fine = to the end
flessibile	🔊	flexible	
forte	🔊 (f)	loud; strong	
fortepiano	🔊 (fp)	loud then immediately soft	
fortissimo	🔊 (ff)	very loud	
forza	🔊	force	eg: forzando (fz) = strongly accented
fretta	🔊	haste	
fuoco	🔊	fire	
furioso	🔊	furious	
giocoso	🔊	playful; humorous	
giojoso		joyful; merry	
giusto	🔊	proper; exact	
grandioso	🔊	grandly	
grave	🔊	very slow; solemn	
grazioso	🔊	graceful	
impetuoso	🔊	impetuous	
incalzando	🔊	getting quicker	
inquieto	🔊	restless	
in relieveo	🔊	prominent	A direction to make the melody stand out.
lacrimoso	🔊	sad	
largamente	🔊	broadly	

larghetto		rather slow	Slightly faster than largo.
largo		rather slow; stately	
legato		smoothly	Indicates no break between notes.
leggiero		light; nimble	
lento		slow	
liberamente		freely	
l'istesso		the same	eg: l'istesso tempo = at the same speed
loco		at the normal pitch	Used to cancel an 8va direction. Also used to confirm that 8va is not intended.
lugubre		mournful	
lunga		long	eg: lunga pausa = long pause
lusigando		coaxing	
ma		but	eg: allegro ma non troppo = quick but not too quick
maestoso		majestic	
mancando		fading away	
marcato	(marc.)	emphatic; accented	
marziale		in a military style	
meno		less	eg: meno forte = less loud
mesto		sad	
mezzoforte	(mf)	moderately loud	
mezzopiano	(mp)	moderately soft	
misterioso		mysterious	
misura		measure	eg: alla misura = in strict time; senza misura = in free time
moderato		moderate speed	eg: allegro moderato = moderately fast.
molto		very; much	eg: allegro molto = very fast
morendo		dying away	
mosso		movement	
moto		movement	
niente		nothing	
nobilmente		nobly	
non		not	
nuovo		new	e.g. di nuovo = again
obbligato		obligatory	Indicates that an instrument has a special role and is essential.
ossia		or; alternatively	Often used to indicate a simpler version of a difficult passage.
ostinato		persistent	Generally refers to a persistently repeated rhythmic or melodic figure.
parlando		speaking	A direction for a singer to sing in a conversational style.
patetico		with deep feeling	
pausa		pause	
per		by; for; to	
perdendosi		dying away	
pesante		heavy	
piacevole		pleasant	
piangevole		plaintive	
pianissimo	(pp)	very soft	
piano	(p)	soft	
più		more	e.g. più forte = louder
pizzicato		plucked	An instruction to string players to pluck the strings, rather than bow them.
placido		calm; peaceful	

pochettino		(poch.)	rather little	
poco			a little	e.g. poco a poco = little by little
possible			possible	e.g. presto possible = as fast as possible
precipitando			rushing; headlong	
presto			very fast	
prima			first	(Prima; Primo) e.g. prima volta = first time; tempo primo = revert to the speed at the beginning of the piece of music
quasi			as if; resembling	e.g. quasi recitativo = like a recitative
rallentando		(rall.)	gradually getting slower	
rigoroso			strict	
rinforzando		(rf; rfz)	reinforcing	
risoluto			bold; strong	
ritardando		(rit.)	gradually getting slower	
ritenuto		(rit.)	held back	
ritmico			rhythmically	
rubato			with some freedom of time	
scherzando			playful; joking	Also scherzoso.
scherzo			joke; jest	A movement in a piece, generally light and humorous in nature.
seconda			second	(Seconda; secondo)
semplice			simple; plain	
sempre			always	e.g. sempre staccato = always detached
senza			without	e.g. senza misura = freely (not in time)
segue			go straight on	
sforzando		(sf; sfz)	forced; accented	
simile		(sim.)	in the same way	
slargando			getting slower	
slancio			enthusiasm	
smorzando		(smorz.)	dying away	Both tone and speed
soave			gentle; smooth	
solenne			solemn; grave	
sonoro			resonant; with rich tone	
sopra			above	
sospirando			sighing	
sostenuto			sustained	
sotto			below	eg: sotto voce = in an undertone
spirito			spirited	
spiritoso			spirited	
staccato			detached	
strepitoso			noisy; boisterous	
stretto			quicken the speed	Also means overlapping entries of a fugue subject.
stringendo			gradually getting faster	
subito			suddenly	
tacet			silent	A direction that a particular part has nothing to play in a section of music.
tanto			so much	
tempo			speed	e.g: a tempo = return to the previous speed, after a slowing down or speeding up.

teneramente			tenderly	
tenuto			held	
tosto			swift; rapid	
tranquillo			calm	
trionfale			triumphant	
triste			sad; sorrowful	
troppo		too much	eg: allegro ma non troppo = fast, but not too fast.	
tutti		all; everyone		
veloce			swift	
vigoroso			vigorous; strong	
vivace			lively	
vivo			lively	
voce			voice	
volante			flying; fast	
volta		time	e.g. prima volta = first time	
volti subito		(V.S.)	turn the page at once	

