

Music Glossary

Keyword	Definition	Translation
Texture	The way different musical parts or layers are combined.	
Monophonic	A single melodic line with no harmony.	
Homophonic	A main melody supported by chords.	
Polyphonic	Multiple independent melodies sounding together.	
2, 3 or 4 part textures	Music written for multiple simultaneous parts.	
Unison	All performers play or sing the same melody.	
Chordal	Music based mainly on block chords.	
Imitation	A melody repeated by another part after a short delay.	
Layered	Different parts gradually added on top of each other.	
Melody and accompaniment	A dominant melody supported by background chords.	
Counter melody	A secondary melody played against the main tune.	
Descant	A high, decorative melody above the main tune.	

Round	A simple canon where performers start the same melody at different times.
Canon	A strict form of imitation between musical lines.
Drone	A sustained or repeated note.
Alberti bass	A repeated broken-chord pattern.
Stab chords	Short, accented chords.
Walking bass	A bass line that moves in steady, stepwise motion.
Allegro/Vivace	Fast tempo.
Allegretto	Moderately fast tempo.
Moderato/Andante	Moderate or walking tempo.
Adagio/Lento	Slow tempo.
Accelerando	Gradually getting faster.
Ritardando/Rallentando	Gradually getting slower.
Rubato	Flexible tempo for expressive effect.
Pause	A brief stop in the music.
Semibreve	A note lasting four beats.
Minim	A note lasting two beats.
Crotchet	A note lasting one beat.
Quaver	A note lasting half a beat.
Semiquaver	A note lasting a quarter of a beat.
Dotted	Adds half the note's value.
Syncopation	Accents on weak beats.

Swing rhythms	Uneven quaver patterns typical in jazz.
On the beat	Notes played on the strong beats.
Off-beat	Notes played between the main beats.
Triplet	Three notes in the time of two.
Chaal	A Bhangra rhythm pattern.
Associated rests	Rests matching note durations.
Driving rhythms	Strong, energetic rhythmic patterns.
Dance rhythms	Rhythms typical of dance styles.
Rock rhythms	Strong beats with backbeat emphasis.
Regular	Even, predictable patterns.
Irregular	Uneven or unpredictable metre.
Accent	Emphasis on a note.
Simple time (2/4, 3/4, 4/4)	Beats divide into two.
Duple/triple/quadruple	Two, three, or four beats per bar.
Compound time (6/8)	Beats divide into three.
Pianissimo	Very quiet.
Piano	Stringed keyboard instrument.
Mezzo piano	Moderately quiet.
Mezzo forte	Moderately loud.

Forte	Loud.
Fortissimo	Very loud.
Crescendo	Gradually getting louder.
Diminuendo	Gradually getting quieter.
Sforzando	Sudden strong accent.
Western Classical Tradition	Art music from Western culture.
Baroque	Music from c.1600–1750.
Classical	Music from c.1750–1820.
Romantic	Music from c.1820–1900.
Chamber music	Music for small ensembles.
Jazz	Improvised African-American music style.
Blues	Music with blues scales and expressive lyrics.
Musical Theatre/Musical	Songs combined with drama on stage.
Film Music	Music written for films.
Rock	Popular music with electric instruments.
Soul	Music combining gospel and rhythm & blues.
Hip-hop	Rap-based urban music.
Reggae	Jamaican music with off-beat rhythms.
Ballad	Slow, expressive song.
Pop	Mainstream commercial music.
Bhangra	Punjabi dance music.

Fusion	Blend of multiple musical styles.
Minimalism	Music with repeating patterns.
Strings	Stringed instrument family.
Violin	High-pitched string instrument.
Viola	Mid-range string instrument.
Cello	Low-pitched string instrument.
Double bass	Lowest string instrument.
Harp	Large plucked string instrument.
Woodwind	Instrument family using air and reeds.
Flute	Woodwind instrument played by blowing across a hole.
Oboe	Woodwind instrument with double reed.
Clarinet	Woodwind instrument with single reed.
Saxophone	Woodwind instrument with metal body and single reed.
Bassoon	Low double-reed woodwind instrument.
Brass	Instrument family using lip vibration.
Trumpet	High brass instrument.
French horn	Brass instrument with circular tubing.

Trombone	Brass instrument with a slide.
Tuba	Largest brass instrument.
Percussion	Instruments struck or shaken.
Timpani	Tuned kettle drums.
Drum kit	Set of drums and cymbals.
Snare drum	Drum with metal wires underneath.
Cymbal	Metal percussion disc.
Hand held percussion	Small portable percussion instruments.
Glockenspiel	Metal-bar percussion.
Xylophone	Wooden-bar percussion.
Tabla	Indian hand drums.
Dhol	Double-headed drum from Punjab.
Keyboard	Keyboard-based instruments.
Organ	Keyboard instrument with pipes.
Harpsichord	Plucked keyboard instrument.
Basso Continuo	Continuous bass line in Baroque music.
Classical or Spanish guitar	Nylon-string guitar.
Electric guitar	Amplified guitar.
Bass guitar	Low-pitched guitar.
Sitar	Indian plucked string instrument.

Sarangi	Indian bowed instrument.
Tumbi	Punjabi single-string instrument.
Solo	One performer.
Duet	Two performers.
Trio	Three performers.
Soprano	Highest female voice.
Alto	Lower female voice.
Tenor	High male voice.
Bass	Low male voice.
Backing vocals	Supporting singing parts.
A cappella	Singing without accompaniment.
Chorus	Group of singers.
Orchestra	Large ensemble of instruments.
String quartet	Two violins, viola, cello.
Pop/rock group	Band in pop or rock style.
Rhythm section	Players providing beat and harmony.
Acoustic	Not amplified.
Synthesised/electronic	Digitally generated sounds.
Panning	Sound moving left to right.
Phasing	Swooshing effect from time delay.
Sample	Recorded sound reused.
Reverb	Echo-like ambience.
Echo	Repeated sound reflections.

Amplified	Made louder using electronics.
Humming	Singing with closed lips.
Syllabic	One note per syllable.
Melismatic	Several notes per syllable.
Scat	Jazz vocal improvisation.
Vibrato	Small pitch fluctuations.
Falsetto	High male voice.
Belt	Strong, powerful singing.
Rap	Spoken rhythmic vocals.
Staccato	Short, detached notes.
Legato	Smooth, connected notes.
Sustained	Held for a long time.
Arco/bowed	Played with a bow.
Divisi	Players split into parts.
Double stopping	Playing two strings at once.
Tremolo	Rapid repetition of a note.
Distortion	Gritty guitar effect.
Hammer on	Guitar technique using fretting hand.
Rim shot	Drumstick hits rim and head.
Slap bass	Percussive bass technique.
Drum roll	Rapid drum strokes.
Muted	Dampened sound.
Glissando/slide	Continuous slide between notes.

Pitch bend	Changing pitch slightly.
Plucked	Strings played by plucking.
Slurred	Smooth group of notes.
Tongued	Articulation using the tongue.
Detached	Notes separated distinctly.