

MUSIC REFERENCE SHEET : ITALIAN TERMS

Italian is the international language of music. Here are some of the most common words used in music, grouped according to what they tell us about.

HOW FAST ?

Adagio	Very slow
Allegretto	A little slower than allegro
Allegro	Quick and usually cheerful
Andante	Gentle walking speed
Andantino	A little quicker than andante
Con moto	With movement
Grave	Slow and serious
Largo	Slow, broad
Larghetto	A little slowly, usually rather gentle
Lento	Slowly
L'istesso tempo	At the same speed
Moderato	Moderately, or moderately fast
Presto	Very fast

CHANGING SPEED

A tempo	Go back to earlier speed, i.e. after getting slower or faster
Accelerando	Accelerating, getting faster
Allargando	Getting broader, i.e. slower and usually stronger
Calando	Getting slower and quieter
Doppio movimento	Double speed
Meno mosso	Immediately slower (literally "less moved")
Morendo	Dying away
Perdendosi	Getting slower and quieter
Più mosso	Immediately quicker (literally "more moved")
Rallentando (rall.)	Getting slower
Ritardando (rit.)	Getting slower
Ritenuto (rit.)	Held back
Stringendo	Getting quicker and more urgent
Tempo Primo	
Tempo I	At the first speed

WHAT MOOD OR STYLE ?

Agitato	Agitated
Alla . . .	In the style of . . .
Animato	Animated, lively
Appassionato	Passionately
Brillante	Brilliant, sparkling
Brio	Vigour
Cantabile	In a singing style
Dolce	Sweetly (dulcet)
Doloroso	Sadly
Energico	Energetically
Espressivo	Expressively
Forza	Force
Fuoco	Fire
Giocoso	Cheerfully (jocose)
Grandioso	Grandly
Grazia	Grace
Grazioso	Gracefully
Leggiero (legg.)	Lightly
Lontano	Distant
Maestoso	Majestically, grandly
Marcato	Marked
Martellato	Hammered
Marziale	Martial
Mesto	Sadly
Misterioso	Mysteriously
Pesante	Heavily
Risoluto	Resolutely, with determination
Scherzando	Playfully
Scherzo	A joke
Sonore	Sonorous, resonant
Sostenuto (sost.)	Sustained
Tranquillo	Tranquil, peaceful
Vivace	Vivacious, lively

HOW LOUD ?

pp (pianissimo)	Very quiet
p (piano)	Quiet
mp (mezzo piano)	Medium quiet
mf (mezzo forte)	Medium loud
f (forte)	Loud, strong
ff (fortissimo)	Very loud
Crescendo (cresc.)	Getting louder (increasing)
Decrescendo	Getting quieter (decreasing)
Diminuendo (dim.)	Getting quieter (diminishing)

MISCELLANEOUS

Arco	Strings: Play with the bow
Assai	Very
Attacca	Go straight on
Breve	Brief, short, and a note twice as long as a semibreve
Coda	Tailpiece, i.e. the last section of a piece of music
Come	As
Comodo	Convenient
Con, col, colla	With, with the
Da capo, D.C.	From the beginning
Dal segno, D.S.	From the sign 'S'
Di	Of
E	And
-etto	Word ending meaning "little" E.g. Allegretto
Fermata	Pause
Fine	Finish, end
G.P. (gran' pausa)	Silence, usually for a whole bar
-ino, -ina	Word ending meaning "little" E.g. andantino, sonatina
-issimo	Word ending meaning "very" E.g. pianissimo
Legato	Smoothly (N.B. never abbreviated)
Loco	Play at the written pitch (usually after octave up or down)
Lunga	Long, and a note twice as long as a breve
Ma	But
Meno	Less (minus)
Molto	Much, very
Moto	Motion, movement
Muta in . . .	Change to . . .
Non	Not
Ottava, 8va	Octave, usually indicating "play an octave higher"
8va bas.	Play an octave lower
Ossia	Or (usually indicates an alternative version)
Pausa	Rest (not pause)
Più	More (plus)
Pizzicato (pizz.)	Pluck the string
Poco	Little
Poco a poco	Little by little, gradually
Poi	Then
Quasi	As if
Ripetizione (rip.)	Repetition, repeat
Seque	Follow, go straight on
Sempre	Always
Senza	Without (Old English "sans")
Sforzando (sf sfz)	Accent
Simile	In the same way
Solo	One voice or instrument, either alone or with an important part
Sordino (sord.)	Mute (brass or stringed instruments)
Sopra	Above
Staccato	Detached, bouncy
Subito (sub.)	Suddenly
Tacet	Silent
Tempo	Speed
Tempo giusto	At a steady speed, in strict time
Tremolando (trem.)	Quick repetition of one note or alternation of two notes
Troppo	Too, too much
Tutti, tutta	All
Volti subito (V.S.)	Turn the page quickly
Vuota	Empty (usually indicating a silent bar)

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