

Maryland State Department of Education
MUSIC GLOSSARY
[A hyperlink to Voluntary State Curricula](#)

ABA Often referenced as “song form,” musical structure with a beginning section, followed by a contrasting section, followed by a repetition of the beginning.

Accuracy The ability to be precise and avoid errors.

Acoustic Sound Sources All instruments that do not require electronics to produce sound, including brass, woodwind, string, or percussion instruments and instruments from various cultures.

Aesthetic Criteria Standards used for assessing the effectiveness of music. (These may include the quality of the aural perception, emotional makeup of the listener, and the context in which a particular work is being experienced.)

Articulation Clarity and distinct rendition in musical performance.

Bass Clef F clef that indicates the placement of F below Middle C on the staff. (It is used for low-pitched instruments and voices and for left-hand keyboard parts.)

Blend The process of producing tones that pass imperceptibly into each other.

Call-and-Response A song style that follows a simple question-and-answer pattern in which a soloist leads and a group responds.

Chance Music Music in which composers deliberately leave parts of the composition and performance undetermined. (Aspects such as melody, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, and form are left wholly or partly to the discretion and creativity of the performer. It is also known as *aleatory music*.)

Classroom Instruments Any of a number of musical instruments typically found in a general music classroom, inclusive of, but not limited to: keyboard, guitar, Orff instruments (melody and rhythm), and small auxiliary instruments.

Compose Process of creating a musical work

Culture(s) The shared ideas, beliefs, customs, and experiences of a given people at a given time.

Descant A freely written or improvised soprano part added to a melody.

Describe Demonstrate understanding of music through reading and writing music notation, other visual representation, verbal description, and movement.

Dynamics The volume of sound, the loudness or softness of a musical passage.

Electronic Sound Sources Personal computers, basic midi devices such as keyboards, sequencers, synthesizers, drum machines, and other developing technology.

Elements of Music Components of musical activity, including pitch, duration, form, dynamics, texture, and tone color.

Families of Instruments In Western music, like instruments are often categorized in four groups, or families: string, woodwind, brass, and percussion.

Folk Music The indigenous music of the world evoking the life and culture from which it comes. (Music often handed down by the aural/oral tradition.)

Form The way a musical composition is organized, often referring to repetition and contrast within the work.

Free Form Musical structure that relies less on repetition and contrast and more on motivic development.

Fugue A polyphonic composition consisting of a series of successive melody imitations.

Genre Category of music marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

Homophonic A style of musical texture in which a single melody is supported by Chords.

Hornbostel-Sachs Classification System A system, devised in 1914, for classification of musical instruments based on the sound produced by the vibrating material. (The five major categories are: Idiophones – Self sounding instruments; Membranophones – Instruments producing sound by means of a stretched skin or membrane; Aerophones – Wind instruments with the sound caused by vibrating air; Chordophones – String instruments; Electrophones – Instruments using electronic circuits.)

Improvisation Spontaneous musical invention commonly associated with jazz.

Interval The distance in pitch between two tones.

Intonation The act of singing or playing in tune.

Listen To make a conscious effort to hear, being intent upon the various aspects of musical composition and performance.

Locomotor Movement Movement through space involving a change in location; a moving base involving a progressive relocation of the body in space. (Examples of basic steps are walk, run, leap, hop, and jump. Skip, slide, and gallop are examples of irregular rhythmic combinations.)

Major Key (Major Mode) Tonality of a composition based on a scale formula of two whole steps, one half step, three whole steps, and one half step.

Melodic Pattern A representative example of a short melody or combined melodies.

Melody A succession of notes, varying in pitch, which have an organized and recognizable shape.

Meter A rhythmic measure of a certain number of beats.

Minor Key (Minor Mode) Tonality of a composition based on a scale formula of one whole step, one half step, two whole steps, one half step, two whole steps.

Motive (Motivic) A short, distinctive musical pattern or figure, often used by composers as a building block.

Movement Patterns Any type of bodily response to music. It may include fingers only, hands or arms only, feet only, or the entire body.

Music Structure Synonymous with form; the way a musical composition is organized, often referring to repetition and contrast within the work.

Non-Locomotor Movement Movement that occurs above a stationary base; movement of the body around its own axis. (Also called axial movement, it includes bending, stretching, pushing, pulling, bouncing, swinging, shaking, and twisting.)

Ostinato A brief, unvarying melody repeated continually throughout a composition.

Pentatonic Any five-tone scale.

Pitch The highness or lowness of sound determined by its frequency of vibration.

Polyphonic A texture which is characterized by the simultaneous combination of different melodies and rhythms.

Rondo A form of composition, usually instrumental, in which one section intermittently recurs. (A frequent pattern is ABACADA.)

Round A composition in which the same melody is started at different times and sounded together; also called canon.

Rhythmic Pattern A representative example of a short rhythm or set of rhythms.

Rhythm Combinations of long and short sounds that convey a sense of movement – pertaining to everything having to do with the *time* aspect of music.

Scale of 1 – 6, Graded Music Publishers and music education organizations grade music according to level of difficulty. (In Maryland, the official lists are available from the Maryland Music Educators Association.)

Serialism Use of a set sequence of pitches as the basis for a musical composition, such as the ordering of the twelve chromatic tones, which are then transposed, inverted, or presented in retrograde

Solfeggio A method of sight reading using the syllables, “DO, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, TI, DO”

Staff A set of five lines and four spaces on which music is notated.

Style Musical characteristics shared by a “school” or group of composers; process by which a composer or performer uses musical material in a unique manner.

Stylistic Eras Approximate time periods in music history during which composers used similar compositional techniques, e.g., Renaissance, Baroque, Classic, Romantic, and Impressionist.

Tempo (Tempi) The speed at which a piece of music is performed.

Theme and Variations A musical form in which a theme is stated, then varied in a succession of statements; variations may be sectional or continuous.

Timbre The distinctive tone quality of a sound. (See *tone color*.)

Tone color Specific quality of a sound. (See *timbre*.)

Transposition Changing a whole piece or a section of a piece from one pitch level (key or tone row) to another.

Treble Clef The sign, which indicates that the line on the staff on which it is placed, is the G a fifth above middle C (It is used for high-pitched instruments and voices and for right-hand keyboard parts).

Two Staff System Two connected sets of five lines and four spaces used to notate two-part vocal or instrumental music.

Verse and Refrain Song form in which each stanza, or line of metrical writing, is followed by a chorus that is repeated after each verse.

Western Traditional Instrument Classification System In this system, musical instruments are classified by family: string, woodwind, brass, and percussion.

World Culture(s) The shared ideas, beliefs, customs, and experiences of a given people at a given time.

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