

# Elements of Music

## Key Terminology GCSE Music

### Organisation of Pitch

'Pitch' refers to how high or low sounds are

Arpeggio	An arpeggio has the notes of a chord played in succession rather than together, strictly in continuously ascending or descending order. The term 'broken chord' is sometimes used as a synonym (the notes of the chord thus broken often occurring in any order)
Cadence	The chords that conclude a musical phrase. Cadences are of four main types: perfect, with chords V-I; imperfect, with I (or other nondominant chord) and V; plagal, with chords IV-I; interrupted, usually with V-VI. (See 'Roman numerals' below)
Bass (line)	The lowest part in the musical texture, which often determines or generates the harmony. A Baroque 'figured bass' has numerals underneath to indicate the chords to be 'realised' by the continuo keyboard player. A 'murky' bass has a pattern of broken octaves (as in parts of Beethoven's Pathétique sonata)
Chord	The simultaneous sounding together of two or more notes. Often used to refer to the triads in major and minor keys.
Conjunct	Synonym for 'stepwise' (see below)
Disjunct	Opposite of conjunct (or its synonym 'stepwise')
Dissonance	In traditional harmony a dissonance is a note that does not belong to a common chord or triad – strict rules usually govern its approach and its resolution back to a non-dissonant note (i.e. a 'consonance')
Chord sequence	A series of chords, usually repeated (e.g. in a 12-bar blues)
Drone	Especially in non-classical genres, the extended sustaining or repeating of a note or a harmonic interval (notably a perfect 5th)
Fanfare	A flourish for brass instruments (frequently with percussion) for ceremonial or celebratory effect, or simply any short passage for brass in an orchestral work
Ground bass	A repeating phrase in the bass (a type of 'ostinato'), especially in some Baroque pieces, notably by Purcell
Harmony	Successions of chords (or sometimes refers to single chords)
Interval	The distance between two neighbouring notes or two heard simultaneously. Most intervals are stated as ordinal numbers (2nds, 3rds, etc.) with an adjective expressing their major, minor, diminished or augmented character
Leap	A melodic movement to a note further than a tone or semitone away from the previous note. Opposite of 'step'
Melody	A melody (or 'melodic line') is a succession of single sounds – most frequently an individual strand or part within a fuller musical texture. A melody is usually 'tuneful' or otherwise prominent or memorable

Melodic device	A compositional method applying to a single melodic line rather than to the complete texture (for example melodic sequence)
Monotone	Use of the same pitch repeatedly in a melodic part
Ornamentation	The process of elaborating or decorating musical material (particularly a melody). Includes conventional ornaments such as trills and turns
Ostinato	A short musical pattern repeated throughout a section or complete piece
Pedal (or pedal point)	A note (usually in the bass, and generally either the tonic or dominant of the key) which is sustained or repeated while chords change, often resulting in dissonance
Riff	Similar to ostinato, but applied to popular styles of music
Roman numerals	Roman numerals (from I to VII) are used to label chords in traditional harmony according to which degree of the scale is used as the root. Thus in C major, the chord D F A (with root D) is II
Scale	A succession of pitches in stepwise order usually extending for an octave (e.g. C D E F G A B C is a (major) scale)
Sequence	Repetition of a melody (or an harmonic progression) but at different pitch level(s) rather than at the same pitch
Stepwise	Where a melody moves by steps (by tones and/or semitones) and not by leaps (of a 3rd or more)
Theme	A melody (or occasionally some other form of musical material) on which part or all of a piece is based

## Tonality

The relationship of notes within a scale or mode to a principal note (the tonic or final). A wider term than key but often used synonymously with it

Atonal	Absence of tonality or key
Chromatic	Chromatic notes are those progressing by semitones, especially to a tone having the same letter name, eg C to C sharp
Dominant (key)	The key a perfect 5th higher than the tonic ('home') key of a piece (e.g. D major in a G major piece)
Key	A form of tonality based on major and minor scales
Major	Based on major scales, with a major 3rd between scale degrees 1 and 3.
Minor	Based on minor scales, with a minor 3rd between scale degrees 1 and 3
Modal	Tonality based on modes (precursors of modern scales – of several types, each with a different series of tones and semitones)
Modulation	Change of key
Pentatonic	Based on a five-note scale (often equivalent to scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 of a major scale, or 1, 3, 4, 5, (flat)7 of a minor scale)
Relative minor/major	Major keys and their relative minors have the same key signature (e.g. F major and D minor). Minor keys and their relative majors have the same key signature (e.g. E minor and G major)

## Form and Structure

The overall shape of a composition (e.g. binary, ternary, rondo). 'Form' and 'structure' are largely synonymous

Binary	A form with two sections (often referred to as A and B), each usually repeated. The A section usually modulates from the tonic to dominant or relative major. The B section returns to the tonic, usually via other keys
Introduction	An opening passage or section which clearly prepares for (or introduces) the first main idea (e.g. in a song where the piano has an introduction before the singer begins)
Phrase	A short passage of music to some extent comparable to a phrase in speaking or writing. Many phrases are two or four bars long
Rondo	A form comprising several statements of a main section interspersed with contrasting episodes. The simplest rondo structure was ABACA, where A is the recurring section, and B and C are the episodes
Sonata form	A large-scale form which evolved in the Classical period. It combines elements of binary form, and ternary form (in having exposition, development and recapitulation)
Ternary	A form with three sections (often referred to as A B A). The opening section is repeated (exactly or varied), section B providing pronounced contrast
Strophic	A strophic song has the same (or similar) music for each stanza of the poem being set. (A song in which some or all stanzas are set differently is ‘through-composed’)

## Sonority

The nature and quality of musical sounds

Articulation	The degree to which a note is separated from the note that follows it (ranging from minimal (legato) to much greater (staccato or staccatissimo))
Timbre	The particular tone colour of an instrument or voice

## Texture

The number of parts in a piece of music and how they relate to one another. Several types of texture are listed below

Accompaniment	Musical background to a principal part or parts (e.g. piano accompanying a solo singer)
Continuo (or Basso continuo)	The bass line in many Baroque orchestral, choral and chamber works. Most commonly played by low string instruments (with or without bassoons) and with a chord-playing instrument (notably harpsichord, organ or lute) to complete the harmony by realising the figured bass
Heterophony	Where two or more parts play the same melodic line simultaneously, but there are small variations between them. The adjective is ‘heterophonic’
Homophony	A widely-used type of texture consisting of a melody part and other subsidiary (accompanying) parts. The adjective is ‘homophonic’
Monophony	Music in which only one note is heard at a time – a single melodic line. The adjective is ‘monophonic’

Polyphony	In one sense any texture with two or more parts, but commonly used as a synonym for 'counterpoint' where there are two or more simultaneous and largely independent melodic lines. The adjective is 'polyphonic'
Two-part	Music for two 'parts' (i.e. for two melodic lines, and therefore with two notes sounding simultaneously except where one or both rest). 'Threepart' and 'four-part' music have three and four parts respectively
Imitation	Two or more parts share the same melodic idea (not necessarily in full, exactly or at the same pitch). Each new part enters separately, the preceding one continuing with shared or new material

## Tempo, Rhythm and metre

'Tempo' is the speed of the music, (which may be, for example, slow, quick, or lively). 'Metre', often indicated by a time signature, concerns the pattern and number of strong and weak beats (e.g. 2/4 metre has two crotchets per bar, the first 'strong', the second 'weak'). 'Rhythm' refers more broadly to the relationship between sounds and the passage of time, and often concerns conventional groupings (e.g. 'dotted rhythms', as defined below).

Beat	Most music has a regular beat rather as most people have a regular pulse. Small numbers of beats are generally grouped into bars. Some beats, notably the first of a bar, are 'strong' or 'accented', others, notably the last, are 'weak' or 'unaccented'. Some rhythms come 'off the beat': further, see 'syncopation'
Dotted rhythm	The term 'dotted rhythm' is usually applied to a pair of notes consisting of a dotted note and a shorter note (the two making up a complete beat or number of beats), or to several successive such pairs of notes
Duration	In rhythmic terms, the length of a note
Shuffle	A rhythm based on the shuffle dance step, characteristically featuring alternately long and short notes (within triplet groupings)
Swing	A jazz style that incorporates swung rhythms
Swung rhythm	Two notes of the same value (usually quavers) are played with the first lengthened and the second correspondingly shortened (as often in jazz)
Syncopation	A 'strong' or stressed note occurs on a part of a bar or beat that would normally be 'weak' or unstressed
Triplets	Three notes of equal value taking the time normally occupied by two notes of the same written value (or by one undotted note of the next highest value)

## Dynamics

The volume of musical sound(s), and also the symbols used in a score to indicate volume (e.g. f and p)

Accent	Notes may be given special prominence by the addition of accent marks (e.g. > )
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