

## **Melody**

A succession of single tones or pitches perceived as a unity.

We perceive the pitches of this broad, singing melody in relation to one another, in the same way we hear the words in a sentence as an entire thought.

Example:

[Brahms, Symphony No. 1, fourth movement](#)

## ▪ **Pitch**

The highness or lowness of a tone, depending on the frequency (rate of vibration)

In this famous example, we hear three repeated pitches or tones, then a leap to a lower pitch, followed by the same sequence starting on another, lower tone.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C minor, first movement](#)

## ▪ **Interval**

The distance and relationship between two pitches.

The opening interval in this work is an octave (8 tones apart), followed by small intervals (of a semitone or half step).

Example:

[Chopin, Prelude in E minor, Op. 28, No. 4](#)

## ▪ **Range**

The distance between the lowest and highest tones of a melody, an instrument, or a voice. This span can be generally described as narrow, medium, or wide in range.

## ▪ **Shape**

This is determined by the direction a melody takes as it turns upward or downward or remains static. On a line graph, a melody might be charted as an ascending line, a wave, or a static line.

## ▪ **Conjunct**

Describes a melody that moves in small intervals.

This joyful tune moves in small, connected intervals (mostly seconds), making it conjunct.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 9, fourth movement, "Ode to Joy"](#)

## ▪ **Disjunct**

Describes a melody that moves in disjointed or disconnected intervals

This dance-like tune moves with disjointed leaps, making it disjunct.

Example:

[Haydn, Symphony No. 94 \(Surprise\), third movement](#)

## ▪ **Phrase**

As in language, a unit of meaning within a larger structure; thus, a melody may be divided into component phrases.

This melody divides into four distinct phrases; the first two are similar, the third is contrasting, and the last returns to the opening idea. The melody's four phrases make up a complete musical thought.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 9, fourth movement, "Ode to Joy"](#)

#### ▪ **Cadence**

A resting place in a musical phrase-musical punctuation.

This melody features four phrases, each of which ends in a cadence. The resting places, or cadences, after the first and third phrases are inconclusive (like a comma in a sentence); those after the second and fourth phrases sound final (like a period closing a sentence).

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 9, fourth movement, "Ode to Joy"](#)

#### ▪ **Countermelody**

An accompanying melody sounded against the principal melody.

In this famous march, we hear the high piccolos playing a countermelody against the main melody.

Example:

[Sousa, The Stars and Stripes Forever, Trio](#)

#### **Rhythm**

The element of time in music (Since music is an art that exists solely in time, rhythm controls ultimately all the relationships within a musical work.)

In this example, the insistent rhythm drives the music forward and organizes it in time.

Example:

[Ravel, Boléro \(Opening\)](#)

#### ▪ **Beat**

Regular pulsation; a basic unit of length in musical time.

In this dance movement, the beats are regular, with a strong, or accented, beat followed by two weaker pulses (**1** - 2 - 3 - **1** - 2 - 3).

Example:

[Haydn, Symphony No. 94 \(Surprise\), third movement](#)

#### ▪ **Accent**

Emphasis on a note, so that it is louder or longer than another.

In this example, the accented beat occurs at regular intervals, on every third pulse (**1** - 2 - 3 - **1** - 2 - 3).

Example:

[Haydn, Symphony No. 94 \(Surprise\), third movement](#)

#### ▪ **Tempo**

The rate of speed or pace of the musical pulse. Tempo markings are traditionally given in Italian; common markings include: grave (solemn; very, very slow); largo (broad; very slow); adagio (quite slow); andante (a walking pace); moderato (moderate); allegro (fast; cheerful); vivace (lively); presto (very fast); accelerando (getting faster); ritardando (getting slower); and a tempo (in time; returning to the original pace).

▪ **Measure** A rhythmic group or metrical unit that contains a fixed number of beats, divided on the musical staff by bar lines.

In this example, the pattern of accents falls in threes; thus the beats are grouped into measures of three beats each (1 - 2 - 3 | 1 - 2 - 3 | 1 - 2 - 3 ).

Example:

[Haydn, Symphony No. 94 \(Surprise\), third movement](#)

▪ **Meter** The grouping of beats into larger, regular patterns, notated as measures. In simple meters, such as duple, triple, and quadruple, each beat subdivides into two; in compound meters, such as sextuple, each beat divides into three.

▪ **Upbeat** The last beat of a measure, a weak beat, which anticipates the downbeat, the first beat of the next measure.

This expansive melody in quadruple meter begins on the last beat (4) of the measure, anticipating the strong downbeat ( 4 | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4).

Example:

[Brahms, Symphony No. 1, fourth movement](#)

▪ **Downbeat** The first beat of a measure, the strongest in any meter

This triple-meter dance begins on an accented beat, the first beat, or downbeat, in the measure (1 - 2 - 3 | 1 - 2 - 3).

Example:

[Bach, Minuet in G](#)

▪ **Syncopation** Deliberate upsetting of the meter or pulse through a temporary shifting of the accent to a weak beat, or an offbeat.

This example features a syncopated rhythm in the melody, with a steady pulse in the accompaniment.

Example:

[Joplin, The Entertainer](#)

▪ **Polyrhythm** The simultaneous use of several rhythmic patterns or meters; common in twentieth-century music and certain African musics.

▪ **Additive Meter** Additive meter—Patterns of beats that subdivide into smaller, irregular groups (e.g., 2+3+2+3=10); common in certain Eastern European musics.

This chant has a free rhythm with no recurring metrical accents.

Example:

[Gregorian chant, "Kyrie eleison"](#)

▪ **Nonmetric** Music lacking a strong sense of beat or meter; common in chant, as well as in certain non-Western musics

This chant has a free rhythm with no recurring metrical accents.

Example:

[Gregorian chant, "Kyrie eleison"](#)

▪ **Harmony** The simultaneous combination of notes and the ensuing relationships of intervals and chords; the vertical relationship of combined notes. Not all musics of the world rely on harmony for interest, but it is central to most Western music.

In this example, the piano melody is supported by a simple harmonic accompaniment.

Example:

[Mozart, Piano Concerto in C major, K. 467, second movement](#)

## ▪ Chord

Simultaneous combination of tones (typically three or more) that constitute a single block of harmony.

In this example, the melody is accompanied by repeated chords, or blocks of harmony (each made up of three tones).

Example:

[Chopin, Prelude in E minor, Op. 28, No. 4](#)

## ▪ Interval

The distance and relationship between two pitches.

In the example, the accompaniment sustains the harmonic interval of a fifth, while the melody alternates descending fifths and fourths.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 9 in D minor, first movement](#)

## ▪ Triad

A common chord type consisting of three pitches built on alternate tones of a major scale or minor scale (1–3–5)

In this example, the opening melody outlines the notes of a major triad (1 - 3 - 5), sounding them one after another rather than simultaneously.

Example:

[Haydn, Symphony No. 94 \(Surprise\), second movement](#)

## ▪ Scale

A series of tones or pitches in ascending or descending order. Scale tones are often assigned numbers (1–8) or syllables (do—re—mi—fa—sol—la—ti—do).

## ▪ Major Scale

A collection of seven different pitches ordered in the specific pattern of whole steps and half steps shown below:

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8  
Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half

The melody in this example is chosen from the pitches of a major scale built on the pitch G.

Example:

[Bach, Minuet in G](#)

## ▪ Minor Scale

A collection of seven different pitches ordered in the specific pattern of whole steps and half steps shown below (diagram)

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8  
Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half Whole

This mournful melody is built from the pitches of a minor scale.

Example:

[Grieg, Peer Gynt Suite, "Ase's Death"](#)

## ▪ Tonic

In tonality, the first note of a scale (the tonic, or keynote "do") serves as the home base around which the others revolve.

This melody begins and ends on the first note of the scale, the tonic, and revolves around this pitch, providing a strong sense of a home base (tonality).

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 9, fourth movement, "Ode to Joy"](#)

## ▪ **Tonality**

The principal of organizing a work around a central tonic, or home pitch, based on a major or minor scale.

Tonality is perceived here as a strong pull to the tonic (G); when the melody finally reaches a cadence on this pitch (at the end of this excerpt), there is a sense of finality.

Example:

[Bach, Minuet in G](#)

## ▪ **Diatonic**

Melody or harmony built solely from the seven tones of a major or minor scale.

This trumpet melody is built exclusively from the seven pitches of a major scale, making it diatonic.

Example:

[Mouret, Rondeau](#)

## ▪ **Chromatic**

Melody or harmony built from many, if not all, of the twelve semitones (half steps) of the octave.

This winding melody makes use of many half steps from the chromatic scale.

Example:

[Bach, Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D minor, Fugue](#)

## ▪ **Consonance**

A concordant, harmonious combination of tones that provides a sense of relaxation and stability in music.

This majestic passage is harmonious, or consonant, providing a sense of stability in the music.

Example:

[Brahms, Symphony No. 1, fourth movement](#)

## ▪ **Dissonance**

A combination of tones that sounds discordant and unstable, in need of resolution.

## ▪ **Drone**

Sustained sounding of one or several tones for harmonic support, a common feature in folk music.

A low—pitched, two—note drone is heard at the beginning of this example, as the disjunct melodic idea is passed from one instrument to another.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 9 in D minor, first movement](#)

## ▪ **Texture**

The interweaving of melodic (horizontal) and harmonic (vertical) elements in the musical fabric. Texture is generally described as monophonic (single line), heterophonic (elaboration on a single line), homophonic (single line with accompaniment), or polyphonic (many voiced).

## ▪ **Monophonic**

Single – line texture, or melody without accompaniment.

In this chant, only one melody is heard (whether sung by a soloist or by the group) with no accompaniment.

Example: [Gregorian chant, "Kyrie eleison"](#)

▪ **Heterophonic** Texture in which two or more voices (parts) elaborate the same melody simultaneously; often the result of improvisation.

▪ **Homophonic** Texture with a principal melody and accompanying harmony; as distinct from polyphony.

In this example, the principal melody is heard in the upper range of the piano, while the chordal accompaniment is subordinate.

Example: [Mozart, Piano Concerto in C major, K. 467, second movement](#)

▪ **Polyphonic** Occurs when two or more melodic lines combine into a multivoiced texture, as distinct from monophonic.

This example features numerous lines combined into a complex musical fabric in which melodic interest is distributed among all the parts.

Example: [Mozart, Requiem, "Kyrie eleison"](#)

▪ **Counterpoint** The compositional art of combining two or more simultaneous melodic lines (polyphonic texture); term means "point against point" or "note against note."

▪ **Imitation** Compositional technique in which a melodic idea is presented in one voice (or part), then restated in another while the first voice continues with new material.

In this example, the voice parts build from lowest to highest (basses, tenors, altos, sopranos), each imitating the first melodic statement.

Example: [Handel, Messiah, "Hallelujah" Chorus](#)

▪ **Canon** A type of polyphonic composition in which one musical line strictly imitates another at a fixed distance throughout.

In this instrumental canon, the double bass presents a melody that is imitated exactly by the bassoon at a fixed distance in time.

Example: [Mahler, Symphony No. 1, third movement](#)

▪ **Round** A popular type of perpetual canon for voices, in which each vocal part enters in succession on the same melody.

▪ **Form** The structure or shape of a musical work, based on repetition, contrast, and variation; the organizing principle of music. Binary and ternary are basic forms, while more sophisticated forms include as rondo, sonata-allegro, minuet and trio, theme and variations, ritornello, and fugue.

▪ **Repetition** Within a form, repetition fixes the material in our mind and satisfies our need for the familiar; it provides unity to a form.

▪ **Contrast** Within a form, contrast sustains our interest and feed our love of change.

In this example, the first musical idea (heard twice at a fast tempo) is balanced by a contrasting idea, which is also repeated.

Example:

[Corelli, Suite for Strings, "Badinerie"](#)

## ▪ Variation

A formal principle in which some aspects of the music are altered but still recognizable.

Here, a familiar melody is varied by a change of harmony (from major to minor) and by altering the rhythm, yet it is still recognizable.

Example:

[Haydn, Symphony No. 94 \(Surprise\), second movement](#)

## ▪ Theme

A melodic idea used as a basic building block in the construction of a composition. (The main theme of a fugue is called a "subject.")

This melody, or theme, is one in a series of musical events in this work. The theme is a basic idea out of which subsequent musical events grow.

Example:

[Brahms, Symphony No. 1 in C minor, fourth movement](#)

## ▪ Thematic development

The process of revealing a theme's capacities and bringing them to fulfillment. The principle of elaborating or varying a musical idea is pervasive in Western music, and it is also found in melody-oriented styles of many Far Eastern and Middle Eastern musics.

The composer elaborates and varies the opening idea in this example, thus revealing the theme's capacity for growth.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C minor, first movement](#)

## ▪ Motive

A small, thematic fragment that constitutes a melodic-rhythmic unit.

In this excerpt, a familiar four-note idea, or motive, is sounded twice before it is subjected to further development.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C minor, first movement](#)

## ▪ Sequence

A restatement of an idea at a higher or lower pitch level.

Here, the familiar motive is restated a number of times beginning on different pitches; thus, it is treated in sequence.

Example:

[Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C minor, first movement](#)

## ▪ Ostinato

A short musical pattern – melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic- that is repeated persistently throughout a work or major section of a composition.

In this example, a short (four-note) descending pattern in the bass is heard throughout under the voices.

Example:

[Monteverdi: Lament of the Nymphs](#)

▪ **Basic forms** Two- and three-part forms are common in short pieces such as songs and dances. Binary, or two-part, form (A-B) is based on statement and departure. Ternary, or three-part, form (A-B-A) extends the idea of statement and departure by bringing back the first section.

▪ **Advanced forms** More intricate forms include rondo, sonata-allegro, minuet and trio, theme and variations, and fugue. Some are based on a single principal theme that undergoes development (fugue, theme and variations) or that is set off by contrasting sections (rondo, ritornello); others are based on two or more themes of equal or nearly equal importance (sonata-allegro, minuet and trio).

▪ **Responsorial Music** Occurs when a solo singer ( or solo group ) acts as "leader," alternating with a chorus of "followers." This is found in some types of Western chant, as well as in many African and Native American musics (i.e., "call and response").

In this example of Gregorian chant, a soloist alternates with a choir, who responds by imitating what was just sung.

Example:

[Gregorian chant, "Kyrie eleison"](#)

▪ **Dynamics** Designations for the relative loudness or quietness of music. The main dynamic terms are based on the Italian words for loud ("forte") and quiet ("piano"). These words can be modified by the prefix "mezzo" (medium) or the suffix "issimo" (more).

▪ **Pianissimo** The Italian term for "very quiet" (literally "more piano"). This is indicated in a musical score by the marking "pp."

This work begins very softly (pianissimo) with a flute melody played against a rhythmic accompaniment.

Example:

[Ravel, Boléro \(Opening\)](#)

▪ **Piano** The Italian term for "quiet" (literally "small"). This is indicated in a musical score by the marking "p".

This example, featuring clarinet playing the melody, is soft (piano).

Example:

[Ravel, Boléro \(Clarinet\)](#)

▪ **Mezzo-piano** The Italian term for "moderately quiet." This is indicated in a musical score by the marking "mp".

This example, featuring tenor saxophone playing the melody is marked "mezzo piano," or moderately soft.

Example:

[Ravel, Boléro \(Sax\)](#)

▪ **Forte** The Italian term for "loud" (literally "strong"). This is indicated in a musical score by the marking "f".

In this example, the woodwind section plays the melody loudly (marked "forte")

Example:

[Ravel, Boléro \(Woodwinds\)](#)

▪ **Fortissimo** The Italian term for "very loud" (literally "more strong"). This is indicated in a musical score by the marking "ff".

At the close of this work, the dynamic level is very loud (fortissimo) in the full orchestra.

Example:

[Ravel, Boléro \(Conclusion\)](#)

▪  
**Crescendo**

The dynamic effect of gradually growing louder, indicated in the musical score by the marking "<."

This energetic theme is repeated in various combinations of instruments as the dynamic level gradually grows from p (piano, or soft) to ff (fortissimo, or very loud).

Example:

[Mendelssohn, Symphony No. 4 \(Italian\), fourth movement](#)

▪  
**Decrescendo**

The dynamic effect of gradually growing softer, indicated in the musical score by the marking ">." Also referred to as diminuendo.

The dynamic level decreases very gradually in the closing section of this work (except for the last two loud chords).

Example:

[Smetana, The Moldau](#)

▪  
**Sforzando**

A sudden stress or accent on a single note or chord. This is indicated in a musical score by the marking "sf".

This Russian dance features sudden loud accents on certain notes, notated as "sf" or "sforzando."

Example:

[Tchaikovsky, The Nutcracker, "Trepak"](#)