Section 1.9

DYNAMICS, ARTICULATIONS, SLURS, TEMPO MARKINGS

Dynamics are used to indicate relative loudness:

- \( ppp \) = pianississimo = very, very soft
- \( pp \) = pianissimo = very soft
- \( p \) = piano = soft
- \( mp \) = mezzo-piano = medium-soft
- \( mf \) = mezzo-forte = medium-loud
- \( f \) = forte = loud
- \( ff \) = fortissimo = very loud
- \( fff \) = fortississimo = very, very loud
- \( fp \) = forte followed suddenly by piano; also \( mfp, ffp \), etc.
- \( sfz \) = sforzando = a forceful, sudden accent
- \( fz \) is forceful but not as sudden as \( sfz \)

Articulations specify how notes should be performed, either in terms of duration or stress. Staccatissimo means extremely shortened duration. Staccato means shortened duration. Tenuto has two functions: it can mean full duration OR a slight stress or emphasis. Accent means stressed or emphasized (more than tenuto). Marcato means extremely stressed. An articulation of duration (staccatissimo, staccato, or tenuto) may combine with one of stress (tenuto, accent, or marcato).

Slurs are curved lines connecting different pitches. Slurs can mean: (1.) connect the notes as a phrase; (2.) for string instruments: play with one motion of the bow (up or down); (3.) for voice: sing with one syllable, or (4.) for wind instruments: don’t tongue between the notes.
Fermatas indicate that the music stops and holds the note until the conductor or soloist moves on. Musical context, style, and taste determine how long a fermata actually lasts. Breath marks indicate a quick break, or for a wind instrument like trumpet or voice, a breath. The caesura (sometimes “grand pause” or G.P.) indicates a full stop and pause before the music continues.

Breath marks

Crescendo signs and diminuendo signs indicate a gradual increase or decrease in loudness, respectively. The words crescendo (cresc.), diminuendo (dim.), or decrescendo (decresc.) are sometimes written instead.

Tempo is the speed of the beat, usually given in beats per minute (BPM). Sometimes BPM is labeled M.M. for Maelzel’s metronome. (Johann Maelzel promoted and improved the metronome in the 1800s.) The crescendo/diminuendo examples above show a tempo label of 60 quarter notes per minute, or one quarter note each second.

Musicians use many Italian terms for tempo. Some of the more common, in order from slowest to fastest, are: Grave (solemn), Largo (very slow and broad), Lento (very slow), Adagio (slow), Andante (walking pace, moderately slow), Moderato (moderate), Allegro (fast), Vivace (lively), and Presto (very fast).