

THE CHORAL SINGERS TOOLKIT

A compact (but **NOT** totally comprehensive) guide for choral singers

CONTENTS

Page 2

Finding and Keeping Your Place in the Music 1
(High notes, low notes, the stave, lines and systems)

Page 3

Finding and Keeping Your Place in the Music 2
(Bars and barlines, orientation techniques)

Page 4

Finding and Keeping Your Place in the Music 3
(Repeat marks, first and second time bars etc.)

Page 5

Beats and Time Signatures

Page 6

Notes, Rests and Time Values. More on Time Signatures

Page 7

Ties, Slurs and Dots. Even more on Time Signatures

Page 8

Note Names, Pitches and Intervals

Page 9

More on Note Names, Accidentals (*Sharps and Flats*)

Page 10

Key signatures, Loudness

Page 11

Tempo (Fast or Slow), Breathing, Placing Consonants

Page 12

Diphthongs, Can't Sing - Tone Deaf?, Useful Practical Tips

Anyone can sing, and can sing very happily in a choir without knowing anything about music notation. However, although you could learn Russian or Turkish without knowing their alphabets, your appreciation of the language would be much greater if you could read it. The information in this document won't make you a sight-reader (that takes practice and/or the accident of inheritance), but it will clear up much of the confusion that can occur if a choir is score-based (uses printed music extensively) by setting out the basic information for understanding the whats, hows, and whys of printed music. If a conductor barks out, "Tenors, I want a fortissimo on the G double flat, then a diminuendo until the staccato wedge," that will no longer be a confusing fog of technicalities.

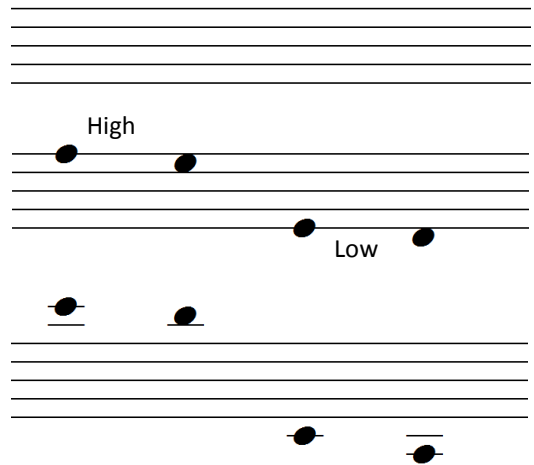
Finding and Keeping Your Place in the Music (the Score)

Notes are written on a **STAFF** or **STAVE**.

This shows if they are **HIGH** or **LOW**.

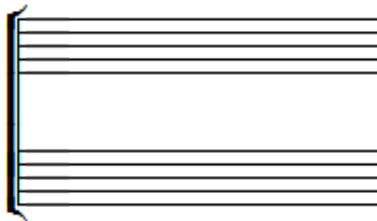
Notes can be written on the lines or in the spaces.

Very high or low notes are written on **LEGER LINES**.



Several staves may be performed at the same time. They are then grouped together with a bracket or brace at the left margin. A group of staves is commonly called a **LINE (GB)** or **SYSTEM (US)**.

A two-stave line with a bracket.



A three-stave line with a brace.



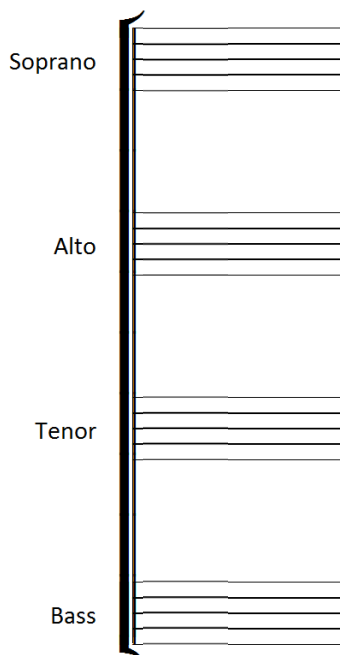
The most common division of voices in a choir is

SOPRANO - ALTO - TENOR - BASS
High - Low - Lower - Lowest

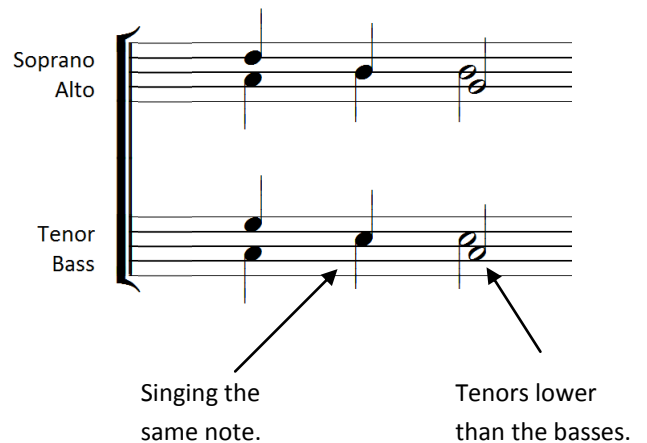
These may be subdivided

SOPRANO 1 - SOPRANO 2
Higher - Lower

The voices are usually assigned to a 4-stave line like this.

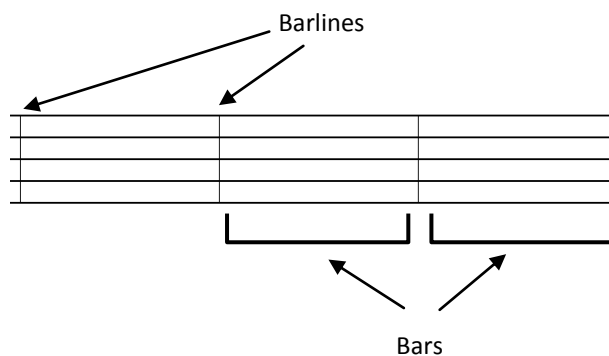


Sometimes, to save space, the Sopranos and the Altos, and the Tenors and the Basses will share a staff. Then if the note **TAILS** point **upwards**, they are soprano or tenor notes, and if the note tails points **downwards**, they are alto or bass notes.

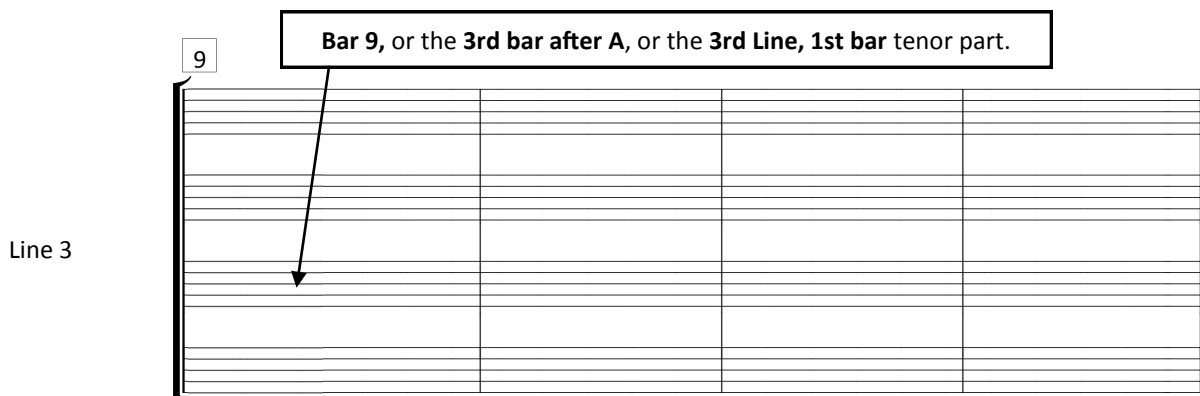
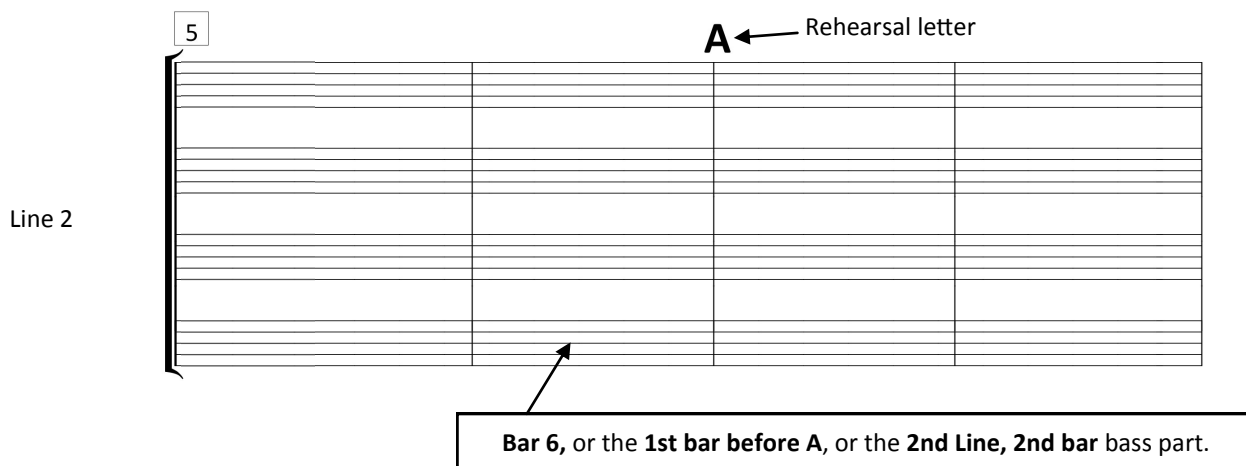
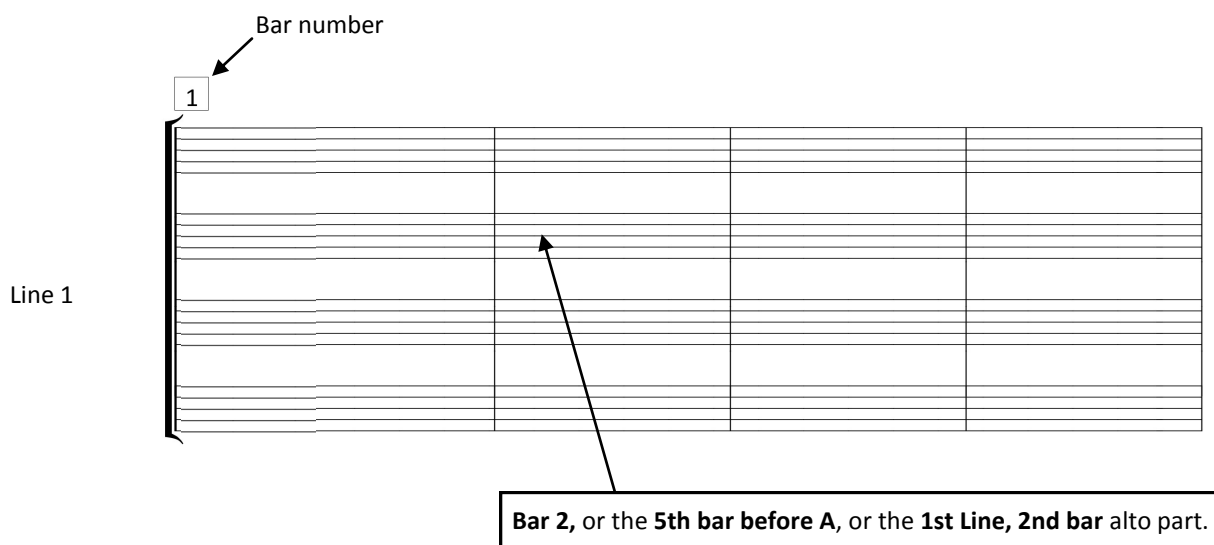


On a staff, **BARLINES** divide it into smaller units.

The gap between two barlines is called **BAR**.



We can orientate ourselves on a page by **BAR NUMBERS, REHEARSAL LETTERS/NUMBERS** (landmarks on the page), or **LINE/BAR** references.



Bars between **REPEAT MARKS** are sung twice, thus:

1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4.

Repeat marks

0-0-0-0-000-0-0-0-0

Sometimes, there are different endings for the first time a section is sung (**1ST TIME BAR**) and the second time it is sung (**2ND TIME BAR**). Thus:

1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 4

0-0-0-0-000-0-0-0-0

At the end of a piece **D.C. al Fine** tells you to go back to the beginning and sing through to **Fine** in the **3RD TIME BAR**.

Thus: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1, 2, 4.

0-0-0-0-000-0-0-0-0

At the end of a piece **D.S. al Fine** tells you to go back to the **distinctive sign** and sing through to **Fine** in the **THIRD TIME BAR**.

Thus: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 2, 4.

The distinctive sign →

0-0-0-0-000-0-0-0-0

At the end of a piece **D.S. al Coda** tells you to go back to the D.S. sign, sing through to the **3RD TIME BAR**, then jump to the **CODA**.

Thus: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 2, 4, 7, 8. *There are many possibilities, but they all use the same basic methods.*

D.S. al Coda

Beats and Time Signatures

Most music has **accented** or **louder** beats at regular intervals.
We normally count the louder beats as **1** and the lesser beats as 2, 3, 4, etc.

GOD save our **GRA** - cious Queen, **LONG** live our **NO** - ble Queen, **GOD** save the **QUEEN**.

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

GOOD King Wen - ces - **LAS** looked out **ON** the feast of **STE** - phen

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

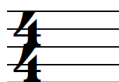
NB!! You will notice that some notes last *longer* than one beat, and some *shorter* than one beat,
but the counting is kept **ABSOLUTELY REGULAR**.

On a stave, the **barlines** are placed immediately before the accented beats.

God Save Our Gracious Queen has **THREE BEATS IN A BAR**, and Good King Wenceslas has **FOUR BEATS IN A BAR**.

Usually, there is a **TIME SIGNATURE** at the beginning of the music (as in the examples above).

The **UPPER NUMBER** tells you how many beats there are in a bar. For the time being, we can ignore the LOWER NUMBER.



Sometimes, the time signature will change during the course of a piece.

For the sake of convenience, in **FAST** music, a conductor may decide to count some beats as just parts of other beats.

So **FOUR** beats in a bar could be counted as **TWO** beats like this : | 1 and 2 and | 1 and 2 and |

Or **SIX** beats could be counted as **TWO** beats: | 1 and a 2 and a | 1 and a 2 and a |

Or **THREE** beats could be counted as **ONE** beat; | 1 and a | 1 and a | 1 and a |

But the counting stays regular.

On the other hand, in **SLOW** music, the beat may be divided into shorter beats.

FOUR beats may be counted like this: | 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and | or even: | 1 2, 3 4, 5 6, 7 8 |.

THREE beats may become: | 1 and 2 and 3 and | or: | 1 2, 3 4, 5 6 |

Notes, Rests and Time Values

The appearance of a note tells **HOW LONG IT LASTS** compared to other notes (**ITS TIME VALUE**).

US: whole note 2 1/2 notes
UK: semibreve 2 minims

US: 1/2 note 2 1/4 notes
UK: minim 2 crotchets

US: 1/4 note 2 1/8 notes
UK: crotchet 2 quavers

US: 1/8 note 2 1/16 notes
UK: quaver 2 semiquavers

Short notes fit exactly into the time value of longer notes. Above: $1/2 = (2 \times 1/8) + (4 \times 1/16)$.
And, below: $1/4 = 1/16 + 1/8 + 1/16$.

It makes **no difference** to the time value whether the tails point up or down or whether they are joined or not.

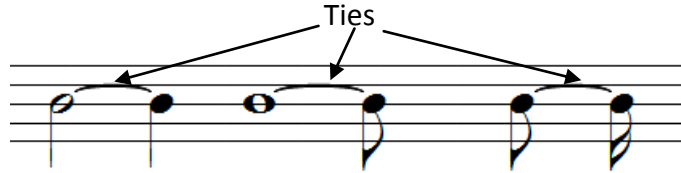
More on Time Signatures: the LOWER NUMBER says what we are counting as the beat.

Some pieces begin with a **short bar**; that is, an **UP-BEAT** or **ANACRUSIS**.

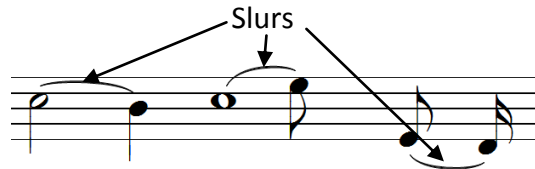
There are **RESTS**, which tell you when **NOT** to sing. These also have **time values**.



Note can be **TIED** together to make one longer note **IF THEY ARE AT THE SAME PITCH** (on the same line or space).



If the notes **ARE NOT AT THE SAME PITCH**, the curved lines are **SLURS**, which mean, "sing smoothly."



A **DOT** after a note (or rest) makes it **50% LONGER**.



A **DOUBLE DOT** after a note (or rest) makes it **75% LONGER**.



Even More About Time Signatures - Using Dotted Notes

If the **UPPER** number of a time signature is a 6, 9, or 12, it's **POSSIBLE** that the basic beat divides into 3.

In these cases, to find the **number of beats in a bar**, **DIVIDE THE UPPER NUMBER by 3**.

To find what that beat is, imagine that the beat suggested by the **LOWER** figure is **typed together in groups of 3**, OR is a **dotted note**.

(This is a confusing complication - but it's what happens)



4 beats in a bar, counting in **dotted 1/4 notes or crotchets**.



2 beats in a bar, counting in **dotted whole notes or semibreves**.



3 beats in a bar, counting in **dotted 1/8 notes or quavers**.

This is called
COMPOUND TIME.

Music without this
complication is said
to be in
SIMPLE TIME.

A Last bit about note values - using **TUPLETS**

If a beat is divided into an unusual number of smaller notes, a **bracket** or **little number** is used to alert the performer.



7 in the time of 4. A **septuplet**.



3 in the time of 2. A **triplet**.



3 in the time of 2. A **triplet**.

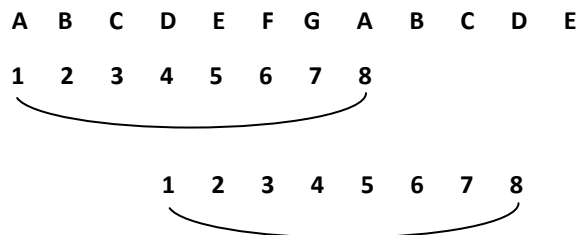


2 in the time of 3. A **duplet**.

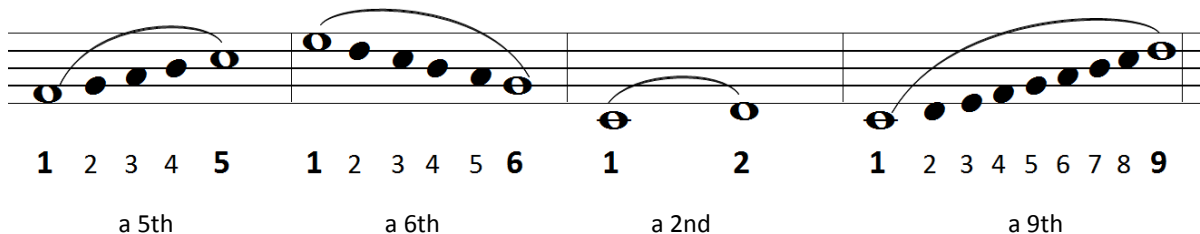
NOTE NAMES, PITCHES AND INTERVALS

Notes are given letter names from A - G, which are then repeated for many different notes. This is because notes of the same letter name, although higher or lower, sound very similar and go together (harmonise) very well.

The distance between two notes of the same name is called an **OCTAVE**.



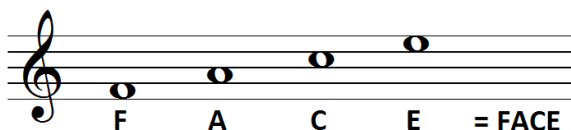
The distance between two notes is called an **INTERVAL**, counting the starting note as **1** and then the notes in between.



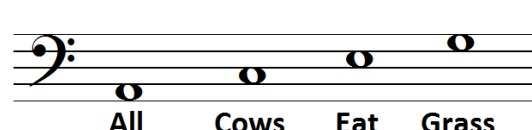
CLEFS are used to define the letter names of the lines and spaces of the stave.

The most usual are the **TREBLE** clef for **high** notes and the **BASS** clef for **low** notes.

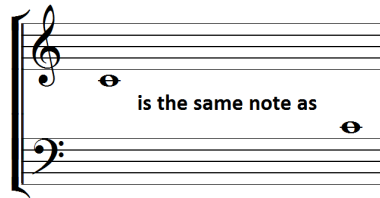
If you know the names of the **spaces**, it's easy to work out name of **the lines**.



Treble Clef



Bass Clef



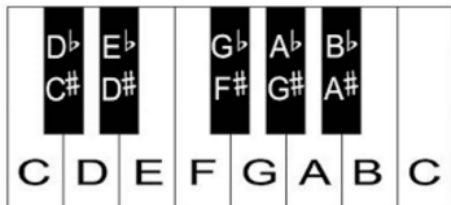
With a **2-stave line**, the **Sopranos and Altos** sing from the **Treble Clef** and the **Tenors and Basses** from the **Bass Clef**.
 With a **4-stave line**, it's not uncommon to use a **Treble Clef** for the **Tenors**, but everyone knows that they sing an **octave lower**.

ACCIDENTALS (SHARPS AND FLATS)

The basic notes A - G can be found as the white notes on a piano keyboard.



To get to the equivalent of the black notes, we need to use **SHARPS (#)** and **FLATS (b)**.
 These are placed in front of notes. A **sharp RAISES** a note by a **SEMITONE** (moves it to the key immediately to the right),
 and a **flat LOWERS** a note by a **SEMITONE**, (moves it to the key immediately to the left).

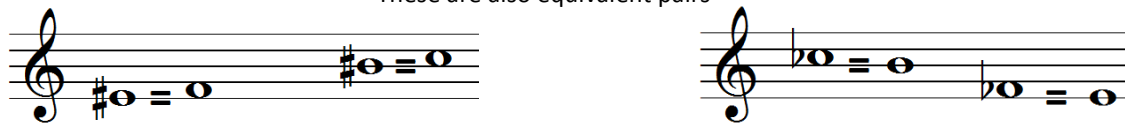


You will notice, for instance, that G# and Ab are the same note. We use both names, though, to keep the music spelling and grammar correct. For example, although the following sounds correct, you wouldn't write it:

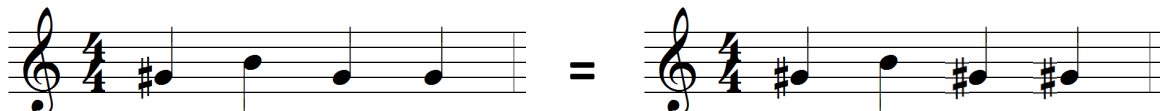
Wen eye hert mie nee, ei treyed not two kri.

So, it's similar with music.

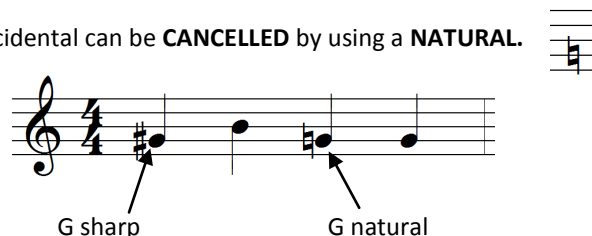
These are also equivalent pairs



The effect of an accidental lasts until the **next barline**.



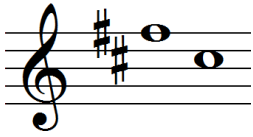
An accidental can be **CANCELLED** by using a **NATURAL**.



If a piece uses the same accidentals many times, they are often gathered together at the beginning to form a **KEY SIGNATURE**.
 These accidentals in the key signature then **AFFECT EVERY NOTE OF THE SAME LETTER NAME**, *unless cancelled by a natural*.



EVERY **F**, whether high or low, is **SHARPENED**.



EVERY **F and C**, whether high or low, is **SHARPENED**.



EVERY **B**, whether high or low, is **FLATTENED**.



EVERY **B, E, and A**, whether high or low, is **FLATTENED**.

To meet the dictates of musical grammar, there are also **DOUBLE SHARPS** (which raise a note **TWO** semitones),
 and **DOUBLE FLATS** (which lower a note **TWO** semitones).



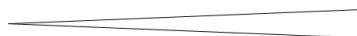
LOUDNESS

ppp pp p mp mf f ff fff

Very quiet >>>>>> Middle quiet/loud >>>> >>>> Very loud

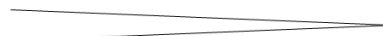
Also: pianissimo, piano, mezzo-piano, mezzo-forte, forte, fortissimo

Getting louder



Crescendo
Cresc.

Getting quieter



Diminuendo
Dim.
Decrescend
Decresc.

These signs (**accents**) make a note **LOUDER** than those immediately surrounding it.

— > *sf fz fp sffz sfz*

TEMPO (Fast or Slow)

Slow	Middle	Fast
Adagio	Moderato	Allegro
Largo	Andante	Presto
Lento		Vivace

Getting Faster	Getting Slower
Accelerando	Rallentando (rall.)
Accel.	Ritenuto (rit.)

The Italian words above are **relative** and have no absolute value. The indications below, although appearing to be **absolute**, are often varied according to how many performers there are and/or how much **acoustic** (echo) there is.

♩ = 100: 100 crotchet beats in a minute.

♪ = 50: 50 semiquaver beats in a minute.

♩ = 72: 72 minim beats in a minute.

Breathing

We have all been breathing for a long time, so we know how our body feels when the lungs are full/empty.

We use this knowledge to control our breathing and, if we have to sing for a long time without taking a breath, we conserve the air we have and don't let it all out in the first few seconds.

There is a discipline about breathing and singing which is different from normal speech. Before starting to sing, take a good breath during the beats running up to the start time. For instance: 1, 2, 3, 4, SING, becomes 1, 2, deep breath, SING.

In the best circumstances, we only breathe where there is a rest or a punctuation mark in the text:

There was a young girl in the choir, (breath) whose voice arose higher and higher, (breath) 'til one Sunday night, (breath if needed) ...

In emergencies, we may have to breathe between words: *There was a young girl (breath) in the choir, ...*

We (normally) **NEVER** breathe in the middle of a word: *'til one Sun-(breath)-day night, ...* (but see the example below).

In emergencies, we may also breathe **after a tied note**, or between the **repetitions** of little bits of the same melody (a sequence).

Placing Consonants

Consonants are placed as late as possible in a note. For instance, if the word "cat" is sung on a 4 beat note, the "t" comes just before the next note, NOT on beat 4: **Ca** - 2 - 3 - 4 - T, NOT **Ca** - 2 - 3 - T -.

Also, be careful not to **sizzle** the letters "s" or "z". **Bu** - 2 - 3 - 4 - s, NOT **Bu** - 2 - s - s - s.

