

Glossary for Music

The glossary for Music includes terms commonly found in music education and for performance techniques. The intent of the glossary is to promote consistent terminology when creating curriculum and assessment documents as well as communicating with stakeholders.

Ability: natural aptitude in specific skills and processes; what the student is apt to do, without formal instruction.

Analog tools: category of musical instruments and tools that are non-digital (i.e., do not transfer sound in or convert sound into binary code), such as acoustic instruments, microphones, monitors, and speakers.

Analyze: examine in detail the structure and context of the music.

Arrangement: setting or adaptation of an existing musical composition
Arranger: person who creates alternative settings or adaptations of existing music.

Articulation: characteristic way in which musical tones are connected, separated, or accented; types of articulation include legato (smooth, connected tones) and staccato (short, detached tones).

Artistic literacy: knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the arts

Atonality: music in which no tonic or key center is apparent.

Artistic Processes: Organizational principles of the 2014 National Core Standards for the Arts: Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting.

Audiate: hear and comprehend sounds in one's head (inner hearing), even when no sound is present.

Audience etiquette: social behavior observed by those attending musical performances and which can vary depending upon the type of music performed.

Benchmark: pre-established definition of an achievement level, designed to help measure student progress toward a goal or standard, expressed either in writing or as an example of scored student work (aka, anchor set).

Binary form: musical form consisting of two sections, A and B, which contrast with each other

Body percussion: use of the human body as an instrument to create percussive/rhythmic sounds such as stomping, patsching (patting thighs), clapping, clicking, snapping.

Bordun: accompaniment created by sounding two tones, five notes apart, continuously throughout a composition; can be performed in varying ways, such as simultaneously or alternating.

Chant: most commonly, the rhythmic recitation of rhymes, or poems without a sung melody; a type of singing, with a simple, unaccompanied melody line and free rhythm.

Chart: jazz or popular music score, often abbreviated, with a melody (including key and time signature) and a set of chord changes.

Chord progression: series of chords sounding in succession; certain progressions are typical in particular styles/genres of music.

Collaboration: working together on a common (musical) task or goal.

Complex formal structure: musical form in which rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, and/or other musical materials undergo significant expansion and development, and may be more distantly related across sections while remaining coherent in some way, such as sonata or other novel design with three or more sections.

Composer: one who creates music compositions.

Compositional devices: tools used by a composer or arranger to create or organize a composition or arrangement, such as tonality, sequence, repetition, instrumentation, orchestration, harmonic/melodic structure, style, and form.

Compositional procedures: techniques that a composer initiates and continues in pieces to develop musical ideas, such as fragmentation, imitation, sequencing, variation, aggregate completion, registral saturation, contour inversion of gestures, and rhythmic phrasing.

Compositional techniques: approaches a composer uses to manipulate and refine the elements to convey meaning and intent in a composition, such as tension-release, augmentation-diminution, sound-silence, motion-stasis, in addition to compositional devices.

Concepts, music: understandings or generalized ideas about music that are formed after learners make connections and determine relationships among ideas.

Connection: relationship among artistic ideas, personal meaning, historical, cultural and/or external context.

Context: environment that surrounds music, influences understanding, provides meaning, and connects to an event or occurrence.

Context, cultural: values, beliefs, and traditions of a group of people that influence musical meaning and inform culturally authentic musical practice.

Context, historical: conditions of the time and place in which music was created or performed that provide meaning and influence the musical experience.

Context, personal: unique experiences and relationships that surround a single person and are influenced by personal life, family, habits, interest, and preferences.

Context, social: environment surrounding something or someone's creation or intended audience that reflects and influences how people use and interpret the musical experience.

Craftsmanship: degree of skill and ability exhibited by a creator or performer to manipulate the elements of music in a composition or performance; relating to the constructed syntax of musical ideas in the Plan/Make stage.

Create: conceive and develop new artistic ideas, such as an improvisation, composition, or arrangement, into a work.

Creative/composer intent: shaping of the elements of music to express and convey emotions, thoughts, and ideas; a composer's expressive purpose for a work; meaning or feeling of the music planned and conveyed by a creator or performer.

Creativity: a response to problems or prompts that is novel for the creator, useful, and appropriate.

Criteria: traits relevant to assessing or evaluating music attributes of a work or performance.

Culturally authentic performance: presentation that reflects practices and interpretation representative of the style and traditions of a culture.

Culture: values and beliefs of a particular group of people, from a specific place or time, expressed through characteristics such as tradition, social structure, religion, art, and food.

Cyclical structure: musical form characterized by the return or, cycling around, of significantly recognizable themes, motives, and/or patterns across movements.

Demonstrate: show musical understanding through observable behavior such as moving, chanting, singing, or playing instruments.

Diatonic: seven-tone scale consisting of five whole steps and two half steps (1-1-1/2-1-1-1-1/2).

Diction: the pronunciation of words when singing, including vowels and consonants.

Digital environment: simulated place made or created through the use of one or more digital tools, equipment, or systems.

Digital notation: a visual image of musical sound created by using computer software applications, intended either as a record of sound heard or imagined, or as a set of visual instructions for performers.

Dynamics: level or range of loudness of a sound or sounds.

Elements of music: basic characteristics of sound (pitch, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, texture, form, and style/articulation) that are manipulated to create music.

Enduring Understanding: overarching (or big) ideas that are central to the core of the music discipline and may be transferred to new situations.

Ensemble: group of individuals organized to perform artistic work: traditional, large groups such as bands, orchestras, and choirs; chamber, smaller groups, such as duets, trios, and quartets; emerging, such as guitar, iPad, mariachi, steel drum or pan, and Taiko drumming.

Essential Question: question(s) that are central to the core of a discipline, in this case music, and promotes investigation to uncover corresponding Enduring Understanding(s).

Established criteria: traits or dimensions for making quality judgments in music.

Expanded form: basic form (such as AB, ABA, rondo or theme and variation) expanded by the addition of an introduction, transition, and/or coda.

Explore: discover, investigate, and create musical ideas through singing, chanting, playing instruments, or moving to music.

Expression: feeling conveyed through music.

Expressive intent: the emotions, thoughts, and ideas that a performer or composer seeks to convey by manipulating the elements of music

Expressive qualities: qualities such as dynamics, tempo, timbre, articulation, and/or phrasing which, when combined with other elements of music, give a composition its musical interpretation.

Form: element of music describing the overall organization of a piece of music, such as AB, ABA, rondo, theme and variations, and strophic form.

Formal design: large-scale framework for a piece of music in which the constituent parts cohere into a meaningful whole; encompasses both structural and tonal aspects of the piece.

Formal structure (moderately complex): musical form with three or more sections (such as rounded binary, rondo, or other novel design), in which section closure is somewhat nuanced or ambiguous, and the rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, and/or other musical materials across sections may be more distantly related while remaining coherent in some way.

Fret: thin strip of material placed across the fingerboard of some stringed instruments, such as guitar, banjo, and mandolin; the fingers press the strings against the frets to determine pitch.

Fretted instruments: Instruments with frets, such as guitar, ukulele, mountain dulcimer, and sitar.

Function: use for which music is created, performed, or experienced, such as dance, social, recreation, music therapy, video games, and advertising.

Fundamentals of music theory: basic elements of music, their subsets, and how they interact (e.g. rhythm and meter, pitch and clefs, intervals, scales, keys and key signatures, triads and complex chords-sevenths, ninths, etc.).

Fusion: type of music created by combining contrasting styles into a new style.

Genre: category of music characterized by a distinctive style, form, and/or content, and pairs social, cultural, and historical musical conventions and expectations (e.g. various genres within pop, folk, jazz, rock, classical).

Harmonic sequences: series of two or more chords commonly used to support melody(ies).

Harmonizing instruments: musical instruments, such as guitars, ukuleles, and keyboards, capable of producing harmonies as well as melodies, often used to provide chordal accompaniments for melodies and songs.

Harmonization: process of applying stylistically appropriate harmony, such as chords and chord progressions, countermelodies, and ostinati, to melodic material.

Harmony: chordal structure of a music composition in which the simultaneous sounding of pitches produces chords and their successive use produces chord progressions.

Heterophonic: musical texture in which two or more versions of essentially the same melody are performed simultaneously (e.g. voice and instrument). A technique widely found in musics outside Western art music (Asia and the Middle East).

Historical periods: span of years during which music that was created and/or performed shared common characteristics; historians of Western art music typically refer to the following: Medieval (ca.500-ca.1420), Renaissance (ca.1420-ca.1600), Baroque (ca.1600-ca.1750), Classic (ca.1750-ca.1820), Romantic (ca.1820-ca.1900), and Contemporary (ca.1900-present).

Homophonic: musical texture in which the melody is concentrated in one voice or part and provided with a subordinate accompaniment.

Homorhythmic: all parts move in the same or very similar rhythm but use different pitches, as in hymns or chorales.

Iconic notation: representation of sound and its treatment using lines, drawings, pictures.

Imagine: generate musical ideas for various purposes and contexts.

Imagination: ability to generate in the mind ideas, concepts, sounds, and images that are not physically present and may not have been previously experienced (see Audiate).

Improvisation: music created and performed spontaneously or in-the-moment, often within a framework determined by the musical style.

Independently: working with virtually no assistance, initiating appropriate requests for consultation, performing in a self-directed ensemble offering ideas/solutions that make such consulting collaborative rather than teacher-directed.

Interpret: determine and demonstrate music's expressive intent and meaning when responding and performing.

Interpretation: intent and meaning that a performer realizes in studying and performing a piece of music.

Intervals: distance between two tones, named by counting all pitch names involved; a harmonic interval occurs when two pitches are sounded simultaneously, and a melodic interval when two pitches are sounded successively.

Intonation: singing or playing the correct pitch in tune.

Key signature: set of sharps or flats at the beginning of the staff, following the clef sign, that indicates the primary pitch set or scale used in the music and provide clues to the resting tone and mode.

Lead-sheet notation: system symbol used to identify chords in jazz, popular, and folk music; uppercase letters are written above the staff, specifying which chords should be used and when they should be played.

Level of difficulty: for purposes of these standards, music is classified into six levels of difficulty:

- Level 1 - Very Easy. Easy keys, meters, and rhythms; limited ranges
- Level 2 - Easy. May include changes of tempo, key, and meter; modest ranges
- Level 3 - Moderately Easy. Contains moderate technical demands, expanded ranges, and varied interpretive requirements
- Level 4 - Moderately Difficult. Requires well-developed technical skills, attention to phrasing and interpretation, and ability to perform various meters and rhythms in a variety of keys.
- Level 5 - Difficult. Requires advanced technical and interpretive skills; contains key signatures with numerous sharps or flats, unusual meters, complex rhythms, subtle dynamic requirements
- Level 6 - Very Difficult. Suitable for musically mature students of exceptional competence

Lyrics: words of a song.

Major scale: scale in which the ascending pattern of whole and half steps is whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half.

Melodic contour: shape of a melody created by the way its pitches repeat and move up and down in steps and skips.

Melodic passage: short section or series of notes within a larger work that constitutes a single coherent melodic idea.

Melodic pattern: grouping, generally brief, of tones or pitches.

Melody: linear succession of sounds (pitches) and silences moving through time; the horizontal structure of music.

Meter: grouping of beats and divisions of beats in music, often in sets of twos (duple meter) or threes (triple meter).

Minor scale: scale in which one characteristic feature is a half-step between the second and third tones; the three forms of the minor scale are natural, harmonic, and melodic.

Modal: use of modes (see modes) as distinct from compositions based on tonal scale patterns.

Modes: a stepwise sequence of whole and half steps upon which melodies were originally conceived between the 8th and 11th centuries and used in the middle ages and Renaissance, but are not uncommonly found in contemporary music genres. In jazz, the term mode has been applied to scales other than the major or minor scale that may serve as the basis for improvisation over recurring harmonies, such as in some music by Miles Davis. Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Locrian— were used in the Medieval and Renaissance periods and served as the basis from which major and minor scales emerged.

Model cornerstone assessment: suggested assessment process, embedded within a unit of study, that includes a series of focused tasks to measure student achievement within multiple process components.

Mood: overall feeling that a section or piece of music conveys.

Monophonic: musical texture consisting of a single, unaccompanied melodic line.

Motif/motive: brief rhythmic/melodic figure or pattern that recurs throughout a composition as a unifying element.

Movement: act of moving in nonlocomotor (such as clapping and finger snapping) and locomotor (such as walking and running) patterns to represent and interpret musical sounds. Also a self-contained, potentially independent section of a larger work (e.g. sonata, symphony, suite).

Music literacy: knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the discipline of music by independently carrying out the artistic processes of creating, performing, responding, and connecting.

Music theory: study of how music is composed and performed; analysis of the elements of music and the framework for understanding musical works.

Music vocabulary: domain-specific words traditionally used in performing, studying, or describing music.

Musical idea: ideas expressed in music, which can range in length from the smallest meaningful level (motive or short pattern) through a phrase, a section, or an entire piece.

Musical range: span between the highest and lowest pitches of a melody, instrument, or voice.

Musical work: piece of music preserved as a notated copy or sound recording or passed through oral tradition.

Non-pitched instruments: instruments, such as woodblocks, whistles, electronic sounds, that do not have definite pitches or tones.

Notation: visual representation of musical sound.

One-part formal structure: continuous form, with or without an interruption, in which a singular instance of formal closure is achieved only at or near the end of the piece; also known as through-composed.

Open-ended assessment: assessment that allows students to demonstrate the learning of a particular outcome in a variety of ways, such as demonstrating understanding of rhythmic notation by moving, singing, or chanting.

Ostinato: a short musical pattern (rhythmic or tonal) that is repeated consistently throughout the composition.

Pentatonic scale: five-tone scale often identified with the pattern of the black keys of a keyboard, although other five-tone arrangements are possible.

Perform: process of realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.

Performing, performance: experience of engaging in the act of presenting music in a classroom or private or public venue (see also the Artistic Process of Performing).

Performance decorum: aspects of contextually appropriate propriety and proper behavior, conduct, and appearance for a musical performance, such as stage presence, etiquette, and appropriate attire.

Performance practice: performance and presentation of a work that reflect established norms for the style and social, cultural, and historical contexts of that work.

Performance technique: personal technical skills developed and used by a performer.

Personally-developed criteria: qualities or traits for assessing achievement level developed by students individually.

Phrase: musical segment with a clear beginning and ending, comparable to a simple sentence or clause in written text.

Phrasing: the way in which a composers and performers (and consequently listeners) make sense of musical lines through the use of expressive qualities such as dynamics, tempo, articulation, and timbre to convey organizational and affective stylistic characteristic of a genre.

Piece: general, non-technical term referring to a composition or musical work.

Pitch: identification of a tone or note with respect to highness or lowness (i.e., frequency).

Plan: select and develop musical ideas for creating a musical work.

Polyphonic: musical texture in which two or more melodies sound simultaneously.

Polytonal: music in which two or more tonalities (keys) sound simultaneously.

Present: share artistic work (e.g., a composition) with others.

Program: presentation of or list of a sequence of musical works to be performed by individual musicians or groups in a concert, recital, or other setting.

Purpose: reason for which music is created, such as, ceremonial, recreational/social, commercial, or generalized artistic expression.

Refine: make changes in musical works or performances to more effectively realize intent through technical quality or expression.

Repertoire: body or set of musical works that can be performed.

Respond: understand and evaluate how the arts convey meaning.

Rhythm: duration or length of sounds and silences that occur in music; organization of sounds and silences in time.

Rhythmic passage: short section or series of notes within a larger work that constitutes a single coherent rhythmic idea.

Rhythmic pattern: grouping, generally brief, of long and short sounds and silences.

Rondo: musical form consisting of three or more contrasting sections in which one section recurs, such as ABACA.

Rubric: established, ordered set of criteria for judging student performance; includes descriptors of student work at various levels of achievement.

Scale: pattern of pitches arranged in ascending or descending order and identified by their specific arrangement of whole and half steps.

Score: written notation of an entire music composition.

Section: one of a number of distinct segments that together comprise a composition; a section consists of several phrases.

Select: choose music for performing, rehearsing, or responding based on interest, knowledge, ability, and context.

Sensitivity: skill of a creator, performer, or listener in responding to and conveying the nuances of sound or expression.

Set: sequence of songs or pieces performed together by a singer, band, or disc jockey and constituting or forming part of a live show or recording.

Setting: specified or implied instrumentation, voicing, or orchestration of a musical work

Setting of the text: musical treatment of text as presented in the music.

Sight-reading: first attempt to perform a notated musical work.

Simple formal structure: musical form with a small number of distinct or clearly delineated sections, (such as simple binary, ternary, or other novel design), using closely related rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic materials across the sections.

Sonic events: individual sounds (or sound masses) and silences whose succession forms patterns and contrasting units that are perceived as musical.

Sonic experience: perception and understanding of the sounds and silences of a musical work and their inter-relationship.

Stage presence: performer's ability to convey music content to a live audience through traits such as personal knowledge of the repertoire, exhibited confidence, decorum, eye contact and facial expression.

Staging: environmental considerations, such as lighting, sound, seating arrangement, and visual enhancements, that contribute to the impact of a musical performance.

Standard notation: system for visually representing musical sound that is in widespread use; such systems include traditional music staff notation, tablature notation (primarily for fretted stringed instruments), and lead-sheet notation.

Storyline: extra-musical narrative that inspires or explains the structure of a piece of music.

Strophic form: vocal music in which the music repeats with a new set of text each time.

Structure: totality of a musical work.

Style: label for a type of music possessing distinguishing characteristics and often performance practices associated with its historical period, cultural context, and/or genre.

Stylistic expression: interpretation of expressive qualities in a manner that is authentic and appropriate to the genre, historical period, and cultural context of origin.

Tablature: system of graphic standard notation, commonly used for fretted stringed instruments, in which a diagram visually represents both the fret board and finger placement on the fret board.

Teacher-provided criteria: qualities or traits for assessing achievement level that are provided to students by the teacher.

Technical aspects: characteristics enabling the accurate representation/presentation of musical ideas.

Technical challenges: requirements of a particular piece of music that stretch or exceed a performer's current level of proficiency in technical areas such as timbre, intonation, diction, range, or speed of execution.

Technical accuracy, technical skill: ability to perform with appropriate timbre, intonation, and diction as well as to play or sing the correct pitches and rhythms at a tempo appropriate to the musical work.

Tempo: rate or speed of the beat in a musical work or performance.

Tension/release: musical device (musical stress, instability, or intensity, followed by musical relaxation, stability, or resolution) used to create a flow of feeling.

Ternary form: Musical form consisting of three sections: A, B, A; two sections the same, one contrasting section.

Texture: manner in which the harmonic (vertical) and melodic (horizontal) elements are combined to create layers of sound.

Theme and variations: musical form in which a melody is presented and then followed by two or more sections presenting variations of that melody.

Timbre: tone color or tone quality that distinguishes one sound source, instrument, or voice from another.

Tonal pattern: grouping, generally brief, of tones or pitches.

Tonality: tonic or key tone around which a piece of music is centered.

Transfer: use music knowledge and skills appropriately in a new context.

Unity: presence of structural coherence within a work, generally achieved through the repetition of various elements of music (see Variety).

Variety: presence of structural contrast within a work for the purpose of creating and sustaining interest, generally achieved through utilizing variations in the treatment of the elements of music (see Unity).

Venue: physical setting in which a musical event takes place.

Vocables: audible sounds and/or nonsense syllables used by vocalists to convey musical ideas or intent.

Vocalizations: vocal exercises that include no text and are sung to one or more vowels.