







Key Musical Vocabulary









(taken from the Model Music Curriculum Appendix March 2021)

Word	Definition
6/8 time	A time signature that shows to count 6 quavers in a bar. It will often look like this: 
<i>Accelerando</i>	Gradually growing faster
<i>Adagio</i>	At a slow speed
<i>Allegro</i>	At a brisk speed
Arrangement	A reworking of a piece of music so that it can be played by a different instrument or combination of instruments from the original.
Baroque period	Music written between c.1600 and c.1750. Periods and eras of music overlap and are not always distinct.
Bars	A segment of time corresponding to a specific number of beats.
Beat/Pulse	A basic unit of time marking out the speed at which the music is played.
Beat groupings	Collecting beats into recognised groups within the bar.
Body percussion	Sounds produced using fingers, hands and feet plus mouthed effects, e.g. cheek pops, tongue clicks, clapping, and a wide range of vocal sounds.
Brass band	A group of musicians playing brass instruments and sometimes including percussion.
Brass family	The instrument family that consists of Trumpet, Cornet, Flugelhorn, French Horn, Eb Horn, Baritone, Euphonium, Trombone, Bass Trombone and Tuba.
Call and response	Two distinct phrases, where the second phrase is heard as a direct response to the first.
Chants	Text spoken rhythmically, not sung.
Chord	Two or more notes played together to achieve harmony.
Chord progressions	A succession of chords, one after another.
Classical period	Music written between c.1750 and c.1830. Periods and eras of music overlap and are not always distinct.
Classroom percussion	Untuned and tuned percussion instruments specifically designed for use in the classroom (e.g. boomwhackers).
Clef	A symbol found at the beginning of a line of music to show how high or low the notes are.
Compound time	Music that is written in a metre of 2 but where each beat is subdivided into 3 quavers, providing a bouncy, skipping, jig-like rhythm, for example in Row, Row, Row your Boat. (e.g. 6/8)
Contemporary music ensemble	A group of musicians who play music written in the late 20th or 21st century. Instrumentation is decided by the music the group wish to perform.
<i>Crescendo</i>	Gradually getting louder. 
Crotchet	A note worth one beat, represented by a solid dot with a stem.
Crotchet rest	(See Rests)
Cuckoo interval	A pitch pattern of two notes found in many Early Years and KS1 songs, sounding exactly like a 'cuc-koo' call. (Also described as So-Mi interval in Solfege).

Decrescendo	Gradually getting quieter. 
Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do (Solfege)	Many people would use Solfege before introducing written notation. Syllables are assigned to the notes of the scale, often used in sight-singing. Solfege can be used with hand signals to distinguish pitch visually. It can be used to learn to mentally hear the pitches of music before playing or singing them.
Dot Notation	Visual symbols used to represent musical notes and chords.
Dotted crotchet	A note value lasting one and a half beats.
Downbeat	The accented first beat of a group of notes in any metre, e.g. in 1 2 3 1 2 3.
Drone	A sustained sound, which could be a single note or a chord.
Duet	A piece played or sung by two performers.
Dynamics	Volume: very soft (<i>pianissimo</i>) (<i>pp</i>) soft (<i>piano</i>) (<i>p</i>) moderately soft (<i>mezzo-piano</i>) (<i>mp</i>) moderately loud (<i>mezzo-forte</i>) (<i>mf</i>) loud (<i>forte</i>) (<i>f</i>) very loud (<i>fortissimo</i>) (<i>ff</i>)
Echo-playing	Repeating a given phrase.
Ensemble	i) A group of players of any size and instrumental mix. ii) 'A sense of ensemble' describes a musical performance in which players keep together rhythmically and maintain a balance between parts.
Flutter tongue	A tonguing technique for woodwind and brass players, in which a performer flutters their tongue to make a 'frrr' sound.
Folk band	A group of players who play music in a folk style/genre.
Full diatonic scale	A scale which is traditional in European classical music (e.g. C-D-E-F-G-A-B).
Genre	Music that shares a certain style or particular tradition is said to belong to a genre, e.g. 'Avant-garde' or 'Gospel Blues'.
Graphic notation, symbols or scores	Images or a mark that can signify a particular musical action.
Groove	Persistent repeated units, giving a feel of swing or togetherness.
Harmony	A musical effect created by combining two or more notes played or sung simultaneously.
Improvisation/Improvise	Creating and inventing music in real time, i.e. 'on the spot'.
Interval	The pitch difference between two notes.
Layered texture	A piece of music with more than one contrasting part, 'layering' the music.
Legato	Smooth.
Major and Minor	A simple major scale can be played using all the white notes on the piano starting and ending on C, and minor scale from A to A. An example major chord is C-E-G, and minor A-C-E. Often music in major keys or using major scales is referred to as happy with minor meaning sad.
Melodic phrase	A musical 'sentence' that makes sense played or sung on its own.
Melody and accompaniment	A melodic tune which is accompanied by another line of music.
Metre	The different groupings of beats, most commonly occurring in 2, 3 and 4 time.
Middle C	The note C in the middle of the keyboard. If a keyboard has 88 keys, like a standard piano, this is where Middle C is found, i.e. C4. 
Minim	A note worth two beats, represented by a hollow dot with a stem.

Moving and static parts	A static part of music might be a drone or a repeated pattern. A moving part might be a long phrase that changes more frequently than the accompaniment. It's another way of describing Melody and Accompaniment.
Note values	<p>A semibreve is worth 4 beats \circ</p> <p>A minim is worth 2 beats \downarrow</p> <p>A crotchet is worth 1 beat \downarrow</p> <p>A quaver is worth half a beat \downarrow</p> <p>A semiquaver is worth a quarter of a beat \downarrow</p> <p>1 semibreve = 2 minims = 4 crotchets = 8 quavers = 16 semiquavers</p>
Octave	The musical alphabet is A-B-C-D-E-F-G, which then repeats. For example, A to the next A is a distance of 8 notes (Oct = 8) therefore an octave is the range between an A and the next A.
Orchestra	An ensemble of instruments, usually combining string, woodwind, brass and percussion.
Ostinato/Ostinati	A musical phrase or rhythm which is repeated.
Paired quaver	A quaver is a note value that is worth half a beat. Paired quavers are 2 quavers next door to each other, with a horizontal line joining the two note stems together.
Partner songs	Songs with two (or more) complete melodies that can be sung separately but go together because they are the same length and follow the same harmony (e.g. <i>She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain</i> , and <i>When the Saints Go Marching In</i>).
Pause	The note or rest that the pause is assigned to should be prolonged.
Pentatonic scale	A scale with five notes, e.g. C D E (F) G A (B), very common in folk music.
Percussion family	The instrument family that consists of untuned (e.g. snare drum) and tuned (e.g. xylophone) percussion instruments, i.e. instruments that make a sound or note when struck with a mallet, beater or stick.
Phrasing	Connecting or grouping several notes or rhythms to create a sequence of sounds that make sense musically and satisfy both performer and listener. Phrasing in a song indicates where the singer should breathe.
Pitch	How high or low a note is.
Pizzicato	Plucking the string on a violin, viola, cello or double bass.
Playing by ear	The skill of 'picking out' a phrase or melody on a pitched instrument without the support of written music: this skill may require dedicated practice.
Playing/singing at sight (sight-read)	The skill of reading and playing or singing notation without preparation time.
Quaver	A note worth half a beat (half a crotchet), represented by a solid dot, a stem and a tail.
Question and answer	Two distinct phrases usually written in different parts of the music, but which operate like a conversation, with the second phrase answering the first.
<i>Rallentando</i>	Gradually growing slower.

Renaissance period	Music written between c.1400 and c.1600. Periods and eras of music overlap and are not always distinct.
Rests	A moment of silence in music. Rests can last for different lengths of time; 4 beat (semibreve) rest  2 beat (minim) rest  1 beat (crotchet) rest  half a beat (quaver) rest 
Rhythm	Variable sound patterns that fit over a steady pulse or beat: in songs, rhythms are dictated by the arrangement of syllables.
Romantic period	Music written between c.1830 and c.1900. Periods and eras of music overlap and are not always distinct.
Rondo form	Music composed in a set pattern of sections. The main initial musical theme alternates with contrasting musical sections and is often represented as A-B-A-C-A-D-A.
Round	A song in which singers perform the same melody but at staggered starting points, producing overlapping harmony. Rounds are most commonly performed in 2, 3 or 4 parts.
Scale	A sequence of eight adjacent notes which together span an octave.
Score	A written document of a piece of music using notation.
Semibreve	A note worth four beats represented as a hollow oval with no stem attached. 
Semiquaver	A note worth a quarter of a beat. A single semiquaver note has two "tails" on its note stem. If several semiquavers are written in succession, the tails join up to form double lines above the note.
Sequence	The order or arrangement of phrases to form a longer piece.
Solo	A section of music, of any length, played or sung by one performer alone.
Sound-maker (sound effect)	Naturally created music, made using materials found outside traditional music making, e.g. rustling leaves, scrunching newspaper.
Staccato	Short and spiky, the opposite of Legato.
Staff notation	Note values are placed on a set of five lines, or in the four spaces within the lines, to denote their pitch. The lines (and spaces) are called a stave or staff. The higher the position of the note on the stave, the higher its pitch.
Stave	A set of five horizontal lines and four spaces.
Stick notation	A method of teaching music-reading that uses the sticks of the notes without the circular heads of the notes.
String family	The instrument family that consists of violin, viola, cello, double bass and guitar.
Structure	How a piece is organised.
Sustain pedal	The right foot pedal on a piano, which sustains the sound produced longer than the physical action of playing a note.
Syncopation	Playing on the off-beat.
Tempo/tempi	The speed or pace of music (fast/slow, faster/slower).
Ternary form	Music composed in three sections, often referred to as 'sandwich' music, illustrating that the outer sections are the same with a contrasting middle section: e.g. Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. Ternary form is often represented as ABA.
Texture	The overall effect of how melody, harmony and rhythm are combined in a piece of music.
Time signature	two numbers sit on top of each other next to the clef (see below) and specify how many beats are contained in each musical bar, and which note value is equivalent to a musical beat.
Treble clef	 This sign is placed on the stave at the start of a piece of music. It lets the performer know that the note values on the lines and in the spaces

	can be played by instruments such as violin, flute, clarinet, recorder, oboe, trumpet, piano (right hand), and soprano and alto singers.
Tremolo	On string instruments, rapidly moving the bow back and forth; a roll on a percussion instrument; or two notes or chords played rapidly on a piano or marimba.
Triad	A three-note chord, often built on the tonic, or 'home' note – the lowest of the three in pitch – and played together with the third and fifth note above it. A C major triad would contain the notes C, E and G.
Tuned instruments	Percussion and orchestral instruments that can produce different notes e.g. xylophone, chime bars, glockenspiel, hand bells; violin, trumpet, flute, cello, piano, etc.
Two/three/four part song	A song written for two, three or four soloists or groups of singers, with melodies that complement each other harmonically. Part songs are often notated with multiple staves.
Unison	Playing or singing the same notes together, at the same pitch.
Untuned instruments	Percussion that makes a unpitched sound when hit, shaken or scraped, e.g. woodblock, maracas, guiro, cymbal, drum.
Verse and chorus	Music composed in a set pattern of sections, often Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge- Chorus or similar. Used in most Pop songs.
Vocal balance	Maintaining appropriately even dynamics and accurate pitching between groups of singers when performing.
Wind band	A group of musicians playing woodwind instruments, sometimes with percussion.
Woodwind family	The instrument family that includes flute, clarinet, recorder, oboe, bassoon and saxophone.
World music ensemble	A group of musicians playing instruments traditional to a country, continent or culture.