

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
A cappella	Nat 5	Unaccompanied choral singing.
A tempo	Nat 4	The music returns to the main tempo (speed) after there has been a change.
AB	Nat 5	Two-part form - music in two sections: A then B. These sections may be repeated.
ABA	Nat 4	Three-part form – music in three sections: section A, then B, then back to A.
Accelerando	Nat 4	The tempo (speed) of the music gradually becomes faster.
Accented	Nat 3	Accented notes are notes which sound louder than others.
Accidental	Nat 5	A sign added to a note to change the pitch.
Accompanied	Nat 3	Other instrument(s) or voice(s) supports the main melody.
Accordion	Nat 3	An instrument with a keyboard played with the right hand and buttons (which play chords) pressed by the left hand.
Acoustic guitar	Nat 3	The acoustic guitar is a stringed instrument that is played by plucking or strumming the strings with fingers, or using a plectrum.
Adagio	Nat 3	A slow tempo (speed).
African music	Nat 4	Much African music features voices and/or African drums.
Alberti bass	Nat 5	Broken chords played by the left hand outlining harmonies whilst the right hand plays the melody.
Allegro	Nat 3	A fast tempo (speed).
Alto	Nat 4	The lowest female voice.
Anacrusis	Nat 4	The notes which appear before the first strong beat of a musical phrase, particularly at the start of a piece.
Andante	Nat 4	A tempo at a walking speed.
Answer	Nat 3	A short musical phrase that follows on from a 'question' phrase.
Arco	Nat 5	Instruction given to string players to use a bow.
Aria	Nat 5	A solo song sung in an operatic style, in an opera, oratorio or cantata, with orchestral accompaniment.
Arpeggio	Nat 4	Notes of a chord played one after the other.
Ascending	Nat 3	Ascending notes rise in pitch.
Atonal	Nat 5	Atonal music has no feeling of key, major or minor. It is very dissonant and lacks a 'nice' melody and accompaniment.
Backing vocals	Nat 4	Singers who support the lead singer(s), usually by singing in harmony in the background.
Bagpipes	Nat 3	A musical instrument having a flexible bag inflated either by a tube with valves or by bellows, a double-reed melody pipe, and from one to four drone pipes.
Baritone	Nat 5	A male voice whose range lies between that of bass and tenor.
Baroque	Nat 4	The name given to a style of music composed during the period 1600-1750 approximately.
Bass	Nat 4	The lowest male voice.
Bass drum	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the percussion family.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Bass guitar	Nat 4	The bass guitar is pitched lower than a guitar. It is an electric string instrument and has only four strings, two fewer than an electric guitar.
Bassoon	Nat 5	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family.
Beat	Nat 3	The basic pulse you hear in music.
Binary	Nat 5	A form in which the music is made up of two different sections labelled A and B.
Blowing	Nat 3	The sound produced by blowing into or across the mouthpiece of the instrument, eg brass, woodwind and recorders.
Blues	Nat 3	Blues started as Black American folk music, developing from spirituals and work songs.
Bodhran	Nat 5	An Irish wooden drum, held in one hand and played with a wooden beater.
Bongo drums	Nat 5	Fairly high-pitched drums, joined in pairs and usually played with fingers and palms.
Bothy ballad	Nat 5	A folk song, usually with many verses, from north-east Scotland.
Bowing	Nat 3	The sound produced by drawing the bow across the strings of a stringed instrument, eg violin or cello.
Brass	Nat 3	A family of instruments made from metal with a mouthpiece, eg trumpet and euphonium.
Brass band	Nat 4	A band of brass instruments and percussion.
Broken chord	Nat 4	In a broken chord, the notes of a chord are played separately.
Cadence	Nat 5	The end of a musical phrase.
Cadenza	Nat 4	A passage of music which allows soloists to display their technical ability in singing or playing an instrument.
Canon	Nat 4	Strict imitation. Once one part starts to play or sing a melody, another part enters shortly afterwards with exactly the same melody.
Castanets	Nat 5	A percussion instrument popular in Spanish music.
Cello	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the string family and is slightly smaller and slightly higher in pitch than a double bass.
Celtic rock	Nat 5	A style of music that mixes Celtic folk music and rock together.
Change of key	Nat 4	A move from one key to another.
Choir	Nat 3	A group of singers who perform together.
Chord	Nat 3	Two or more notes sounding together.
Chord progressions	Nat 4	A series of related chords built on the first, fourth and fifth notes of a major or minor scale.
Chord progressions	Nat 5	Different progressions using the chords built on the 1st, 4th, 5th and 6th notes of a major or minor scale.
Chorus	Nat 5	A group of singers, the music written for them or the refrain between verses of a song.
Chromatic	Nat 5	Notes which move by the interval of a semitone.
Clarinet	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family. It uses a single reed, which is attached to a plastic mouthpiece.
Clarsach	Nat 5	A small Scottish harp, used in folk music. Clarsach is Gaelic for harp.
Classical	Nat 5	A term used to describe/refer to music composed during the period 1750-1810 approximately; the era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Cluster	Nat 5	A term used to describe a group of notes, which clash, played together.
Coda	Nat 5	A passage at the end of a piece of music which rounds it off effectively.
Compound time	Nat 4	The beat is divided into groups of three.
Compound time groupings	Nat 5	The beat is a dotted note which divides into three, eg 6/8 = two dotted crotchet beats in a bar and each beat can be divided into three quavers.
Con sordino - muted	Nat 5	Using a mute changes the sound normally produced on an instrument.
Concerto	Nat 4	A work for solo instrument and orchestra, eg a flute concerto is written for flute and orchestra.
Contrapuntal	Nat 5	Texture in which each of two or more parts has independent melodic interest; similar in meaning to polyphonic.
Contrary motion	Nat 5	Two parts which move in opposite directions, eg as one part ascends the other part descends.
Counter melody	Nat 5	A melody played against the main melody.
Crescendo	Nat 3	The music gradually becomes louder.
Cross rhythm	Nat 5	Contrasting rhythms played at the same time or played with unusual emphasis on notes.
Crotchet	Nat 3	A note that lasts for 1 beat.
Cymbals	Nat 4	A percussion instrument, round in shape and made of metal.
Descant (voice)	Nat 5	A counter melody which accompanies and is sung above the main melody.
Descending	Nat 3	Descending notes fall in pitch.
Diminuendo	Nat 3	The music gradually becomes quieter.
Discord	Nat 3	A chord in which certain notes clash. In the 20th century, many composers used discords in their music.
Distortion	Nat 4	An electronic effect used in rock music to colour the sound of an electric guitar. It gives a 'fuzzy' sound rather than the usual clean sound.
Dotted crotchet	Nat 5	A note that last for 1½ beats.
Dotted minim	Nat 3	A note that last for 3 beats.
Dotted quaver	Nat 5	A note that last for ¾ beats.
Dotted rhythm	Nat 4	A long note followed by a shorter one or a short note followed by a longer one, as in a Scotch snap.
Double bass	Nat 4	The largest and lowest instrument of the string family.
Drone	Nat 4	One note held on or repeated in the bass.
Drum fill	Nat 3	A rhythmic decoration played on a drum kit.
Drum kit	Nat 3	A set of drums and cymbals often used in rock music and pop music.
Electric guitar	Nat 3	A guitar which requires an electric amplifier to produce sound.
Episode	Nat 5	A passage of music linking two musical themes, such as in Rondo Form
Faster	Nat 3	The tempo (speed) increases.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Fiddle	Nat 3	Another name for the violin, used in Scottish folk music.
Flute	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family, although it is made of metal. It differs from other woodwind instruments as it does not have a reed.
Flutter tonguing	Nat 5	Rolling your 'r's' whilst playing a brass or woodwind instrument.
Folk groups	Nat 3	A group of two or more musicians who perform music in a traditional style, usually accompanied by guitars.
Forte	Nat 3	Forte means loud volume.
Fortissimo	Nat 5	This means very loud volume.
French horn	Nat 5	This instrument belongs to the brass family and is basically four metres of tubing curled around, with a bell-shaped opening on one end and a mouthpiece in the other.
Gaelic psalms	Nat 5	Psalms (hymns) which were sung in Gaelic, unaccompanied.
Glissando	Nat 5	Sliding from one note to another, taking in all the notes in between where possible.
Glockenspiel	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the percussion family. The metal bars are laid out in a similar pattern to the piano and are played with beaters.
Gospel	Nat 5	Music written with religious lyrics, often in praise or thanksgiving to God.
Grace note	Nat 5	A type of ornament played as a quick, crushed note before the main note of a melody.
Ground bass	Nat 5	A theme in the bass which is repeated many times while the upper parts are varied.
Grouped semiquavers	Nat 4	A group of semiquavers which are joined together.
Güiro	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the percussion family. It is made of wood that has been hollowed out and has ridges cut into the outer surface. A wooden stick is scraped along the ridges to produce the sound.
Harmony	Nat 3	The sound of two or more notes made at the same time.
Harp	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the string family. It is usually about 1.8 metres high, weighs 36kg and has 47 strings.
Harpsichord	Nat 4	A keyboard instrument which looks like a small grand piano. The keys are laid out in the same way as on a piano but are opposite in colour – the majority of the keys are black, and the raised ones are white.
Hi hat cymbals	Nat 5	Used as part of a drumkit, they consist of two cymbals (one upside-down) that are hit with a stick or brush, and opened/closed with a foot pedal.
Homophonic	Nat 5	Texture where you hear melody with accompaniment or where all the parts play a similar rhythm at the same time.
Imitation	Nat 4	Where the melody is immediately copied in another part.
Imperfect cadence	Nat 5	A cadence consists of two chords at the end of a phrase. In an imperfect cadence the last chord is chord V (the dominant) creating an unfinished effect.
Improvisation	Nat 3	The performer makes up music during the actual performance, they don't have the melody written down to help, although there may be suggested chords as a guide.
Indian music	Nat 5	Music from India which uses instruments such as the sitar and tabla.
Inverted pedal	Nat 5	A note which is held on or repeated continuously at a high pitch.
Jazz	Nat 3	At first this was music created by black Americans in the early 20th century.
Jig	Nat 4	A fast dance in compound time. Usually 2 beats in a bar, with each beat dividing into 3 quavers.
Latin American music	Nat 3	Dance music from South America.
Leap/leaping	Nat 3	Jumping between notes which are not next to each other.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Legato	Nat 3	The notes are played or sung smoothly.
Lines and spaces of the treble clef	Nat 3	The system for writing music uses five lines, each with a different letter name - find out more about the lines and spaces.
Major	Nat 4	The music sounds in a major key – often described as having a cheery, happy feel to it.
March	Nat 3	Music with a strong steady pulse with two or four beats in a bar.
Melismatic	Nat 5	Several notes sung to one syllable.
Mezzo forte	Nat 4	Mezzo forte stands for fairly loud volume.
Mezzo piano	Nat 4	Mezzo piano stands for 'fairly quiet volume'.
Mezzo soprano	Nat 5	A female singer whose voice range lies between that of a soprano and an alto.
Middle eight	Nat 4	In popular music, a section which provides a contrast to the opening section. It is often eight bars long.
Minim	Nat 3	A note that lasts for 2 beats.
Minimalist	Nat 5	A development in the second half of the 20th century based on simple rhythmic and melodic figures which are constantly repeated with very slight changes each time.
Minor	Nat 4	The music sounds in a minor key, often described as having a sadder feel than major.
Moderato	Nat 5	A medium tempo (speed).
Modulation	Nat 5	A change of key.
Mouth music	Nat 4	Unaccompanied songs with Gaelic or nonsense words, normally sung for ceilidh dances.
Musical	Nat 3	A musical play which has speaking, singing and dancing and is performed on a stage.
Muted	Nat 4	Using a device which reduces the volume or alters the sound of an instrument.
Oboe	Nat 5	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family. It uses a double reed which is placed between the lips and the air travels between the two reeds into the instrument.
Octave	Nat 3	The distance of 8 notes eg from C up to C.
Off the beat	Nat 3	Notes played on the weaker beats, eg beats 2 and 4 in a 4/4 bar.
On the beat	Nat 3	Notes played on the stronger beats, eg beats 1 and 3 in a 4/4 bar.
Opera	Nat 4	A drama set to music with soloists, chorus, acting, and orchestral accompaniment.
Orchestra	Nat 3	There are four main sections to an orchestra: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.
Organ	Nat 3	A keyboard instrument usually found in churches. It usually has more than one keyboard, plus pedals that are played with the feet.
Ornament	Nat 4	An ornament decorates a melody by adding extra notes. Ornaments are often short and add melodic and rhythmic interest.
Ostinato	Nat 3	A short musical pattern repeated many times.
Paired quaver	Nat 4	Two quavers (1/2 beat notes) joined together.
Pan pipes	Nat 4	Pipes which are graded in size and are bound together. The sound is made by blowing across the top of the pipes.
Pause	Nat 3	A note or rest that is held longer than written. The pause sign (looks like an eye and an eyebrow) is written above the note or rest that is to be held as a pause.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Pedal	Nat 4	Short for pedal point. A note which is sustained, or repeated continuously, in the bass beneath changing harmonies.
Pentatonic	Nat 4	Any five-note scale. In practice, the most common one is that on which much folk music is based, particularly Scottish and Celtic.
Percussion	Nat 3	Instruments that are played by hitting, striking, shaking or scraping.
Perfect cadence	Nat 5	A cadence consists of two chords at the end of a phrase. A perfect cadence is the dominant to tonic chords (V-I).
Pianissimo	Nat 5	Pianissimo is an indication that the music should be played very softly.
Piano (dynamics)	Nat 3	Quiet volume, abbreviated to 'p'.
Piano (instrument)	Nat 3	A keyboard instrument which produces sounds by hammers hitting strings.
Pibroch	Nat 5	Music for solo bagpipe, in theme and variation form, and with grace notes.
Piccolo	Nat 5	A half-size flute which plays an octave higher than the standard flute.
Pitch bend	Nat 5	Changing the pitch of a note, for example by pushing a guitar string upwards.
Pizzicato	Nat 5	Abbreviation pizz. An instruction given to string players to pluck the strings instead of using the bow.
Plucking	Nat 3	Sound made when you pluck the strings of a stringed instrument with a finger or fingers.
Polyphonic	Nat 5	Texture which consists of two or more melodic lines, possibly of equal importance, which weave independently of each other.
Pop	Nat 3	A style of popular music played by a group of musicians.
Pulse	Nat 3	The basic beat in music. The pulse may be in groups of two, three or four with a stress on the first in each group.
Quaver	Nat 4	A note that lasts half a beat.
Question	Nat 3	An opening phrase which is often followed by an answer.
Ragtime	Nat 4	A style of dance music which became popular at the end of the 19th century and which helped to influence jazz.
Rallentando	Nat 4	The tempo (speed) of the music gradually slows down.
Rapping	Nat 4	Rhyming lyrics that are spoken and performed in time to a beat. Rapping is popular in hip-hop music.
Recorder	Nat 4	There are four main types of recorder: descant, treble, tenor and bass.
Reel	Nat 3	A Scottish dance written in simple time with two or four beats in a bar.
Reggae	Nat 4	Reggae music was developed in the late 1960s in Jamaica. It has quite a distinctive sound and has the characteristic of strong accents on the 2nd and 4th beats of the bar.
Repeat sign	Nat 4	A sign which indicates a section of music should be repeated.
Repetition	Nat 3	An exact repeat of a musical idea.
Reverb	Nat 5	An electronic effect which can give the impression of different hall acoustics.
Riff	Nat 3	A repeated phrase usually found in jazz and popular music.
Ritardando	Nat 5	The music slows down.
Rock	Nat 3	A style of popular music with a heavy, driving beat. Usually features electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Rock 'n' roll	Nat 3	1950s American music which grew from the combined styles of jazz, blues, gospel and country.
Roll	Nat 5	A very fast repetition of a note on a percussion instrument, eg on a snare drum or timpani.
Romantic	Nat 4	In music, the period 1810-1900 approximately, which followed the Classical era.
Rondo	Nat 5	A form where the first section (A) keeps returning, in between different sections – B, C etc.
Round	Nat 3	Each part sings or plays the same melody, entering one after the other. When they reach the end they start again.
Rubato	Nat 5	Translates as 'robbed time' which means the music will speed up and slow down in order to allow for expression, therefore there will not be a strict tempo maintained.
Saxophone	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family. It uses a single reed which is attached to a plastic mouthpiece.
Scale	Nat 4	A sequence of notes moving by step in an ascending or descending order.
Scat singing	Nat 4	Nonsense words, syllables and sounds are improvised (made up) by the singer. Sometimes the singer is imitating the sounds of instruments.
Scotch snap	Nat 4	A very short accented note before a longer note.
Scots ballad	Nat 4	A Scottish song which tells a story. Examples of Scots ballads are 'Flower of Scotland' and 'Loch Lomond'.
Scottish	Nat 3	Music of Scotland.
Scottish dance band	Nat 3	A band which plays Scottish music for people to dance to.
Semibreve	Nat 3	A note that lasts for four beats.
Semiquaver	Nat 4	A note that lasts for a quarter (1/4) of a beat.
Semitone	Nat 5	Half a tone, eg G to Ab on a keyboard. From one fret to another on a guitar.
Sequence	Nat 3	A melodic phrase which is immediately repeated at a higher or lower pitch.
Sforzando	Nat 5	A note played with a forced sudden accent.
Simple time	Nat 4	The music has two, three or four beats in each bar, and each beat is a crotchet (1 beat note) and each beat can be divided into 2.
Sitar	Nat 5	A plucked, stringed instrument from India. It's basically an Indian guitar – easy to remember because sitar rhymes with guitar.
Slower	Nat 3	The tempo (speed) decreases.
Snare drum	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the percussion family and is played with sticks or brushes. This drum can act as two different instruments – a side drum and a snare drum.
Solo	Nat 3	One instrument or voice. A prominent instrument or voice can be solo even when part of a larger ensemble.
Soprano	Nat 4	The highest range of female voice.
Staccato	Nat 3	The notes are short and detached.
Steel band	Nat 3	A West Indian band whose instruments are made out of oil drums called pans. The top of each drum is hammered into panels to make different pitches.
Step/stepwise	Nat 3	Moving up or down between notes which are next to each other.
Strathspey	Nat 4	A Scottish dance with four beats in a bar and usually featuring the Scotch snap.
Striking	Nat 3	The sound is produced by hitting the instrument.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Strings	Nat 3	The family of instruments which have strings. The sound is produced by dragging a bow across the strings or by plucking them with the fingers.
Strophic	Nat 5	A song which has music repeated for verses/choruses, therefore the same music will be heard repeating throughout the song.
Strumming	Nat 3	A finger, fingers or plectrum are drawn across the strings of an instrument, usually guitar.
Swing	Nat 4	A jazz style which started in the 1930s and was performed by a big band. The numbers and types of instruments in the big bands increased during this period, through the influence of swing.
Syllabic	Nat 5	Vocal music where each syllable is given one note only.
Symphony	Nat 5	A large work for orchestra, usually in four movements.
Syncopation	Nat 4	Strongly accented notes playing off or against the beat. Syncopation occurs in all kinds of music.
Tabla	Nat 5	Indian drums often used to accompany the sitar.
Tambourine	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the percussion family. A wooden or plastic frame has pairs of metal jingles attached and is mostly played by the hand striking or shaking the instrument.
Tenor	Nat 4	A high-pitched, adult male voice.
Ternary	Nat 4	A B A – 3 part form: Section A, followed by a B section which is a different melody, than a return to the A section.
Theme and variation	Nat 4	The structure of a piece where the melody is heard (the theme), then returns several times with variations.
Timpani	Nat 4	A drum with skin stretched across a large bowl. It was traditionally made of copper, but is more commonly now made of fibreglass.
Tone	Nat 5	The distance between two notes, equivalent to two semitones (for example, two frets on a guitar).
Triangle	Nat 4	This is a piece of metal in the shape of a triangle, open at one corner, and struck with a metal beater. It is an untuned percussion instrument, as it cannot play a range of notes.
Trill	Nat 5	Moving quickly and repeatedly between two notes which are a step apart.
Trombone	Nat 4	This is the only brass instrument that has a slide instead of valves. Air vibrates through a player's lips, into a mouthpiece which is connected to the instrument.
Trumpet	Nat 4	The trumpet is the smallest and highest brass instrument in the brass family. Air vibrates through a player's lips, into a mouthpiece which is connected to the instrument.
Tuba	Nat 5	The tuba is the largest and lowest brass instrument in the brass family. Air vibrates through a player's lips, into a mouthpiece which is connected to the instrument.
Unaccompanied	Nat 3	There are no instruments playing in the background.
Unison	Nat 3	Singing or playing the same notes at the same time.
Vamp	Nat 4	A rhythmic accompaniment with a bass note played on the beat and a chord off the beat. Usually played on piano or guitar.
Verse and chorus	Nat 4	A structure/ form popular in many songs. The music of the verse will repeat, often with different words, and between verses the chorus will normally repeat and features different music to the verse.
Viola	Nat 5	This instrument belongs to the string family. It is slightly bigger and lower in pitch than the violin, but looks similar. It can be played with a bow.
Violin	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the string family. It is the smallest and highest pitched instrument in the string family. It can be played with a bow.
Voice	Nat 3	The human instrument used to speak or sing.
Walking bass	Nat 5	A bass line (low notes) often featured in a variety of jazz styles. It goes for a walk, up and down a pattern of notes, and is often played on a double bass.
Waltz	Nat 3	A dance with three beats in a bar in simple time.
Waulking song	Nat 5	A rhythmic song sung in Gaelic by the women in the Western Isles of Scotland while they waulked woolen cloth to soften and shrink it.

CONCEPT	LEVEL	DEFINITION
Whole-tone scale	Nat 5	A scale containing no semitones but built entirely on whole tones.
Wind band	Nat 4	A band with woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.
Woodwind	Nat 3	Instruments which produce sounds by blowing across a hole, against an edge or through a single or double reed, eg flute, clarinet, saxophone, oboe and bassoon. They need not be made of wood.
Xylophone	Nat 4	This instrument belongs to the percussion family. The wooden bars are laid out in a similar pattern to the piano and are played with beaters.