

Optional Music Extension: Levels of Dynamics

If students are familiar with elements of music, they might also be familiar with the following terms to describe dynamics. Feel free to ask what they know, and expand their vocabulary as you feel appropriate.

You will want to find a balance between adding terminology, and overwhelming the students who are just grasping the basics of dynamics, duration, pitch, and timbre. However, the basics are simple to grasp, and students enjoy learning vocabulary that the adults at home might not know!

The two basic differentiations are: **piano** (pronounced *pee-AH-noh*) and **forte** (pronounced *FOR-teh*). They are Italian words for “soft” and “loud.” In musical scores these words can be written out, or designated with a “*p*” or “*f*”. Students will notice that we also use the word “piano” for the keyboard instrument. The original name for this instrument was “piano forte,” as it represented a technological innovation; in contrast to the harpsichord, it could vary in dynamics by the touch of the fingers.

Dynamic markings that represent a gradual increase or decrease in sound look like math designations for “less than” and “greater than.” As you might guess, the pointed or “less” side of the sign means “softer.”

Crescendo (Kreh-SHEN-doh): increasing from a softer to louder dynamic



Decrescendo (DEE-kreh-shen-doh or DEH-kreh-shen-doh) or diminuendo (dee-meen-oo-EN-doh): decreasing from a louder to a softer dynamic



If you wish to go beyond the above basics, here are terms that represent gradations of dynamics, from very soft to very loud:

Pianissimo (<i>pp</i>)	(pea-ah-NEE-see-mo)	Very soft
Piano (<i>p</i>)	(pee-AH-no)	Soft
Mezzo piano (<i>mp</i>)	(MED-so pee-AH-no) Italian: half soft	Moderately soft
Mezzo forte (<i>mf</i>)	(MED-so FOR-the) Italian: half loud	Moderately loud
Forte (<i>f</i>)	(FOR-teh)	Loud
Fortissimo (<i>ff</i>)	(for-TEE-see-moh)	Very loud