

Musical Terminology

South Dakota American Choral Directors Association
High School Honor Choir

A cappella: Choral music generally without accompaniment; literally - in the style of the chapel

Accelerando (Accel.) or Stringendo (String.): Gradually growing faster

Accent: Emphasis or stress on one tone over others

Ad libitum (Ad lib.) or A placere: At pleasure; at will

Alla Breve: Indicating 2/2 time or "cut time"; literally - on the breve (half note)

Allargando: Growing broader, that is, louder and slower

Animato: Animated; excited; with life and spirit

A tempo: Return to the original tempo

Bravura: Great technical skill, virtuosity

Caesura (/ /): A break in the music

Cantabile: In a singing (lyric) style

Coda: A section added at the end of a composition or passage as a conclusion

Con: A prefix meaning "with"

Con anima: With animation

Con forza: With force

Con spirito: With spirit, lively

Crescendo: Increase in volume

Da capo (D.C.): To return and perform from the beginning

Del segno (D.S.): To return and perform from the sign (S)

Decrescendo: Becoming softer

Diminuendo: Gradually become softer

Diatonic: Pertaining to the notes of a major or minor scale

Dissonance: A relation or state of tension between various tones

Divisi: To divide; as into parts

Dolce: Sweetly

Double flat (bb): Lower the tone one full step

Double sharp (##): Raise the tone one full step

Dynamics: The level (amplitude) or loudness of sound

Pianissimo (pp)	very soft
Piano (p)	soft
Mezzo piano (mp)	medium soft
Mezzo forte (f)	medium loud
Forte (f)	loud
Fortissimo (ff)	very loud

e, et, ed: Meaning "and"

Enharmonic: A different spelling of the same pitch or chord

Espressivo: With expression, with feeling

Fermata: A sign that indicates the note or rest over which it is placed is to be prolonged

Fine: The end

Forzando (fz): Forced, a strong accent

Interval: The distance or relation between two pitches

Key signature: A grouping of accidentals placed at the beginning of a composition or section to indicate key

Sharps (#):

Number	Major Key	Minor Key
0	C	a
1	G	e
2	D	b
3	A	f#
4	E	c#
5	B	g#
6	F#	d#
7	C#	a#

Flats (b):

	Major Key	Minor Key
0	C	a
1	F	d
2	B _b	g
3	E _b	c
4	A _b	f
5	D _b	b _b
6	G _b	e _b
7	C _b	a _b

Legato: Smooth and connected

L'istesso tempo: At the same tempo

Maestoso: Majestic, with dignity

Marcato: Marked, emphasized

Melisma: Use of many notes on one syllable of text

Meno: A prefix meaning "less"

Meno mosso: Less motion

Modulation: A change of key within a composition

Molto: Much, very

Morendo: Dying away

Mosso, moto: Motion, movement

Niente: Nothing

Non: Not

Ornament: Melodic decoration

Ossia: Alternate version of a set of notes

Passione: With fervent emotion or passion

Phrase: A natural division of the melodic line with a cadence; comparable to a clause or sentence

Piu: More

Poco a poco: Little by little

Quasi: As if, almost

Rallentando (Rall.): Becoming slower

Ritardando (Rit.): Becoming slower

Rubato: Free use of accelerando and ritardando within a measure without altering the duration of the measure as a whole

Sans: Without

Scherzando: Playfully

Sempre: Always

Senza: Without

Sequence: Repetition of a set of notes at a different scale degree

Sforzando or Sforzato (sf or sfz): Forced or accented

Simile: In a similar manner

Sotto voce: Softly, with a subdued voice, literally "under the voice"

Staccato: Detached

Subito: Suddenly

Tacet: To be silent

Tempo: The pace at which a composition is to be performed; rate of speed

Tempo Terms from slowest to fastest

Grave	very, very slow
Largo	very slow
Larghetto	less slow than largo
Adagio	slow
Lento	moderately slow
Andante	moderate; walking tempo
Andantino	less slow than andante
Moderato	medium tempo

Allegretto	less fast than allegro
Allegro	fast
Vivace, Vivo	very fast and lively
Presto	extremely fast
Prestissimo	as fast as possible

Tenuto: Hold or sustain

Tessitura: The location of the majority of pitches in a composition or section

Timbre: Tone color

Time Signature: A symbol indicating the type of meter and the unit of beat

Tonality: All notes in a scale related to one central tone

Tranquillo: Tranquil, peaceful

Tutti: All

Unison: Voices on the same pitch or mixed voices in octaves