





DYNAMICS

In music, dynamics means how loud or how quiet the music is. When music is written down, the dynamics are represented by letters, which stand for Italian words for the dynamic levels. Forte means loud and piano means quiet.

The instrument, commonly called the "piano", was originally called the "pianoforte" because it could play dynamics, unlike earlier popular keyboard instruments such as harpsichord and spinet, which could only play forte (loud) or piano (soft), but no crescendo (getting louder) or decrescendo (getting quieter).

Hence the term terraced dynamics, which is a characteristic feature of baroque music and means a sudden change in tempo or volume without gradual crescendos and decrescendos. Dynamics are relative and do not relate to a specific volume level.

piano pianissimo	softest possible	<i>ppp</i>
Pianissimo	very quiet	<i>pp</i>
Piano	quiet	<i>p</i>
mezzo piano	moderately quiet	<i>mp</i>
mezzo forte	moderately loud	<i>mf</i>
Forte	loud	<i>f</i>
Fortissimo	very loud	<i>ff</i>
Fortissimo	loudest possible	<i>fff</i>
fortepiano	loud and then immediately soft	<i>fp</i>
pianoforte	soft and then immediately strong	<i>pf</i>
crescendo	a gradual increase in volume	
Decrescendo	a gradual decrease in volume. Can be extended in the same manner as crescendo.	
diminuendo		
Accents	indicates an accent only and is neither related to nor derived from the sign for diminuendo, even though the signs are of a roughly similar shape.	
Sforzando	indicates a forceful accent.	<i>sfz</i>
Sforzando piano	indicates a sforzando followed immediately by piano; in general, any two dynamic markings may be treated similarly.	<i>sfp</i>
 rinforzando	(literally "reinforcing") indicates that several notes, or a short phrase, are to be emphasized.	<i>rfz</i>
morendo	dying away (may also indicate a tempo change)	
Terraced dynamics	Expressive style typical of some early music in which volume levels shift abruptly from soft to loud and back without gradual crescendos and decrescendos.	
sotto voce	in an undertone (whispered or unvoiced)	
smorzando	becoming muffled or toned down	
marcato	stressed, pronounced	

Dynamics are an important way of conveying the mood of a piece and your use of dynamics is a marked element of your performance. Composers use dynamics to change the mood. Sometimes a piece will have very few dynamics and others will have many changes.