Common Musical Signs and Terms

Pitch

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{stave} & \text{treble clef} & \text{bass clef} & \text{double sharp} & \text{sharp} & \text{natural} & \text{flat} & \text{double flat} \\
\end{array}
\]

The small lines for notes above or below the stave are called leger lines.

8va means play an octave higher than written; 8ba means play an octave lower than written.

15ma means play two octaves higher than written; 15ba means play two octaves lower.

Time and rhythm

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{semibreve} & \text{minim} & \text{crotchet} & \text{quaver} & \text{semiquaver} \\
\end{array}
\]

Half of a semiquaver is a demisemiquaver; half of a demisemiquaver is a hemidemisemiquaver.

Dots:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{h} + \text{h} \\
\text{h} + \text{h} + \text{h} \\
\text{h} + \text{h} + \text{h} + \text{h} \\
\end{array}
\]

Ties join two notes of the same pitch into one longer note.

A triplet is three notes played in the time of two; a quintuplet is five notes in the time of four.

A pause or fermata (\(\sim\)) means hold the note or rest for longer than its written value.

An anacrusis is an incomplete bar (or unstressed beat, or upbeat) at the start of a piece.
The anacrusis bar is not numbered; bar 1 is always the first complete bar.

\(\text{C}\) (common time) means 4 crotchet beats per bar; \(\text{C}\) (alla breve) means 2 minim beats per bar.

Dynamics and articulation

Forte (f) means loud; mezzo forte (mf) is moderately loud, fortissimo (ff) is very loud.
Piano (p) means soft; mezzo piano (mp) is moderately soft, pianissimo (pp) is very soft.
Fortepiano (fp) means loud then immediately soft.
Crescendo (cresc.) means gradually becoming louder.
Diminuendo (dim.) or decrescendo (decresc.) means gradually becoming softer.

Slurs indicate legato, which means smooth and well connected.
\(\cdot\) (above or below a note) indicates staccato, which means short and detached.
\(-\) (above or below a note) indicates tenuto (ten.), which means held and slightly stressed.
\(\wedge\) or \(\wedge\) (mezzo staccato) means moderately short and detached.
Mezzo staccato can also be indicated by staccato dots combined with a slur.

Non legato means not connected (though not as detached as staccato).

> indicates an accent (to emphasise the note); ^ indicates a strong accent.

Forzando (f\(z\)) or sforzando (sf or sf\(z\)) indicate strong accents, f\(fz\) or sf\(f\) are very strong accents.
Tempo
The suggested tempo is indicated in beats per minute: \( \text{♩} = 60 \) means 60 \( \text{♩} \) beats per minute. The abbreviation \textit{ca} (for \textit{circa}) is used when the suggested tempo is approximate.

\textit{Adagio} or \textit{Lento} means slowly. \textit{Largo} means broadly (unhurried).
\textit{Andante} means at an easy walking pace. \textit{Andantino} usually means a little faster then \textit{Andante}.
\textit{Allegro} means fast and lively. \textit{Allegretto} means moderately fast. \textit{Presto} means very fast.
\textit{Accelerando} (accel.) means gradually becoming faster.
\textit{Rallentando} (rall.) or \textit{ritardando} (ritard.) means gradually becoming slower.
\textit{Ritenuto} (rit. or riten.) means immediately slower, or held back.
\textit{A tempo} means return to the former speed; \textit{Tempo Primo} means return to the original tempo.

Ornamentation

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{cccc}
\text{♩} & \text{♩} & \text{♩} & \text{♩} \\
\text{lower mordent} & \text{upper mordent} & \text{trill} & \text{trill} \\
\text{trill} & \text{trill} & \text{turn} & \text{acciaccatura} \\
\text{acciaccatura} & \text{trill} & \text{appoggiatura} & \text{appoggiatura} \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Commonly used terms
\textit{Ad libitum} (ad lib.) or \textit{a piacere} means at the performer’s discretion (with artistic licence).
\textit{Cantabile} or \textit{cantando} means in a singing style.
\textit{Da Capo} (D.C.) or \textit{al Fine} means play from the beginning until the word “fine” (the finish).
\textit{Dal Segno} (D.S.) or \textit{al Coda} means play from the \$ sign to the \$ sign, then play the Coda.
\textit{Con} means with; \textit{con brio} means with a bright (brilliant) sound; \textit{con grazia} means with grace.
\textit{Dolce} means sweetly; \textit{dolcissimo} (dolciss.) means very sweetly.
\textit{Espressivo} or \textit{con espressione} means expressively.
\textit{Leggiero} means lightly; \textit{leggierissimo} means very lightly.
\textit{Marcato} means marked (clear, strong, distinct); \textit{ben marcato} means well marked.
\textit{Meno} means less; \textit{Meno mosso} means slower (less movement).
\textit{Molto} means very or much. \textit{Assai} also means very.
\textit{Opus} (Op.) means a work or group of works; the opus number identifies the piece.
\textit{Più} means more; \textit{Più mosso} means quicker (more movement).
\textit{Poco} means a little; \textit{poco a poco} means little by little.
\textit{Sempre} means always.
\textit{Simile} (sim.) means similarly; it can refer to fingering, pedalling, phrasing, staccato, etc.
\textit{Sostenuto} means sustained.
\textit{Subito} (sub.) means suddenly.
\textit{Vivace} or \textit{vivo} means lively.
\text{♩♩} indicates a repeat (go back to the previous repeat sign \text{♩♩}; or back to the beginning).

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