

curriculum for excellence



National 5 Music Concept Dictionary

A

A cappella	(N5)	Unaccompanied choral singing.
A tempo	(N4)	The music returns to the main tempo (speed) after there has been a change.
AB	(N5)	Two-part form - music in two sections: A then B. These sections may be repeated.
ABA	(N4)	Three-part form – music in three sections: section A, then B, then back to A.
Accelerando	(N4)	The tempo (speed) of the music gradually becomes faster.
Accented	(N3)	Accented notes are notes which sound louder than others.
Accidental	(N5)	A sign added to a note to change the pitch.
Accompanied	(N3)	Other instrument(s) or voice(s) supports the main melody.
Accordion	(N3)	An instrument with a keyboard played with the right hand and buttons (which play chords) pressed by the left hand.
Acoustic guitar	(N3)	The acoustic guitar is a stringed instrument that is played by plucking or strumming the strings with fingers, or using a plectrum.
Adagio	(N3)	A slow tempo (speed).
African music	(N4)	Much African music features voices and/or African drums.
Alberti bass	(N5)	Broken chords played by the left hand outlining harmonies whilst the right hand plays the melody.
Allegro	(N3)	A fast tempo (speed).
Alto	(N4)	The lowest female voice.
Anacrusis	(N4)	The notes which appear before the first strong beat of a musical phrase, particularly at the start of a piece.

Andante	(N4)	A tempo at a walking speed.
Answer	(N3)	A short musical phrase that follows on from a 'question' phrase.
Arco	(N5)	Instruction given to string players to use a bow.
Aria	(N5)	A solo song sung in an operatic style, in an opera, oratorio or cantata, with orchestral accompaniment.
Arpeggio	(N4)	Notes of a chord played one after the other.
Ascending	(N3)	Ascending notes rise in pitch.
Atonal	(N5)	Atonal music has no feeling of key, major or minor. It is very dissonant and lacks a 'nice' melody and accompaniment.

B

Backing vocals	(N4)	Singers who support the lead singer(s), usually by singing in harmony in the background.
Bagpipes	(N3)	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	(N5)	A male voice whose range lies between that of bass and tenor.
Baroque	(N4)	The name given to a style of music composed during the period 1600-1750 approximately.
Bass	(N4)	The lowest male voice.
Bass drum	(N4)	This instrument belongs to the percussion family.
Bass guitar	(N4)	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	(N5)	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family.
Beat	(N3)	The basic pulse you hear in music.

Binary	(N5)	A form in which the music is made up of two different sections labelled A and B.
Blowing	(N3)	The sound produced by blowing into or across the mouthpiece of the instrument, eg brass, woodwind and recorders.
Blues	(N3)	Blues started as Black American folk music, developing from spirituals and work songs.
Bodhran	(N5)	An Irish wooden drum, held in one hand and played with a wooden beater.
Bongo drums	(N5)	Fairly high-pitched drums, joined in pairs and usually played with fingers and palms.
Bothy ballad	(N5)	A folk song, usually with many verses, from north-east Scotland.
Bowing	(N3)	The sound produced by drawing the bow across the strings of a stringed instrument, eg violin or cello.
Brass	(N3)	A family of instruments made from metal with a mouthpiece, eg trumpet and euphonium.
Brass band	(N4)	A band of brass instruments and percussion.
Broken chord	(N4)	In a broken chord, the notes of a chord are played separately.

C

Cadence	(N5)	The end of a musical phrase.
Cadenza	(N4)	A passage of music which allows soloists to display their technical ability in singing or playing an instrument.
Canon	(N4)	Strict imitation. Once one part starts to play or sing a melody, another part enters shortly afterwards with exactly the same melody.
Castanets	(N5)	A percussion instrument popular in Spanish music.

Cello	(N4)	This instrument belongs to the string family and is slightly smaller and slightly higher in pitch than a double bass.
Celtic rock	(N5)	A style of music that mixes Celtic folk music and rock together.
Change of key	(N4)	A move from one key to another.
Choir	(N3)	A group of singers who perform together.
Chord	(N3)	Two or more notes sounding together.
Chord progressions	(N4)	A series of related chords built on the first, fourth and fifth notes of a major or minor scale.
Chord progressions	(N5)	Different progressions using the chords built on the 1st, 4th, 5th and 6th notes of a major or minor scale.
Chorus	(N5)	A group of singers, the music written for them or the refrain between verses of a song.
Chromatic	(N5)	Notes which move by the interval of a semitone.
Clarinet	(N4)	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family. It uses a single reed, which is attached to a plastic mouthpiece.
Clarsach	(N5)	A small Scottish harp, used in folk music. Clarsach is Gaelic for harp.
Classical	(N5)	A term used to describe/refer to music composed during the period 1750-1810 approximately; the era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.
Cluster	(N5)	A term used to describe a group of notes, which clash, played together.
Coda	(N5)	A passage at the end of a piece of music which rounds it off effectively.
Compound time	(N4)	The beat is divided into groups of three.
Compound time Groupings	(N5)	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.

Concerto	(N4)	A work for solo instrument and orchestra, eg a flute concerto is written for flute and orchestra.
Con sordino - muted	(N5)	Using a mute changes the sound normally produced on an instrument.
Contrapuntal	(N5)	Texture in which each of two or more parts has independent melodic interest; similar in meaning to polyphonic.
Contrary motion	(N5)	Two parts which move in opposite directions, eg as one part ascends the other part descends.
Counter melody	(N5)	A melody played against the main melody.
Crescendo	(N3)	The music gradually becomes louder.
Cross rhythm	(N5)	Contrasting rhythms played at the same time or played with unusual emphasis on notes.
Crotchet	(N3)	A note that lasts for 1 beat.
Cymbals	(N4)	A percussion instrument, round in shape and made of metal.

D

Descending	(N3)	Descending notes fall in pitch.
Descant (voice)	(N5)	A counter melody which accompanies and is sung above the main melody.
Diminuendo	(N3)	The music gradually becomes quieter.
Discord	(N3)	A chord in which certain notes clash. In the 20th century, many composers used discords in their music.
Distortion	(N4)	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	(N5)	A note that last for 1½ beats.
Dotted minim	(N3)	A note that last for 3 beats.

Dotted quaver	(N5)	A note that last for $\frac{3}{4}$ beats.
Dotted rhythm	(N4)	A long note followed by a shorter one or a short note followed by a longer one, as in a Scotch snap.
Double bass	(N4)	The largest and lowest instrument of the string family.
Drone	(N4)	One note held on or repeated in the bass.
Drum fill	(N3)	A rhythmic decoration played on a drum kit.
Drum kit	(N3)	A set of drums and cymbals often used in rock music and pop music.

E

Electric guitar	(N3)	A guitar which requires an electric amplifier to produce sound.
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F

Faster	(N3)	The tempo (speed) increases.
Fiddle	(N3)	Another name for the violin, used in Scottish folk music.
Flute	(N4)	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	(N5)	Rolling your 'r's' whilst playing a brass or woodwind instrument.
Folk groups	(N3)	A group of two or more musicians who perform music in a traditional style, usually accompanied by guitars.
Forte	(N3)	Forte means loud volume, abbreviated to <i>f</i>
Fortissimo	(N5)	This means very loud volume, abbreviated to <i>ff</i>
French horn	(N5)	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.

G

Gaelic psalms	(N5)	Psalms (hymns) which were sung in Gaelic, unaccompanied.
Glissando	(N5)	Sliding from one note to another, taking in all the notes in between where possible.
Glockenspiel	(N4)	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	(N5)	Music written with religious lyrics, often in praise or thanksgiving to God.
Grace note	(N5)	A type of ornament played as a quick, crushed note before the main note of a melody.
Ground bass	(N5)	A theme in the bass which is repeated many times while the upper parts are varied.
Grouped semiquavers	(N4)	A group of semiquavers which are joined together.
Güiro	(N4)	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.

H

Harmony	(N3)	The sound of two or more notes made at the same time.
Harp	(N4)	This instrument belongs to the string family. It is usually about 1.8 metres high, weighs 36kg and has 47 strings.
Harpsichord	(N4)	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	(N5)	Used as part of a drum kit, they consist of two cymbals (one upside-down) that are hit with a stick or brush, and opened/closed with a foot pedal.

Homophonic (N5) Texture where you hear melody with accompaniment or where all the parts play a similar rhythm at the same time.

I

Imitation (N4) Where the melody is immediately copied in another part.

Imperfect cadence (N5) 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 (N3) 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 (N5) Music from India which uses instruments such as the sitar and tabla.

Inverted pedal (N5) A note which is held on or repeated continuously at a high pitch.

J

Jazz (N3) At first this was music created by black Americans in the early 20th century.

Jig (N4) A fast dance in compound time. Usually 2 beats in a bar, with each beat dividing into 3 quavers.

L

Latin American music (N3) Dance music from South America.

Leap/leaping (N3) Jumping between notes which are not next to each other.

Legato (N3) The notes are played or sung smoothly.

Lines and spaces of the treble clef (N3) The system for writing music uses five lines, each with different letter name - find out more about the lines and spaces.

M

Major (N4) The music sounds in a major key – often described as having a cheery, happy feel to it.

March (N3) Music with a strong steady pulse with two or four beats in a bar.

Melismatic (N5) Several notes sung to one syllable.

Mezzo forte (N4) Mezzo forte stands for fairly loud volume.

Mezzo piano (N4) Mezzo piano stands for 'fairly quiet volume'.

Mezzo soprano (N5) A female singer whose voice range lies between that of a soprano and an alto.

Middle eight (N4) In popular music, a section which provides a contrast to the opening section. It is often eight bars long.

Minim (N3) A note that lasts for 2 beats.

Minimalist (N5) 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 (N4) The music sounds in a minor key, often described as having a sadder feel than major.

Moderato (N5) A medium tempo (speed).

Modulation (N5) A change of key.

Mouth music (N4) Unaccompanied songs with Gaelic or nonsense words, normally sung for ceilidh dances.

Musical (N3) A musical play which has speaking, singing and dancing and is performed on a stage.

Muted	(N4)	Using a device which reduces the volume or alters the sound of an instrument.
O		
Oboe	(N5)	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	(N3)	The distance of 8 notes eg from C up to C.
Off the beat	(N3)	Notes played on the weaker beats, eg beats 2 and 4 in a 4/4 bar.
On the beat	(N3)	Notes played on the stronger beats, eg beats 1 and 3 in a 4/4 bar.
Opera	(N4)	A drama set to music with soloists, chorus, acting, and orchestral accompaniment.
Orchestra	(N3)	There are four main sections to an orchestra: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.
Organ	(N3)	A keyboard instrument usually found in churches. It usually has more than one keyboard, plus pedals that are played with the feet.
Ornament	(N4)	An ornament decorates a melody by adding extra notes. Ornaments are often short and add melodic and rhythmic interest.
Ostinato	(N3)	A short musical pattern repeated many times.

P

Paired quaver	(N4)	Two quavers (1/2 beat notes) joined together.
Pan pipes	(N4)	Pipes which are graded in size and are bound together. The sound is made by blowing across the top of the pipes
Pause	(N3)	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.
Pedal	(N4)	Short for pedal point. A note which is sustained, or repeated continuously, in the bass beneath changing harmonies.

Pentatonic	(N4)	Any five-note scale. In practice, the most common one is that on which much folk music is based, particularly Scottish and Celtic.
Percussion	(N3)	Instruments that are played by hitting, striking, shaking or scraping.
Perfect cadence	(N5)	A cadence consists of two chords at the end of a phrase. A perfect cadence is the dominant to tonic chords (V-I).
Piano (dynamics)	(N3)	Quiet volume, abbreviated to 'p'.
Piano (instrument)	(N3)	A keyboard instrument which produces sounds by hammers hitting strings.
Pianissimo	(N5)	Pianissimo is an indication that the music should be played very softly, abbreviated to 'pp'.
Pibroch	(N5)	Music for solo bagpipe, in theme and variation form, and with grace notes.
Piccolo	(N5)	A half-size flute which plays an octave higher than the standard flute.
Pitch bend	(N5)	Changing the pitch of a note, for example by pushing a guitar string upwards.
Pizzicato	(N5)	Abbreviation pizz. An instruction given to string players to pluck the strings instead of using the bow.
Plucking	(N3)	Sound made when you pluck the strings of a stringed instrument with a finger or fingers.
Polyphonic	(N5)	Texture which consists of two or more melodic lines, possibly of equal importance, which weave independently of each other.
Pop	(N3)	A style of popular music played by a group of musicians.
Pulse	(N3)	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.

Q

Quaver	(N4)	A note that lasts half a beat.
Question	(N3)	An opening phrase which is often followed by an answer.

R

Ragtime	(N4)	A style of dance music which became popular at the end of the 19th century and which helped to influence jazz.
Rallentando	(N4)	The tempo (speed) of the music gradually slows down.
Rapping	(N4)	Rhyming lyrics that are spoken and performed in time to a beat. Rapping is popular in hip-hop music.
Recorder	(N4)	There are four main types of recorder: descant, treble, tenor and bass.
Reel	(N3)	A Scottish dance written in simple time with two or four beats in a bar.
Reggae	(N4)	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	(N4)	A sign which indicates a section of music should be repeated.
Repetition	(N3)	An exact repeat of a musical idea.
Reverb	(N5)	An electronic effect which can give the impression of different hall acoustics.
Riff	(N3)	A repeated phrase usually found in jazz and popular music
Ritardando	(N5)	The music slows down.
Rock	(N3)	A style of popular music with a heavy, driving beat. Usually features electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit.
Rock 'n' roll	(N3)	1950s American music which grew from the combined styles of jazz, blues, gospel and country.

Roll	(N5)	A very fast repetition of a note on a percussion instrument, eg on a snare drum or timpani.
Romantic	(N4)	In music, the period 1810-1900 approximately, which followed the Classical era.
Rondo	(N5)	A form where the first section (A) keeps returning, in between different sections – B, C etc.
Round	(N3)	Each part sings or plays the same melody, entering one after the other. When they reach the end they start again.
Rubato	(N5)	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.

S

Saxophone	(N4)	This instrument belongs to the woodwind family. It uses a single reed which is attached to a plastic mouthpiece.
Scale	(N4)	A sequence of notes moving by step in an ascending or descending order.
Scat singing	(N4)	Nonsense words, syllables and sounds are improvised (made up) by the singer. Sometimes the singer is imitating the sounds of instruments.
Scotch snap	(N4)	A very short accented note before a longer note.
Scots ballad	(N4)	A Scottish song which tells a story. Examples of Scots ballads are 'Flower of Scotland' and 'Loch Lomond'.
Scottish	(N3)	Music of Scotland.
Scottish dance band	(N3)	A band which plays Scottish music for people to dance to.
Semibreve	(N3)	A note that lasts for four beats.
Semiquaver	(N4)	A note that lasts for a quarter (1/4) of a beat.
Semitone	(N5)	Half a tone, eg G to A ^b on a keyboard. From one fret to another on a guitar.

Sequence	(N3)	A melodic phrase which is immediately repeated at a higher or lower pitch.
Sforzando	(N5)	A note played with a forced sudden accent.
Simple time	(N4)	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	(N5)	A plucked, stringed instrument from India. It's basically an Indian guitar – easy to remember because sitar rhymes with guitar.
Slower	(N3)	The tempo (speed) decreases.
Snare drum	(N4)	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	(N3)	One instrument or voice. A prominent instrument or voice can be solo even when part of a larger ensemble.
Soprano	(N5)	The highest range of female voice.
Staccato	(N3)	The notes are short and detached.
Steel band	(N3)	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	(N3)	Moving up or down between notes which are next to each other.
Strathspey	(N4)	A Scottish dance with four beats in a bar and usually featuring the Scotch snap.
Striking	(N3)	The sound is produced by hitting the instrument.
Strings	(N3)	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	(N5)	A song which has music repeated for verses/choruses, therefore the same music will be heard repeating throughout the song.

Strumming	(N3)	A finger, fingers or plectrum are drawn across the strings of an instrument, usually guitar.
Swing	(N4)	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	(N5)	Vocal music where each syllable is given one note only.
Symphony	(N5)	A large work for orchestra, usually in four movements.
Syncopation	(N4)	Strongly accented notes playing off or against the beat. Syncopation occurs in all kinds of music.

T

Tabla	(N5)	Indian drums often used to accompany the sitar.
Tambourine	(N4)	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	(N4)	A high-pitched, adult male voice.
Ternary	(N4)	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 & variation	(N4)	The structure of a piece where the melody is heard (the theme), then returns several times with variations.
Timpani	(N4)	A drum with skin stretched across a large bowl. It was traditionally made of copper, but is more commonly now made of fibreglass.
Tone	(N5)	The distance between two notes, equivalent to two semitones (for example, two frets on a guitar).
Triangle	(N4)	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 un-tuned percussion instrument, as it cannot

play a range of notes.

Trill	(N5)	Moving quickly and repeatedly between two notes which are a step apart.
Trombone	(N4)	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	(N4)	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	(N5)	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.

U

Unaccompanied	(N3)	There are no instruments playing in the background.
Unison	(N3)	Singing or playing the same notes at the same time.

V

Vamp	(N4)	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	(N4)	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	(N5)	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	(N4)	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 (N3) The human instrument used to speak or sing.

W

Walking bass (N5) 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 (N3) A dance with three beats in a bar in simple time.

Waulking song (N5) A rhythmic song sung in Gaelic by the women in the Western Isles of Scotland while they waulked woollen cloth to soften and shrink it.

Whole-tone scale (N5) A scale containing no semitones but built entirely on whole tones.

Wind band (N4) A band with woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

Woodwind (N3) 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.

X

Xylophone (N4) 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.