

## Musical Signs and Terminology

### **Tempo**

In popular music the most commonly used indication of tempo is to specify the *beats per minute* (bpm) – this can be referred to as the *metronome marking*.

$$\text{♩} = 60$$

This means that there are 60 crotchet beats per minute (one per second).

$$\text{♩} = 120$$

This means that there are 120 crotchet beats per minute. So a tempo of ♩ = 120 bpm is twice as fast as a tempo of ♩ = 60 bpm (two beats per second).

### **Dynamics**

Below are the symbols used to indicate how quietly or loudly notes or phrases should be played. The symbols are based on abbreviations of Italian terms:

| Symbol    | Meaning                     | Italian term |
|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| <i>pp</i> | Very softly/ quietly        | Pianissimo   |
| <i>p</i>  | Softly/ quietly             | Piano        |
| <i>mp</i> | Moderately softly/ quietly  | Mezzo piano  |
| <i>mf</i> | Moderately strongly/ loudly | Mezzo forte  |
| <i>f</i>  | Strongly/ loudly            | Forte        |
| <i>ff</i> | Very strongly/ loudly       | Fortissimo   |

You can add more *ps* or *fs* (normally to a maximum of three), to instruct the performer to play extremely softly/ quietly or extremely strongly/ loudly.

### **Articulation**

The following symbols tell the performer how to play specific notes:

A dot above or below the notehead means 'play the note short' – about half its normal length. This is known as **staccato**.



A straight line above or below the notehead means 'play the note to its full length and *lean* on it slightly'. This is known as **tenuto**.



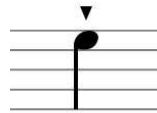
A > above or below a notehead means 'accent the note'. This is known as an **accent** or **marcato**.



An upside down 'v' above or below a notehead means 'strong accent'. This is known as **martelato**.



An arrowhead above or below a notehead means 'very staccato'. This is known as **staccatissimo**.



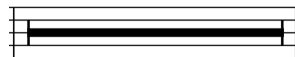
**Slurs** are used where notes should be played together as smoothly as possible. For example, saxophonists and brass instrumentalists will play all the slurred notes in one breath, without accenting any of them. Guitarists and bass players slur notes by 'hammering-on' or 'pulling-off' the notes with their fretting fingers, instead of picking the string again as normal for each new note.



### **Directions for rests**

A semibreve rest indicates a bar of rest. If there is more than one bar of rest, a horizontal line is written through the bar with the number of silent bars written above it.

6



This is much easier for a performer to count than eight separate bars containing semibreve rests.

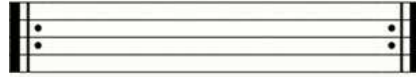
### **Directions for repeats**

If one bar is to be repeated then the symbol  $\%$  can be used. This symbol can be repeated as necessary.



To indicate that a section of music should be repeated (played twice) **repeat marks** are used. A double bar line, followed by two dots either side of the

middle line of the staff, indicates the start of the section to be repeated. Two dots either side of the middle line of the staff, followed by a double bar line, indicate the end of the section. If there are no initial repeat dots then repeat from the beginning of the piece.



If the section is to be repeated more than once, the number of times it is to be played is written above the last repeat dots.