
Essential Dictionary of Music Definitions



*The most practical and useful
source available for students
and professionals*

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Abbreviations

Ban.	Bantu (<i>an African language</i>)
c.	circa (<i>approximately</i>)
Eng.	English
Fr.	French
Ger.	German
Gr.	Greek
Hin.	Hindi
It.	Italian
Jap.	Japanese
Lat.	Latin
Pol.	Polish
Por.	Portuguese
Ru.	Russian
Sp.	Spanish
	Whole step
	Half step
	Whole & half step

Words in *italics* are cross-references.

Pronunciations

Syllables in capital letters are accented.

Long Vowels

<i>ay</i>	long "a" as in day
<i>ee</i>	long "e" as in keep
<i>ei</i>	long "i" as in light
<i>oh</i>	long "o" as in go

Short Vowels

<i>a</i>	short "a" as in cat
<i>e</i> or <i>eh</i>	short "e" as in tent
<i>i</i>	short "i" as in ship
<i>o</i> or <i>ah</i>	short "o" as in hot
<i>u</i>	short "u" as in cut
<i>uh</i>	as in look

Consonants

<i>zh</i>	as in vision
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All other consonants keep their standard pronunciations.

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A

A: Abbreviation for *alto*.

a, à (*It., Fr., ah*): At, by, for, in, to, with.

a2: See *a deux*.

ab (*Ger., ahp*): Off.

abandon, abbandono (*Fr., ah-bawn-DOHN; It., ahb-BAHN-doh-noh*): Abandon, free, passionate.

a battuta (*It., ah baht-TOO-tah*): With the beat.

abbellire (*It., ahb-bel-LEE-reh*): To ornament.

abbellimenti (*It., ah-bel-lee-MEN-tee*): Ornaments or embellishments.

absolute music: Instrumental music without extramusical associations, as opposed to *program music*.

absolute pitch: The ability to recognize the actual pitch of any note heard.

a cappella (*It., ah kahp-PEL-lah*): Without accompaniment.

accelerando (*It., aht-chel-le-RAHN-doh*): Becoming gradually faster. Abbreviated *accel*.

accent, accénto (*Eng.; It., aht-CHEN-toh*): To emphasize a note. Indicated by the symbol >.

accented passing tone: See *passing tone*.

accessory notes: See *auxiliary notes*.

acciaccatura (*It., aht-chahk-kah-TOO-rah*):

A *grace note* which is played simultaneously with the principal note and immediately released.



accidentals: Sharps, double sharps, flats, double flats or natural signs used to raise, lower, or return a note to its normal pitch. Their effect lasts through the remainder of the same measure.

accompaniment: Vocal or instrumental parts that accompany a melody.

accord, accordo (*Fr., ahk-KOHR; It., ahk-KOHR-doh*): Chord.

accordare, accorder (*It., ahk-kor-DAH-ray; Fr., ahk-kor-DAY*): To tune.

accordion: A portable musical instrument where a keyboard and buttons control air which is drawn and pushed by bellows across reeds that vibrate to produce a sound.



accordion

acoustic: A non-amplified or non-electric instrument.

acoustics: The science of sound.

action: The mechanism of an instrument that is set into motion by the performer's fingers.

adagietto (*It., ah-dah-JET-toh*): A tempo slightly faster than *adagio*.

adagio (*It., ah-DAH-joh*): A slow tempo which is faster than *largo* and slower than *andante*.

added sixth: A *triad* including the sixth note above the *root*. For example: C, E, G, A.

addolorato (*It., ahd-doh-loh-RAH-toh*): With grief.

à demi-jeu (*Fr., ah DEH-mee ZHUH*): With half the power.

à demi-voix (*Fr., ah DEH-mee VWAH*): With half the power of the voice.

à deux, a due (*Fr., ah DUH; It., ah DOO-eh*): For two instruments or voices, abbreviated a2. When two parts are written on one *stave*, it indicates that both are to play in unison.

à deux mains (*Fr., ah DUH mah*): With two hands.

a due corde (*It., ah DOO-eh COR-deh*): On two strings.

A dur (*Ger., ah door*): The key of A major.

ad libitum, ad lib. (*Lat., ahd LEE-bee-toom*): Optional, or at will. The performer may omit a section, improvise freely, or alter the tempo.