

A Simple Musical (and some Technology) Glossary:

This is not a Music Technology glossary, but tries to include some basic terms.

A Capella:	Voices or vocals only. No instruments.
Accompaniment:	Playing with someone else to support them, or providing a backing track for them.
Acoustic:	The actual sound. An instrument is called acoustic if you hear the real sound (not electric). Also used to describe the environment it plays in.
Ambient:	Means that the room or space has echo, or that the performance uses 'echo-ey' or reverb effects.
Arrangement:	A version of someone else's music. It has to change something (eg Robbie Williams arranged Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" into "Supreme". If a piece is a direct copy of the original, it is an arrangement.
Articulation:	How something is played (plucked or bowed, slurred or separated, slap bass for example is a type of articulation).
Audio:	Literally means sound. It is also used to refer to recordings of actual sounds as opposed to those created using computer numbers (MIDI).
Augmented:	Literally means 'larger'. Used for augmented chord (where the gaps between the notes are larger) or longer notes (have 'augmented' note length).
Ballad:	Traditionally a song that tells the story (eg "Beowulf" or "Ballad of Roland"). This format was adopted by pop and changed to mean a love song, usually with a slow tempo and often Rock instrumentation.
Band:	See group.
Bar:	American Measure. A short number of beats (usually 4 these days) that establish the beat. The first beat (of 4) is a strong one and provides a sense of beat, so repeating 1 , 2, 3, 4, 1 , 2, 3, 4, for example helps feet to move or musicians to count.
Baroque:	<p>The baroque period of Music stretched from 1600-ish to 1750. It referred to music that (originally) tried to set whole sentences to chords in keys that reflected the emotion of the text. Originally it was (also) the first period of music to use chords and keys and scales (rather than modes).</p> <p>Later, it became a forum for the development of instruments, and doing complicated arrangements of chord notes by allocating them to instrumental parts. The composers of this period did not see themselves as 'Baroque' which meant vulgar, this title was given to the music by the 'Classical' composers that followed on. They saw themselves as 'Second Practice' or 'Modern Style' composers as distinct from the Renaissance composers before who composed in the 'Old Style' or 'First Practice'</p>
Bass:	Actually on its own means the bottom or lowest part of a piece of music. The term is usually used these days to refer to the Bass Guitar. It can refer to a male singer in a choir, or a brass instrument.

Beat	A beat is a constant or regular repetition of one note at any speed. The notes (or sounds) are all the same length, as are the gaps between them. A drum beat is often actually a rhythm (despite the name) for this reason, and so is a break-beat (which has gaps in).
Blue Notes:	Extra notes added to Western Major or Minor scales in Blues. Tend to be used to make tunes more expressive (minor 3 rd over major chord for example).
Blues Scale:	Scale used in Blues, using 'Blue' notes.
Break:	Usually a short set of notes on an instrument that fill in a gap in the main tune (often at the end of a vocal line). Originally it was a Jazz term. It is sometimes also called a 'Fill' today although fill traditionally has referred to drums.
Break-beat:	See rhythm.
Cantata:	Originally meant 'sung together'. See Opera then Oratorio. A Cantata is similar to an Oratorio (sung in church), but was part of the church service, and the text was usually the church text for that day (and thinking about it) rather than a full story.
Chords:	Three or more notes played at the same time, usually on one instrument. Two notes are not usually a chord because they can be of several different ones. Three notes are the minimum that actually define one chord.
Chorus:	In pop music, a section of music that is repeated where the music and the words stay the same on the repeat (see Verse). Most students use or recognise this definition. In traditional Western (or "Classical" music) this section is called a Refrain (and this is still used for music that repeats a small set of words). In traditional Western Music, a chorus is a choir (or a section that uses a choir). In Jazz, a chorus is a set of chords (for example a 12 bar blues is a chorus).
Chromatic:	Music or scales that use all notes (or all semitones). Most music uses a set of 7 notes called a scale (or similar sets) designed to make tunes sound consonant (or pleasant), because of the set of notes picked which are a mixture of tones and semi-tones. Chromatic music uses all 12 notes.
Classical:	Literally music composed by western European composers between 1720 and 1800-ish in a certain style (mainly tune and chords) for orchestras and string quartets. It is NOT anything that is not Rock, Pop, or Folk. The western classical tradition can be used for anything orchestral or vocal or contemporary (ie not rock, pop or folk) from about 1500 (or before) to date. Classical music proper, imitated what they knew of the classics (ancient Greek and Roman civilisations). The composers tried to put what they saw of proportion and symmetry from surviving buildings (of those eras) into their music.
Comping:	See instrumentation.
Composition:	This is a piece of music that is made up. Not a "Cover" or "Arrangement". Usually assessment is done on what had been made up and how this is described. Joint work is often what happens in a band, but cannot be assessed. Statements such as "I did this bit but Gary did that one" are not allowed.
Concept Album:	An album that has a link across tracks (all tracks are linked by a concept or idea). There are several ways of doing this (see my History of Jazz and Pop styles).

Concert:	A public performance of music. Also called a gig (by both classical and rock/pop musicians. Old joke: What's the difference between a gig and a concert? Ooh about £100 and a Dinner Jacket to you mate!
Concerto:	A piece of music for solo instrument accompanied by orchestra (as opposed to a sonata where the accompaniment is a keyboard of some type).
Counterpoint:	When more than one tune plays at once. Music that uses Counterpoint is called Polyphonic Music (many sounds).
Cover:	A direct copy of someone else's piece. If it is changed, it is an arrangement.
Diatonic:	Term used to refer to the two scales used in Western Music (Major and Minor) which span an octave and use mixtures of Semi-tones and Tones to construct them.
Dynamics:	Loudness or softness. How loud or how loud or soft it gets. Usually referred to by a range of interesting Italian terms.
Ensemble:	Literally more than one live player playing together. Technically a group, although group tends to be used for more specific context these days (see group)
Evaluation:	A write-up of everything that has been done. Literally a "log" in one go.
Fill:	Does what it says. It is usually a short set of drum notes that 'fill' a gap in the main beat or rhythm or joints in sections. Drum fills 'signpost' a new section. The term is also used to describe tunes that do this, (see under break).
Form:	The size or shape of a piece of music or a movement or section. Usually a form has a name (symphony or Sonata or Concerto or 32 Bar Popular Song) while Structure (which it is often confused with) refers to the actual number of sections in the piece and when or how often they are repeated.
Genre:	Family or Type of style: Blues is a genre (original idea/concept, identifiable).
Group:	Also called band. The inference is usually a Rock group containing drums, bass guitar, 6string electric guitar (or two) drum kit and vocalist. Could be defined further (lead and rhythm guitar, keyboards, backing vocals, or other instruments).
Homophony:	Music where each part plays the same Rhythm. Rhythm and Blues is homophonic in that all the accompanying instruments play the same rhythm, but as the tune is often different we call it 'melody dominated homophony'.
Improvisation:	Music that is made up on the spot. Most Jazz solos are improvised in that they take the main tune as a start point but then "go off on one". Improvisation doesn't often have even that start point today (has been 'dumbed down'). Proper improvisation should focus on starting, finishing, using or ignoring chord notes, particular tunes or riffs, shorter or longer phrases, what note to end on, etc. Structured improvisation sounds more polished (and possibly free-er).
Instrumentation:	Should be obvious. How many instruments, but also what they do. Includes voices. Can be described as bass lines beat and rhythm parts, chords, melody, 'comping' (where all accompaniment instruments play chord on the beat), backing track or vocals, counterpoint (several tunes at once), 'tune and chords' (homophony).

It can be split into two halves: Timbre (the actual voice or sound of an instrument: Voice instead of flute) and Texture (how many instruments and what sort).

It can help sort out the style. In Rhythm and Blues for example, most of the 'rhythm' instruments (some electric) emphasise the shuffle rhythm in a blues piece which is where the genre gets its name.

Jam: Where a group of musicians get together and play. It usually means that they do not sit down and play particular numbers, but they may improvise or do arrangements or even compose individually or as a group.

Lick: A short tune (traditionally a motif), usually one that is repeated a few times. It is identifiable, but not repeated enough to be a Riff or Ostinato.

Major (Scale or Key): Uses notes heard naturally to construct a chord, scale or set of chords that create 'happy' music. It uses a particular pattern of notes that create intervals that our brains subconsciously accept as comfortable. Western music traditionally uses Major and Minor Scales to set up conflicting emotions. The intervals between notes in the Major go Tone, Tone, Semitone, Tone, Tone, Tone, Semitone (see these terms in this glossary) giving (for example), an A Major Scale of A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A.

Melody: Tune

MIDI: Literally Musical Instrument Digital Interface. The term is used to refer to creating music using computer numbers. A computer can recognise a pitch if it has a number (1 to 127 – low to high), how long the note is, how hard it was played, and the number of the 'voice' from a bank. All of these can be changed by number to create completely new notes, while audio (actual sound recording) has to be changed using the existing sound IN SOME WAY.

Minor (scale or key): See Major first. Minor scales or keys adapt notes from the Major scale to create a set that subconsciously conflicts with our expectations. Minor key music is therefore traditionally seen as 'Sad'. The intervals in the Minor Scale are Tone, Semitone, Tone, Tone, Semitone, 3 Semitones (or Tone and a half), Semitone, giving (for example) a D Minor scale of D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C#, D

Mode or Modal: Music that is composed using an older form of scale. Early western scales were the equivalent to 'white note scales' on today's keyboard, in that the D Mode (called Dorian) was D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D. See also Aeolian, Ionian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, (and possibly Locryan). Each named mode has a different Tone and Semitone pattern between notes. These are not the only modes.

Motif: A short tune. Usually 5 to 10 notes.

Mixer/Mixing Desk: This is where the sounds from several sources (mics, CD players, live players, etc) are "mixed". This can be done during recording or after. Either way, the mixer or desk is linked to something that stores the recording (a CD player or Minidisc or tape or hard drive, in fact anything).

Musical: Almost an opera on film. Uses music to tell a story, but unlike Opear also uses dialogue.

Musical Theatre:	Is Performance on stage using drama, music and dance. Can include aspects of Opera, Operetta, and or Musical.
Notation:	Written down (Music). Common forms are: Staff or Stave: 5 lines used in the western tradition. Higher notes are written higher on the lines, lower ones lower. Different shapes of notes mean different lengths. Graphic: Literally a picture of the shape of the music (numbers of instruments, direction of pitch, larger shapes meaning louder music or bigger groups). Drum: Usually uses lines where one line or space is used for each drum. Notes are written as standard notes, and the cymbals are written as X's or X's in circles. Tab: Uses lines, one for each string on a guitar or bass. Numbers indicate which fret the finger should rest on. Sometimes rhythms are written above the Tab.
Opera:	A musical form. An Opera tells a story in Music, but does it in several different sections. The different sections tell the story (Recitative), the detail (Aria or Duet), and show the emotions (Aria or Chorus).
Operetta:	Literally a small Opera, but usually uses dialogue as well as just music (so different to Opera). Go and watch Gilbert and Sullivan.
Orchestra:	A musical ensemble which usually contains all 'families' of instruments (strings, wind, brass, and percussion). Early orchestras could have as few as 8 or 9 players, but did not contain all 4 families. What came to be the standard orchestra started in the 18 th Century with 25 to 30 players, but orchestras have involved more than 100 players and a choir in the largest works. The usual mental image of an orchestra is Last night of the proms, Dinner Jackets and a very large band.
Oratorio:	Tells a story using music (like opera), but on a sacred text (eg 'The Messiah' or 'The Creation', and is done in church wearing suits or dinner jackets, NOT in a theatre on stage wearing costumes. Uses the same sort of sections, though.
Ostinato:	Also called Riff. A repeated pattern (a set or more than one pitch) of notes. Usually has to be constantly or frequently repeated (maybe in one section).
Performance:	Playing (or acting or dancing). In music (these days) this can include Rap or DJ skills (depending on assessment criteria), as these are "Performance Skills". It should mean performing to an audience, or for assessment.
Phrase:	Usually refers to a tune or tune plus accompaniment, but basically a group of notes that got together. A phrase is usually part of a longer tune.
Pitch:	How high a note is: High pitched notes are higher (eg female voice or squeaks or whistles). Low pitched notes are lower (eg male voice or growls or basses).
Plagiarism:	Nicking other peoples pieces of music or written work. Acknowledged covers or arrangements are ok as they imply someone else wrote it.
Quantize:	Or quantisation. When the notes in a (sequenced) piece of music are changed to fit to a standard value. Often notes played live vary slightly in rhythm, but MIDI notes can be changed to fit to (eg all quaver or 8 th notes). Changes numbers not sound.

- Record:** Literally save evidence of something. Usually save onto computer or tape so that there is evidence of sound.
- Renaissance:** The period of music that lasted from 1500 to 1600 (and after in some areas). The composers tried to make the music clear and beautiful, sometimes by imitation, sometimes by homophony (see homophony). Sometimes this worked, sometimes not (the imitation got in the way of the words for example).
- Rehearsal:** Practice. Preparing (music or dance or drama) for performance. A rehearsal can be assessed, but it is not usually done for an audience.
- Riff:** Also called an Ostinato. A repeated pattern (a set of more than one pitch) of notes. It has to be constantly or frequently repeated (maybe in one section) to be a riff.
- Rhythm:** A pattern of notes of different lengths (or the gaps between the notes are different lengths). Usually a Rhythm fits around a beat (or over it). A rhythm can be regular or repeated, but is not constant repetition of one (length) sound. If it is easier, when you change music to fit the metre or rhythm of words, you are creating a rhythm.
- A break-beat is a rhythm (despite the name) it has a break in.
- Romanticism:** Musical composition of the 19th Century. Composers tried to incorporate an image or emotion into music using different keys, occasionally scales and tunes, etc to paint some sort of a picture (for example Vaughan Williams' "London" symphony or "Antarctic" Symphony). For the first 30 years or so, they tried to fit these into the structures that they inherited from Classical composers, but after that they adapted the structures to fit the image. Of course in the twentieth century, it was the video or film that provided the image, and music in cinemas became (to some extent) a reflection of what took place on the screen.
- Scat:** Singing without words. Syllables like "a whop bop a loo ba" etc. Scat has been used in a variety of styles (Jazz, '50's Rock and Roll, etc).
- Semi-tone:** The distance between two notes next to each other. Scientifically the gap can be described in frequencies, and averages out somewhere around 50 to 75 cycles per second. In music though, that gap is a 'semi-tone' and all semitones are seen as equal. The term means half a tone and the tone originally was probably the smallest gap that could be heard or sung. Instruments have narrowed the gap.
- Sequenced:** Music created using a computer and software (called a 'sequencer'). Usually involves either creating MIDI notes (see MIDI) or recording Audio (see audio), although technically recording audio is not sequencing.
- Solo:** Playing alone, or with an accompaniment. An accompaniment is a simpler part (where someone else is prominent or "the soloist") or a backing track.
- Sonata:** Originally 'sounded together' (as opposed to Cantata 'sung together'). Then it came to mean a four movement instrumental piece, then later still standardised as a piece of music for solo instrument accompanied by a keyboard such as piano, (as opposed to a concerto which was accompanied by orchestra).
- Sonata Form:** A musical form developed with the sonata, which uses two main tunes in a particular order, in particular keys, with repeats in a particular order.

- Structure:** The number of identifiable sections and repeats that a piece of music has. It can also refer to numbers of movements, their content, etc. Structure can be defined using terms such as Verse and Chorus, or using letters (ABA structure) or even using names. NB Form (which is often confused with structure) usually generally refers to the size or type of piece, the number of movements, the size of band etc.
- Style:** What makes the piece suitable for period or decade or type of music. A piece has style if it is 'reggae' or 'rock' or 'baroque' or rhythm and blues'. Most styles can be defined by speed or rhythms or instruments used or the artists, but often there is an undefinable something that cannot be expressed clearly in words. Pop music uses this uncertainty, and when most students or internet sites say that something is 'THIS' style, they cannot say clearly why.
- For a complete list of pop styles (and what makes them), see my History of Jazz and Pop styles (available free on VLE or from Zigzag education).
- Symphony:** A symphony is a piece of music composed for (symphony) orchestra. Traditionally it had movements (used to be 4: Fast, Slow, Dance, Fast), but whether they were there or not started to change in the 19th century, and some 20th Century works only had one. Generally it is a (large) piece of work which focuses on making each section of the orchestra prominent at some points. It developed from the 'sinfonia' which was an instrumental piece in an opera (see opera).
- Tempo:** Speed, how fast, how many bpm (beats per minute). Lots of Italian terms again, but no real need to use them in today's music.
- Tone:** Gap between notes. Historically the smallest gap that could be heard or sung, (although not now). Historically, too, probably the gap between straight letter notes (A, B, C, D, E, F, G), although these are not actually all equal or tones. Tonal can mean music that uses a key, Atonal without a key, and Pentatonic means use of 5 notes, so tone can have a variety of meanings.
- Verse** A section of music that is repeated. The music usually stays the same on the repeat, but the words or lyrics change. If there are no words or lyrics, then technically there cannot be a verse (presumably the music is instrumental). See also Chorus.
- Whole Tone:** Music or scales that uses notes a Tone apart. Most music uses a set of 7 notes called a scale (or similar sets) designed to make tunes sound consonant (or pleasant), because of the set of notes picked which are a mixture of tones and semi-tones. Whole Tone scales uses 6 notes (there are two sets of 6).
- Workstation:** Computer set up (Monitor, Hard Drive, Keyboard, Music Keyboard, and associated equipment that make all of these things work. The hardware, in other words.

Styles or Periods: Check out these on the web, or in my History of Jazz and Pop styles:

Acid House	Garage	Prepared Piano
Acid Rock	Glam Rock	Progressive Rock
AOR	Gospel	Punk
Art Rock	Grunge	Ragtime
Atonality	Hardcore	Rap
Balinese Gamelan	Heavy Metal	Reggae
Baroque	Hip Hop	Renaissance
Be-bop	House	Rococo
Bhangra	Impressionism	Rock
Big Band Bitonality	Indian	Rockabilly
Blues, Britpop	Indie	Rock n Roll
Calypso	Jazz	Rocksteady
Chance	Jungle	Romantic
Chicago Jazz	Mento	Rhythm and Blues
Classical	Minimalism	RnB
Cool Jazz	Modernism	Serialism
Country and Western	Motown	Ska (twice)
Dance, Dancehall	Music Hall	Skiffle
Disco/Hi Energy	Neo-Classicism	Soul
Dixieland	New Orleans Jazz	Spiritual
Drum and Bass	New Romantic	Swing
Dub	New Wave	Techno
Dubstep	Nu Metal	Trad. Jazz
Expressionism	Organum	Trance
Folk	Plain (or Gregorian) chant	Trip Hop
Folk-Rock	Pop	Urban
Funk	Post-Modernism	West Coast Jazz

This is not a definitive guide. Lots of websites hold what they consider definitive style lists (for example http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_popular_music_genres on Wikipedia for Pop Music styles).