



Exploring Dynamics (again!)

What are dynamics and how do they help us understand music?



Warm-Up Activity

Sing “Happy Birthday” three times (make up who you want to sing to, or just say ‘dear Someone’)

- 1) The first time, sing the song all the way through at the same medium volume (we’ll call this *mezzo-forte* or *mf*)
- 2) The second time, start by singing very quietly (*pianissimo*) and gradually get louder, so by the end you are singing very loud (*fortissimo*)
- 3) The third time, trade off - start by singing *fortissimo*, and gradually get quieter, so by the end you are singing *pianissimo*.

In the last lesson, we talked about Dynamics. We learned that dynamics in music relate to how loud and soft we sing.

Review the chart on the right to see all of the main dynamic levels you will see in music ----->

Today, we are going to focus on a new element of dynamics: changing dynamics

<i>fff</i>	as fortissimo as possible
<i>ff</i>	fortissimo (very loud)
<i>f</i>	forte (loud)
<i>mf</i>	mezzo forte (moderately loud)
<i>mp</i>	mezzo piano (moderately soft)
<i>p</i>	piano (soft)
<i>pp</i>	pianissimo (very soft)
<i>ppp</i>	as pianissimo as possible

Changing Dynamics: Getting loud or getting soft

In music, when we want to gradually change the dynamic of the music we are playing, we have a few important ways to notate that. The most common way is to use a *crescendo* or a *decrescendo*.

Crescendo

To ***crescendo*** in music means to get louder. In music, it is usually either marked with an abbreviation like this:

cresc.

Or it is marked with a 'hairpin' marking that looks like this:



Decrescendo

To ***decrescendo*** in music means to get softer. In music, it is usually either marked with an abbreviation like this:

decresc.

Or it is marked with a 'hairpin' marking that looks like this:



Other Dynamic Changes

Crescendo and Decrescendo are both gradual changes in volume. Here are a few other dynamic notation changes, some of which happen much more suddenly:

sub. p - the symbol for subito piano, or suddenly quiet.

sfz - the symbol for sforzando, which means suddenly and forcefully loud or accented

fp - the symbol for forte piano, where music starts forte and immediately drops to piano

dim. - the symbol for diminuendo, which is similar to a decrescendo.

Activity: Identify dynamic levels in a piece of music as you listen to it

Listen to Samuel Barber's choir piece "Agnus Dei". As you listen, make a note for every time you notice the dynamic level changing. If you can, identify which type of dynamics change you are hearing (*crescendo*, *decrescendo/diminuendo*, *sfz*, etc.)

Video: [Agnus Dei](#)

Practice more with dynamics!

Follow-Up activity #1: Pick more songs that you know, and as you listen, write down what dynamic changes as you listen.

Follow-Up activity #2: Draw a dynamics chart: as you listen to Agnus Dei again, draw a line while you listen. Every time you hear the dynamics getting louder, draw your line inclining. When you hear the dynamics getting quieter, draw your line declining.