

Make Your Music MORE DYNAMIC

Think how boring music would be if everything was the same volume. Music isn't only given life by its melodies and harmonies. Nuances like contrasts between loud and soft parts help give music direction and expression. These nuances, called dynamics, can be subtle, like the whisper-quiet zing of a brush on a suspended cymbal, or in your face, like an orchestral brass section going full tilt.

Once a dynamic level is stated in a piece of music, it's always maintained until a new level replaces it. For example, if you see a forte marking (*f*), you will play loudly until the next dynamic marking cancels out or changes that instruction.

Of course, you don't always move suddenly from soft to loud, or vice versa. When increasing or decreasing of dynamic levels takes place over a space of time, whether it's just a beat or half a page, crescendo and decrescendo symbols are used. These are long, open-ended wedges, printed beneath the passage where the desired dynamic change is required. Alternatively, the necessary dynamic instructions (or, more commonly, their abbreviations) are printed below the music. Usually, either the dynamic wedges or the written terms are used, but not both (see diagram below).

Over shorter periods, dynamic fluctuations are usually notated by a crescendo or decrescendo wedge (or "hairpin").

Dynamic wedges are always immediately followed by a dynamic level marking.

Use these dynamic markings to add interest to the songs you write, and in your own playing. Subtle or unexpected dynamic changes can go a long way toward catching—and keeping—a listener's attention.

Lower case italic letters are the universal way to notate dynamics. Dynamic markings are best thought of on a scale from 1 to 10, softest to loudest, as listed here.

- ffff* fortississimo
- fff* fortississimo
- ff* fortissimo
- f* forte
- mf* mezzo-forte
- mp* mezzo-piano
- p* piano
- pp* pianissimo
- ppp* pianississimo
- pppp* pianissississimo

Symbols used to indicate sudden accents (*fz*), more forceful playing (*sf*), and even more forceful playing (*sfz*) are listed to the right. Other, less frequently used markings, include the Italian terms diminuendo (gradually diminishing in intensity), *incalzando* (increasing in tone and speed), and *tutta forza* (as loud as possible).

- fz* forzando
- sf* sforzando
- sfz* sforzato



Crescendo (cresc.) and decrescendo (decresc.) indicate gradual increases or decreases in volume. Diminuendo (dim.) is another common term for decrescendo.

