



MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS: What is CRESCENDO?

Age Range: Elementary

Learning Objective: Students will learn the musical term “crescendo,” listen to musical examples, and practice making crescendos in their own musical performance.

ENGAGE students

DISCUSS. “Remember that *dynamics* is the word we used to describe the volume level in music? There is a special word for when musicians need to get louder, or gradually increase their volume – that’s called a crescendo (creh-SHEN-do.) Try saying that word a few times.” (*Pause to let students practice.*) Musicians know to get gradually louder when they see this symbol.”

Show students [a picture](#) of a crescendo.

ASK. “Do you notice it looks like something that is getting bigger? When you hear or play a crescendo, the sound gets bigger. Let’s see what a crescendo symbol looks like when it’s together with music notes.”

Show students [this image](#).

ASK. “Do you notice another symbol pointing the other direction, right after the crescendo? That’s a diminuendo, or a decrescendo, which means to get gradually softer or quieter – the opposite of a crescendo.”

EXPLORE sounds

PLAY. Make crescendos in different ways:

- Sing a familiar classroom song. Start quietly and get gradually louder. Create and use a crescendo cue card or use conducting patterns to help.
- Drum on your lap! Ask students to work independently and see how long they can stretch their crescendos. Invite select students to perform their “lap drum crescendo” for the class.
- Extend these ideas to classroom instruments or found object percussion.

LISTEN. “Sometimes crescendos happen quickly, and the sound grows suddenly. Listen to this crescendo – it happens fast!” Use an action to show the crescendo.

Also sprach Zarathustra, Op. 30 I. Introduction – Richard Strauss

WATCH. “[Here’s another piece](#) with crescendos. You will hear diminuendos, or decrescendos, too. The slower tempo makes the changes sound more gradual. Performers must use a lot of control to make the increase in volume happen over time. While listening, see if you can open your arms up when you hear a crescendo, and close them together when you hear a diminuendo.” (2 min.)

PRACTICE. “Next time you listen to music, notice any crescendos or diminuendos. Use your new music vocabulary word to describe what you hear to someone else!”