



# What are DYNAMICS?

**Age Range:** Elementary

**Learning Objective:** Students will be introduced to the fundamental concept of dynamics in music. Students will learn the terms and symbols for piano (*p*) and forte (*f*) and demonstrate understanding of their meaning through active listening and music making.

## EXPLAIN idea

*The sample script below introduces the idea of dynamics in music. Feel free to personalize and modify as needed.*

"Raise your hand if you've ever heard LOUD music. (*Pause for hands.*) Raise your hand if you've ever heard quiet music. (*Pause for hands.*) I bet we've all heard music that is loud, soft, or somewhere in between.

"Musicians use the word 'dynamics' to describe the volume level of music. Let's practice saying that word together a few times." (*Say it slowly with students two or three times.*) "Today we will talk about two different dynamic levels: forte and piano."

"Musicians use the word forte (for-TAY) to describe loud music. Forte is the Italian word for loud. A fancy letter f tells musicians to play loudly, or at a forte dynamic level. When musicians see this symbol (*hold up forte cue card*), they play or sing forte, or loudly.

"Musicians use the word piano (pee-AHN-oh) to describe quiet or soft music. Piano is the Italian word for soft. A fancy letter p tells musicians to play softly, or at a piano dynamic level. When musicians see this symbol (*hold up piano cue card*), they play or sing piano, or softly."

"Let's try saying each word when I hold up each card. When I flash the forte card, let's use a forte voice (*demonstrate controlled louder volume on the word forte*) and when I flash the piano card, let's use a soft, piano voice." (*Model softer sounds on the word "piano." Flash each card a few times, saying the matching word at an appropriate dynamic level.*)

## EXPLORE sounds

**EXPLAIN.** "We can play our 'lap drums' (*hands on thighs*) at different dynamic levels- piano and forte." (*Model/demonstrate a steady beat at a forte dynamic level, then piano.*) "If the forte lap drum hurts your legs, it's too loud!"

**PRACTICE.** Practice each dynamic level using lap drums, then use cue cards to prompt forte and piano playing. If you notice students slowing down when they play piano, encourage them to keep the beat steady - don't slow down! Mix in a blank card that means to STOP. This will help regulate activity and cultivate ensemble skills.

**EXPERIMENT.** Try the above activity with other forms of body percussion, found objects, and/or classroom instruments as appropriate.



# What are DYNAMICS?, cont.

## EXTEND learning

Choose one or more activities to extend learning.

- CREATE. Using index cards and markers, ask students to make their own *f* and *p* flash cards.
- LISTEN. With either printed flashcards from the [included printable](#), or from flash cards made by students, invite students to test listening skills with some music that switches back and forth between *piano* and *forte*. Explain to them: “Every time we hear *piano*, flash your *p* card, and when we hear *forte*, flash the *f*!” You may want to repeat the excerpt a few times, since students will have a better understanding of the relational connection of the dynamics after the first listen.