How to Know if Music Should Be Fast or Slow

KS2 MUSIC TEMPO MUSICAL EXPRESSION Ages 10-14 ⏰ 3 min read

What is Tempo?

Tempo is the speed at which music is played. It's measured in **beats per minute (BPM)**, which tells you how many musical beats happen in one minute. A slow piece might have **60 BPM**, while a fast, energetic song could be **140 BPM** or higher.

Think of it like a heartbeat—a resting person's heart beats slowly and calmly, but when you run, your heart beats much faster. Music works the same way!

How Do Musicians Know the Speed?

Musicians use special **Italian words** written on sheet music to show how fast or slow to play. **"Allegro"** means fast and happy. **"Adagio"** means slow and peaceful. **"Andante"** is a moderate, walking pace. These words come from classical music traditions that have been used for hundreds of years.

Modern sheet music also shows the exact **BPM number**, so musicians know precisely how fast to play.

The Mood Tells You the Speed

The **mood or emotion** of a piece strongly suggests its tempo. A funeral march is played slowly and seriously to show respect. A celebration song bounces along quickly with energy. A lullaby creeps forward gently to help babies sleep.

Think of it like how you walk differently depending on your mood—you might shuffle slowly when tired, but skip quickly when excited!

The Type of Music Matters Too

Different **musical genres** have their own typical speeds. **Heavy metal** is usually very fast and intense. **Classical symphonies** often change tempo throughout the piece. **Jazz** can swing between slow, smooth sections and fast, energetic solos. **Hip-hop** tends to have a steady, medium-to-fast beat.

The **instruments** being used also affect tempo. A gentle flute solo would be slower, while a fast drum pattern makes you want to move quickly.

Why Does Tempo Matter?

Getting the tempo right is crucial because it completely changes how the music feels. Play a sad song fast, and it becomes confusing. Play a happy song slowly, and it loses its joy. Good musicians understand that **tempo is as important as the notes themselves**—it's part of telling the musical story.

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