



Tempo: The Speed and Pulse of Music

KS3 MUSIC Ages 11-14 🕒 3 min read

What is Tempo?

Tempo is how fast or slow a piece of music is played. It's like the heartbeat of the music — it keeps everything moving at the right speed. When you listen to a song, you can often tap your foot or nod your head to the beat. That steady beat is connected to the tempo.

Tempo isn't random. It's carefully chosen by composers (people who write music) to create a particular mood or feeling. A fast tempo makes us feel energetic and excited, while a slow tempo can feel calm or sad.

Think of it like running versus walking. Running is fast (high tempo), and walking is slow (low tempo). The speed changes how the activity feels and how tired you get.

How Do We Measure Tempo?

Musicians measure tempo using **beats per minute**, or **BPM**. This tells us exactly how many beats happen in **one minute**. A tempo of **60 BPM** means there are **60 beats** in 60 seconds — so one beat per second.

Different tempos have special Italian names that musicians use all over the world:

Largo (around 40-60 BPM) — very slow and solemn. **Andante** (around 75-105 BPM) — a gentle, walking pace. **Moderato** (around 120-156 BPM) — medium speed.

Allegro (around 120-156 BPM) — fast and cheerful. **Presto** (around 168-200 BPM) — very fast and lively.

Think of it like a metronome in a gym class. The ticking sound happens at regular intervals, and the faster it ticks, the quicker you need to move.

Why Does Tempo Matter?

Tempo affects how we experience music emotionally. A song played at a slow tempo might feel peaceful, but play it faster and it becomes energetic. Film composers use tempo to build tension and excitement in action scenes.

Musicians use a tool called a **metronome** to practise keeping steady tempo. Modern metronomes are often apps on phones or tablets, and they produce a clicking sound at the set BPM.