

Adagio and Allegro in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*

Lesson 1: Beat and Tempo

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For this lesson you'll need:

- Headphones or a speaker
- Something to write on and something to write with

Remember, wherever you see [blue text](#) it's a hyperlink that you can click on for more information. You'll also notice **bold font** with important definitions of the new musical words that we're learning.

Introduction

[Watch a video](#) introduction to this lesson.

Activity 1: What is a musical beat?

Today we'll learn about one of the most important musical elements, [the musical beat](#).

The beat is a steady pulse that holds music together.



A great example of a steady beat in our everyday life is the ticking of the clock, or the sound of your own heartbeat.

Your turn: Take a moment right now and try putting your hand over your heart. Try to stay still and quiet for a few seconds. Do you feel the steady beat of your heart go “ba-bum, ba-bum”? What else do you notice? Is it beating very fast, or very slow, or at a medium speed?



Now, stand up and try to do three jumping jacks, or just run in place for 15 seconds. When you stop, check your heart beat again. Is it faster than before?

Yes, exactly! Your heartbeat is MUCH faster.



Now it's time to relax. Sit down and let your body feel calm.

If you check your heartbeat after you've been sitting down for a while, it will be MUCH slower than when you were running in place.

Activity 2: What is tempo?

So we've noticed that our heartbeat can beat at different speeds:

slow: when we're relaxing or asleep

medium: when we're walking, moving around the house, or even marching

fast: when we're moving fast, running, jumping, or dancing

Similar to our heartbeat, the beat in music can move at different speeds, too. In music we use another Italian word for the speed of the beat and that word is [tempo](#).

Let's say it one more time with lots of energy: "tempo!"

Tempo is the speed of the beat.

In music, instead of saying slow, medium, and fast, we use a few other Italian words, and today we'll learn the most important ones:

Slow = [Adagio](#)

When you hear slow music that makes you want to sit down and relax, the tempo for that music is *adagio*. Can you try saying it very slowly, as you're sitting down and stretching? "A-da-g-i-o...."

Medium = *Moderato*

When you hear music that is medium speed and makes you want to walk around and march, we call the tempo for that music *moderato*. Not so different from the word "moderate," right?



Create your own *moderato* tempo: If you want to hear what *Moderato* tempo sounds like, [look at a clock](#) where you can see the second hand and try to clap on each second. And there you have it — *moderato*!

Fast = *Allegro*

When you hear music that is fast and it makes you want to run, jump or dance, the tempo for that music is *allegro*. Try saying “allegro” as fast as you can. Go!



Activity 3: Listening challenge

We’ve learned so much today, now let’s have some fun! For this activity you’ll need paper and a pen or a pencil. We’ve learned the words for three different speeds in music. Let’s see if you can recognize the speed or tempo for each of these musical examples. As you listen to each piece of music, think about how it makes you move. Does the music make you want to sit down and relax, walk and march, or run and jump?

Circle or write down on a piece of paper the one you think is correct, and if you forget what each word means, you can check in Activity 2:

Excerpt 1

COPLAND Selection from *Appalachian Spring*

Adagio

Moderato

Allegro

Excerpt 2

BEETHOVEN Selection from Piano Concerto No. 5

Adagio

Moderato

Allegro

Excerpt 3

MUSORGSKY / arr. RAVEL *Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks*, from *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Adagio

Moderato

Allegro

We hope you’ve enjoyed learning about beat and tempo!

Share with us! We’d love to see how you’re learning at home.

Scan or take a picture 📷 of your work and send it to: education@nyphil.org.

Answers: Excerpt 1 *Moderato*, Excerpt 2 *Adagio*, Excerpt 3 *Allegro*