

# Melody

**Melody** is partly the arrangement of pitches but its character is also greatly influenced by rhythm, tempo, dynamics, articulation, tonality, instrumentation and other factors. It is important when discussing melody, or indeed any element, to firstly discuss it in its purest form and then add comments which draw on the other elements to support your description if necessary. Below is a list of vocabulary which can be used in the technical description of melody. These can function as techniques used in the basic construction of themes, motifs and melodies, and also as compositional devices. You should add to this list.

## Pitch construction

scalar / scalic  
arpeggiated  
stepwise  
large leaps  
conjunct  
disjunct  
sequenced  
patterned  
voice leading

## Form or Structure of Melody

ascending / descending / static  
complementary phrasing  
balanced / uneven  
sequence / pattern  
repetition / imitation  
post-cadential extension /  
pre-cadential extension  
augmentation / diminution  
delayed resolution / unresolved  
improvised  
subject / counter subject

## Embellishing techniques

passing notes  
accented passing notes  
upper appoggiatura  
lower appoggiatura  
upper mordent  
lower mordent  
turns and trills  
acciaccatura / grace note  
suspensions  
cadenza  
harmonics / overtones  
tremolo

## Mood or Atmosphere

Here you can use any words which subjectively describe the *sound* or *feel* of the melody. Some examples are: wistful, melancholic, sad, poignant, yearning, gloomy, scary, tense, joyous, happy, bouncy, strong, bold, grandiose, majestic, regal, playful, flowing, gentle, peaceful, mellifluous, haunting, calm, relentless, fanfare-like

“Melody” can be misused to describe the whole piece of music. Here are some statements about melody, which are actually descriptions belonging to other elements.

- 1) The melody was fast (rather – the *tempo* was fast OR the *rhythmic durations* were short (ie semiquavers))
- 2) The melody was minor (rather – the *tonality* was minor.)
- 3) The melody was loud (rather – the *dynamic level* was loud.)
- 4) The melody was staccato (rather – the *articulation* was short and detached.)
- 5) The melody was in binary form (rather – the *structure* was binary form.)
- 6) The melody was muted (rather – the *strings / brass* were muted.)

**Task 1** – Listen to a well-known melody such as that from the 4th movement of Beethoven’s 9th symphony and describe it using words from each category above. Ensure that you are describing the actual melody line and not the whole piece of music.

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