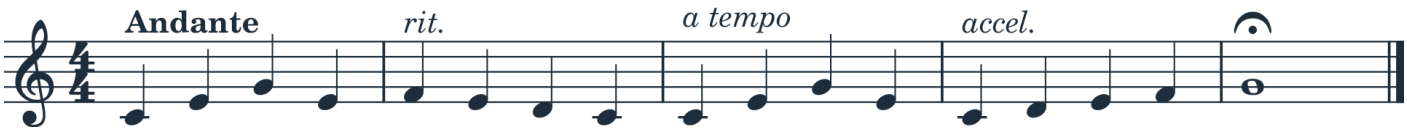Ritardando & Accelerando

when the tempo itself bends — slowing down, speeding up, and snapping back

Tempo is not a cage. Composers ask the beat itself to bend with three little words: **ritardando** (*rit.*) — gradually slower, like a music box winding down; **accelerando** (*accel.*) — gradually faster, like a train leaving the station; and **a tempo** — snap back to the original speed. They are the tempo cousins of the crescendo hairpins: gradual, controlled, and always on purpose.

ONE LINE, THREE TEMPO BENDS



Steady → rit. (each note a touch longer) → a tempo (snap back!) → accel. into a grand fermata.

rit. = braking gently

Each note is **slightly** longer than the one before — a smooth ramp, never a sudden stop. Most common at phrase endings and final measures.

a tempo = the reset button

After any bend, *a tempo* means **the original speed returns instantly**. Keep the old tempo alive in your head during the rit. so you can find it again.

Try it The wind-up toy game: play any 5-finger scale as a music box that winds down (rit.) to almost-stopping… then someone "winds you up" and you accel. back to speed. Then practice the discipline version with a metronome: click ON for the a tempo measures, OFF for the bends — can you land back exactly on the click?
Practice: Exercise 77.

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