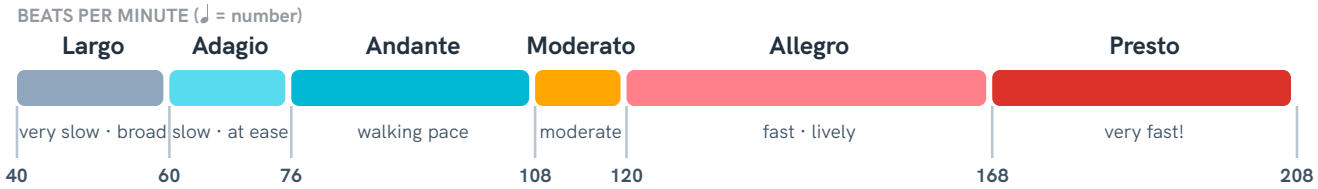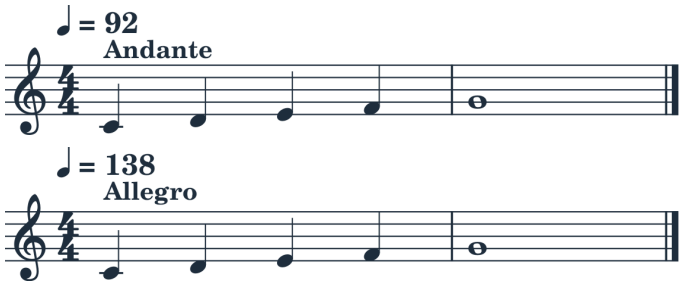
Tempo & the Metronome

how fast is the music — the Italian speed words, and the ticking coach that keeps you honest

Tempo is the speed of the beat — and music measures it two ways. The old way: an **Italian word** at the top of the piece (every musician on Earth reads the same six words). The precise way: a **metronome mark** like ♩ = 92, meaning **92 quarter-note beats per minute**. The metronome itself — patented in 1815, beloved by Beethoven — simply clicks that number so your beat cannot drift.



SAME NOTES, TWO TEMPOS



A stroll at 92, a sprint at 138 — the notes never changed.

HOW TO PRACTICE WITH A METRONOME

1. **Start slow.** Set it to 60 and just **clap with the click** until you lock in — when you are perfectly together, the click seems to disappear.
2. **Play one note per click**: a 5-finger scale, up and down, no mistakes.
3. **Raise it a little** — 4 to 8 clicks at a time. Small steps, never leaps. Use this ramp every day: Handout 360.
4. **The golden rule:** the metronome sets the speed of your **accuracy**, not your ambition. If notes break, go back down — slow and perfect always beats fast and messy.

Try it Guess-the-tempo game: set the metronome to a secret number, clap along, and have someone guess the Italian word from the speedometer above. Then flip it: your teacher says **"Allegro!"** and you dial in a number that fits. Musicians develop an internal clock this way — soon you will feel the difference between 92 and 108 in your bones. Practice: Exercise 77.

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