

The **piano** is a musical instrument played by means of a keyboard. It is one of the most popular instruments in the world. Widely used in classical music for solo performances, ensemble use, chamber music and accompaniment, the piano is also very popular as an aid to composing and rehearsal. Although not portable and often expensive, the piano's versatility and ubiquity have made it one of the world's most familiar musical instruments.

Pressing a key on the piano's keyboard causes a felt-covered hammer to strike steel strings. The hammers rebound, allowing the strings to continue vibrating at their resonant frequency.<sup>[1]</sup> These vibrations are transmitted through a bridge to a sounding board that more-efficiently couples the acoustic energy to the air. The sound would otherwise be no louder than that directly produced by the strings. When the key is released, a damper stops the string's vibration. See the article on Piano key frequencies for a picture of the piano keyboard and the location of middle-C. According to the Hornbostel-Sachs method of music classification, pianos are grouped with chordophones.

The word *piano* is a shortened form of the word ***pianoforte***, which derives from the original Italian name for the instrument, *clavi cembalo*  
[or  
*gravicembalo*  
]  
*col piano e forte*  
(literally  
*harpsichord capable of playing at the normal level, and more strongly*  
). The musical terms "piano" and "forte" are usually interpreted as "soft" and "loud", but this is not strictly what they mean in Italian. "Piano" means here a plane or level, suggesting the normal level of playing. "Forte" would mean a stronger, more powerful level of playing, effectively louder than usual. This refers to the instrument's responsiveness to keyboard touch, which allows the pianist to produce notes at different dynamic levels by controlling the inertia with which the hammers hit the strings.