

3. Know your foreign terms

There are three main foreign languages often seen in music scores: Italian, French and German. The very basics of these foreign terms can be found in theory from Grade 1 to Grade 5. It is very important to know what these terms mean so that you are able to interpret the pieces accurately.

For example, if the speed of a piece is marked "*allegro*" (which means fast, lively) but you play the piece "*andante*" (at a walking speed) or "*adagio*" (slow and stately), this would affect the character of the piece. Even if you were to play all the notes 100% accurately, you will not be able to bring out the character of the piece accurately.

Similarly, if a piece is marked "*maestoso*" (majestically) but you play it "*grazioso*" (gracefully), the piece would sound wrong. When you think of the word "majestically", the first image that pops out of your mind would be the King or Queen making a grand entrance. When you think of the word "gracefully", the image that pops out would be that of a ballerina dancing gracefully across the stage. These are two very different images and character.

Let's imagine this scenario: you are learning how to cook, but you do not know the meaning of "boil", "broil", "bake", "grill" and so on. Even if you have put in all the correct ingredients, if the cooking method is wrong, the dish will turn out wrong.

Whenever you encounter a foreign term, write down the meaning beside the word itself, so that each time you practise the piece you will be reminded of how to play it accurately. There are music dictionaries found in music stores, or you can simply Google the meaning of the word.

Following the markings in the piece shows your respect for the composer. The markings may come in many forms, such as speed markings, dynamics, articulations and phrasings. The composer took great pains to put in the markings, so please follow them religiously, assuming that there is no printing error in the edition that you are using. A performer of a piece is like the "middle man", passing the message from the composer to the listener. You wouldn't want to pass the wrong message, would you?