

# Music Vocabulary

Topic vocabulary for the IELTS exam

## \* Important

- Do not try and learn this list of vocabulary.
- Identify the vocabulary you find useful for answering practise questions about music.
- Record these in your vocabulary notebook and practise using them regularly.

## Set 1: Music genres

There are many different styles of music around the world. These are some of the mainstream genres but do add others to your own music vocabulary list if there are particular styles you like that aren't included here.

**music genre** – a distinct type or style of music

- My favourite **music genre** is rap.

**pop** – popular music; music liked by a broad range of the population

- **Pop** songs are enjoyed by lots of different types of people because they have a good rhythm, a catchy melody, and are easy to remember and sing along to.

**rock music** – music that is based on amplified instruments, especially the electric guitar and electric bass, and characterized by a strong bass line and strong rhythms

- The Rolling Stones play some of the best **rock music** ever written.

**heavy metal** – a type of highly amplified harsh-sounding rock music with a strong beat, characteristically using violent or fantasy imagery

- I like some rock music but find **heavy metal** a bit too loud.

**rap** – a type of music in which the words are not sung but are spoken in a rapid, rhythmic way

- Whilst I'm not a great fan of **rap** music, I do think it's amazing how they speak so fast and remember the words.

**country music** – a form of popular music originating in the rural southern US. It is a mixture of ballads and dance tunes played characteristically on fiddle, banjo, guitar, and pedal steel guitar.

- There's a great **country music** venue in my town where everyone dresses up as cowboys when they go to gigs.

**jazz** – a style of music that is generally loud and rhythmic, where the musicians often make the music up as they go along

- Louis Armstrong is still a popular **jazz** musician many decades after his death.

**reggae** – a form of music with a distinct beat that originated in Jamaica and is still associated with the Caribbean

- Bob Marley was the first internationally known **reggae** musician.



**blues** – African-American music that expresses grief or sorrow about injustice and a longing for a better life

- Did you know that the **blues** is named after the expression 'to feel blue' which means to be sad or depressed?

**traditional music** – songs and tunes particular to a country or region which have been performed over a long period of time, usually several generations

- **Traditional music** is part of our culture and should be preserved.

**folk** – traditional music which included songs written a long time ago and new songs written in the old style

- We have some talented young **folk** musicians in my country who love performing songs from the old days and writing new folk songs for our generation.

**classical music** – a form of music developed in Europe mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries by musicians highly skilled in musical composition

- I find that **classical music** really stirs up the emotions and I particularly enjoy listening to Beethoven and Bach.

**opera** – a musical play, often very dramatic, in which most of the words are sung

- I'm not a fan of **opera** as I really don't like the style of singing.

**musical** – a play or film that uses singing and dancing in the story but also includes a lot of spoken dialogue

- Although there are lots of great new **musicals** being written, I still love West Side Story the best.

**instrumental music** – music where you just hear instruments playing and there is no singing

- I'm not happy when they play **instrumental music** on my favourite radio station as I like to be able to sing along the lyrics.

**easy listening** – a type of music that is not complicated, is pleasant to listen and doesn't need much of your attention

- When I get home in the evening I put on some **easy listening** to help me relax after a busy day.

**background music** – music that is playing while something else is happening

- My friend likes to have **background music** on while she's studying but I need a quiet place to work.

## Set 2: Musical instruments & playing music

If there are any traditional musical instruments popular in your country that you might want to talk about, add them to your own music vocabulary list.

**instrument** – something you play to make music

Some common instruments:

piano

guitar

electric guitar

drums

violin / fiddle

cello

flute

electric keyboard

banjo

double bass

saxophone

trumpet

clarinet

accordion

recorder



If there are any traditional musical instruments popular in your country that you might want to talk about, add them to your own music vocabulary list.

**traditional instruments** – a type of instrument that has been played for many generations or that was popular in the past, often unique to a country or region

- A sitar is a **traditional** Indian musical **instrument**.

**to take up** (a musical instrument) – to begin learning a musical instrument

- I'm going **to take up** the guitar.

**to read music** – to understand and follow written musical notes

- I'm so glad I learnt to **read music** when I had piano lessons as a child because it really helps me now that I sing in a choir.

**to play by ear** – to play without reading the musical notes

- Many talented musicians can't even read music and only **play by ear**.

**talented** – to be naturally skilled at something

- I never got the hang of playing an instrument even though both my parents are **talented** musicians.

**to be musical** – have a skill in or a great liking for music

- My friend Sally is very **musical** and can play several different instruments.

**self-discipline** – the ability to make yourself do things you know you should do even when you do not want to

- You need a lot of **self-discipline** to learn the piano as you have to practise every day and play boring scales.

**sense of accomplishment** – to feel like you've achieved something you can be proud of

- Bernie felt a real **sense of accomplishment** at passing his Grade 2 flute exam.

**vocals** – a part of a piece of music that is sung

- My parents met in a band. Dad was a guitarist and Mum sang **vocals**.

### Set 3: Musicians

**musician** – a person who plays a musical instrument, especially as a profession, or is musically talented

- It was Jai's ambition to be a professional **musician** and play in a famous orchestra.

bass player – someone who plays the bass

**conductor** – the person who leads the orchestra

**guitarist** – someone who plays the guitar

**keyboard player** – someone who plays the keyboard

**pianist** – someone who plays the piano

**drummer** – someone who plays the drums

**cellist** – someone who plays the cello

**violinist** – someone who plays the violin

**vocalist** – someone who sings

- Phil Collins was unusual in being both the drummer and lead **vocalist** in a band, the famous Genesis.



**choir** – a group of singers singing together

- Lulu really enjoyed singing in the **choir**, especially when they performed at concerts.

**orchestra** – a large group of musicians who play many different instruments together and are led by a conductor

- Jason was delighted when he was asked to play violin in the school **orchestra**.

**band** – a group of people who sing together and also play instruments

- I was so excited to be asked to play bass guitar in the new **band**.

**group** – a collection of people who sing together but do not necessarily play instruments

- All the **groups** performing in the contest were excellent and it was hard for the judges to pick the best.

**composer** – a person who writes music, especially as a professional occupation

- My favourite classical composer is Mozart.

#### Set 4: Live music

**a performance** – the act of entertaining other people by dancing, singing, acting or playing music

- The choir gave a wonderful performance at my sister's wedding.

**a gig** – a performance of a band

- My new band is playing their first gig at the weekend.

**a show** – a performance, especially involving music

- I'm going to my kid's school this evening to watch them perform in a show.

**live music** – music performed in front of an audience

- We have many clubs in my city and I often go along with friends to listen to live music.

#### Collocations:

- **live show**
- **live performance**
- **live gig**

**music festival** – an organized event, typically lasting several days, featuring performances by various musicians, singers and groups

- I try to go to at least one **music festival** each summer.

**concert** – a performance of music by one or more musicians or singers

- My orchestra is going to perform at a **concert** organized to raise money for charity.

**stage** – a raised platform on which musicians, actors or entertainers perform

- I felt nervous when I walked out on **stage** and saw the large audience waiting to hear me sing.

**venue** – the place where a public event such as a concert happens

- The disused warehouse was the perfect **venue** for a rock concert.

#### Set 5: Recorded music

**recording** / **recorded music** – music that has been stored on a record, CD, computer, etc., so that it can be heard again

- I have **recordings** of many of my favourite bands stored on my computer.



**MP3 player** – an electronic device that can store and play digital audio files

- I always carry my **MP3 player** with me so that I can listen to music whenever I want to.

**headphones / earphones** – an electronic device that fits over or in the ears for listening to music

- I wear **earphones** to listen to music on my MP3 player while I'm out jogging.

**album** – a collection of recordings issued as a single item on CD, record or another medium.

- I can't wait for my favourite band's new **album** to come out.

**to download tracks** – to obtain music from the internet

- I heard a great band at the gig last night and I'm going to **download** some of their **tracks**.

**speakers** – a piece of electrical equipment for playing recorded sound, through which the sound is played

- The jazz album I got for my birthday sounds amazing through my new **speakers**.

### Set 6: Describing music & songs

**a song** – a usually short piece of music with words that are sung

- My favourite Ed Sheeran **songs** is "Thinking Out Loud".

**lyrics** – the words to a song

- Leonard Cohen wrote some of the best **lyrics** of all time and many artists still perform his songs today.

**a melody** – the main tune in a piece of music that is often played or sung more than once

- I had trouble picking up the **melody** of the new piece we started learning at choir rehearsal today and will practise it at home.

**a tune** – the musical part of a song, especially one that is pleasant and easy to remember

**catchy tune** – a tune or a song that's easy to remember and stays in your mind so that you find yourself humming or singing it

- I heard a really **catchy tune** of on my kid's TV programme this morning and I've been humming it all day.

**piece of music** – a musical composition, especially but not necessarily an instrumental one

- My piano teacher has given me a new **piece of music** to learn before my next lesson.

**taste in music** – the music someone likes

- My boyfriend and I have the same **taste in music** and go to live gigs whenever we can.

**rhythm** – a regular, repeated pattern of sounds

- I love the **rhythm** of reggae music.

**beat** – a characteristic rhythm in some types of music

- Rap music has such a distinctive **beat**.

**harmony** – a pleasant musical sound made by different notes being played or sung at the same time

- One of the reason I enjoy country music so much is because many songs have lovely **harmonies**.

**to be out of tune** – to play or sing slightly wrong notes

- My dad likes to sing along the radio but is so **out of tune** that it sounds terrible.



**to be in tune** – to play or sing with the correct pitch

- Before the performance, the guitarist tightened the strings of his guitar so that it was **in tune**.

**to have a great voice** – to sing well

- I think my friend should enter the singing competition as she **has a great voice**.

**to be tone deaf** – to be unable to distinguish the different notes in music

- I'd really like to be able to sing but I'm **tone deaf** so I don't think there's much chance.

**chorus** – a regularly repeated line or group of lines in a song

- The **choir** sang lots of well-known songs and encourages the audience to sing along to the choruses.

**upbeat** – cheerful or lively

- If I'm feeling sad I put on some **upbeat** music and feel better almost at once.

**nursery rhyme** – a simple traditional song or poem for children

- I can still remember many of the **nursery rhymes** I learnt as a child.

**lullaby** – a quiet, gentle song sung to send a child to sleep

- If my baby wakes up in the night I just sing him a **lullaby** and he soon goes back to sleep.

**sing to sleep** – to make someone feel sleepy by singing them a gentle song

- My mum used to **sing us to sleep** when we were young.

### Set 7: Music & the emotions

**passionate** – to feel strongly about something

- I'm **passionate** about playing the saxophone.

**to cheer up** – to cause to feel better

- Upbeat music always **cheers me** up if I'm feeling down.

**relax / chill out** – to become less tense or anxious

- After a stressful day at work, I lie in the bath listening to classical music as this helps me to **chill out**.

**energise** – to make someone feel energetic or eager

- Reggae music **energises** me so that's what I listen to when I feel sluggish and need motivating.

### Set 8: Other music vocabulary

**rock band** – a group of musicians that play rock music

- One of the great things about living in Manchester is that all the top **rock bands** perform here.

**pop star** – a famous singer or musician who performs pop music

- Many teenagers have the dream of being a **pop star** as they want to be rich and famous.

**famous** – known about and recognized by many people

- The Beatles are one of the most **famous** bands ever to have existed.

**frontman** – lead singer of a band

- Roger Daltrey has been the **frontman** of The Who for over 50 years.

**fan** – a person who admires, supports or follows a person, band or team

- I've always been an Elvis Presley **fan** even though he died before I was born.



**huge following** – to have a large number of fans

- Modern pop stars have a **huge following** which they communicate with on social media. **to**

**go on tour** – to go on a planned series of performances around a region or country

- I hope my favourite band **go on tour** again soon as they put on an amazing live show.

**sellout** – a performance or sports event for which no more tickets are available because it's so popular

- The Bruno Mars concerts were a **sellout** at every venue on the tour.

**record company** – a business that makes and sells musical recordings

- Our band is getting well-known across the country and we're hopeful of getting signed by a **record company**.

**record label** – a brand or trademark associated with the marketing of music recordings and music videos

- You know you've hit the big time if you get signed up with one of the big **record labels** such as Sony.

**hit the big time** – to become successful and/or famous

- After winning the TV talent show, Shelley **hit the big time** and was soon singing in huge venues around the world.

**a hit** – to be popular; a record that sells lots of copies

- "Happy" was a massive **hit** for Pharrell Williams.

**the charts** – a list of individual songs or musical performances ranked in order of number of sales or downloads over a specific period of time which indicates their popularity

- Ariana Grande's new record is brilliant and I'm not surprised it's made it to No.1 in the **charts**.

**to sing along to** – to join in singing

- My favourite songs in the charts are always the ones you can **sing along to**.

**a sing-song** – to sing informally, often with other people

- I have wonderful memories of my gran playing popular songs on the piano at family get-togethers and everyone joining in for **a sing-song**.

**music-lover** – someone who really enjoys listening to music

- I can't say I'm a great **music-lover** although I do enjoy listening to the radio when I'm driving.

**applause** – approval or praise expressed by clapping the hands together

- The **applause** continued even after the band had left the stage.

**a round of applause** – an outburst of clapping from an audience to show approval

- The audience gave the choir an enthusiastic **round of applause** as they came on to perform.

**to be into / not into** – to be interested in or involved with / to not be interested in

- I'm really **into** folk music but **not into** jazz at all.

**to improvise** – create and perform music, drama or verse spontaneously or without preparation

- I don't enjoy listening to jazz when it's **improvised** as it sounds like the musicians are all playing different tunes.

**once in a blue moon** – hardly ever

- I'm definitely a music-lover but only go to live gigs **once in a blue moon**.



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