

TIMING: INNER PULSE, BEAT HIERARCHY, AND PACE

Timing is the tool that organizes the sounds you imagine and the intervals you intonate within time.

In the PianoWell System, timing consists of three main elements:

- Steadiness of pulsation — the consistency of the pulse, supporting flow, momentum, and a sense of grounding in performance. A steady pulsation acts as a unifying force. Like the structure of phrasing and form, it helps hold the music together.
- Beats of pulsation — the natural alternation of stronger and lighter beats, creating a breathing flow in playing.
- Pace of pulsation (tempo) — the emotional speed or energy of the pulse, ranging from calm and peaceful to fast and energetic.

Timing helps:

- choose a tempo that reflects the character of the music, avoiding the tendency to begin faster or slower than in practice
- master rubato while maintaining a clear sense of the original pulse
- master tempo changes such as *più mosso*, *meno mosso*, *accelerando*, *ritardando*, *stretto*, and avoid overlooking these markings in the score
- support virtuosity, as sensing a clear and energetic pulse helps prepare the mind and body for fast motion and coordination
- avoid compulsive speeding up or slowing down in more intense musical moments, such as rising or climax sections, or during increased dynamics

Over time, steady pulse might be altered and the tempo you originally chose may be different. However, it is important to establish a clear inner pulse from the very beginning.

Use of the Metronome

A metronome should be used only to help correct and refine your sense of inner pulse—not to replace it. If, when playing without a metronome, you do not feel a steady inner heartbeat in the music, then practicing with one has little value.

Since this course is intended for experienced pianists with an established musical background, the focus of this lesson is not on developing pulse itself, but on integrating inner pulsation into playing.

Expressive Timing (Rubato)

Mastering rubato requires the following abilities in playing:

- a developed awareness of dynamics, voicing, harmony, musical speech, phrasing, and musical form, creating a natural pull toward the more prominent and expressive moments in the music
- a clear sense of steady inner pulsation, allowing you to return naturally to the original pulse after pushing or pulling the timing

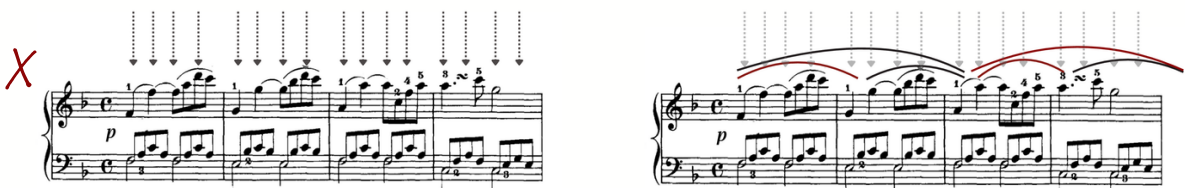
Expressive timing emerges naturally as part of interpretation, usually toward the later stages of learning a piece. In the earlier stages of analysis and timing practice, aim to maintain a steady pulse.

Vertical and Horizontal Lines in Playing

It can be challenging to maintain phrasing—the horizontal line—while feeling inner pulsation as the vertical line in playing.



To avoid a static or “stomping” quality in timing, try to feel the pulse as a gentle heartbeat that follows the phrasing line. This helps develop the ability to sustain both the vertical and horizontal lines simultaneously in playing.



PULSATION & BEATS

The first step in finding the inner pulse of a piece is identifying which note value functions as the beat.

If the beat is too short, it may become difficult to sense the horizontal phrasing line.

X

Allegro. (♩ = 76.)

If the beat is too long, the sense of steady vertical pulsation may become unclear.

X

Allegro. (♩ = 76.)

To find the correct pulsation and beats, look at the time signature. The lower number indicates which note value functions as the beat, while the upper number shows how many of those beats are contained within each measure.

In the examples below, each measure contains 6, 3, or 12 eighth-note beats as the inner pulsation.

FR. CHOPIN
Op. 52

Andante con moto

1. 3/8

2. 3/4

3. 3/2

Alla breve indicates 2/2 rather than common time 4/4. This means there are two beats in each bar, with each beat equal to a half note.

Allegro. (♩ = 76.)

Sometimes, the composer indicates a pulse at the beginning of the piece that differs from the beat suggested by the time signature. In such cases, it is worth exploring this idea and trying to feel the music through the pulse indicated by the composer.

The image displays five musical excerpts, each with a tempo marking and a circled pulse indication (a quarter note):

- Allegro moderato.** (♩ = 126.) The excerpt is in 2/4 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *mf* and *p*.
- Adagio.** (♩ = 84.) The excerpt is in 3/4 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *pp* and *mf*.
- Lento, sostenuto.** (♩ = 50) The excerpt is in 6/8 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *p* and *dolce*.
- Larghetto.** (♩ = 42) The excerpt is in 3/4 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *pp* and *f*.
- Andante cantabile con espressione.** (♩ = 96) The excerpt is in 3/4 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *p* and *fp*.

These are examples where the beat suggested by the composer does not fully reflect the character of the tempo marking. In such cases, you may choose to rely instead on the pulse implied by the time signature.

The image displays two musical excerpts, each with a tempo marking and a circled pulse indication (a quarter note):

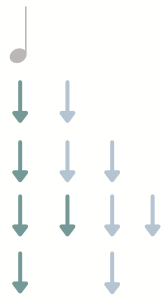
- Presto.** (♩ = 92) The excerpt is in 2/4 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *p* and *f*.
- Allegretto.** (♩ = 66) The excerpt is in 3/4 time. The circled pulse is a quarter note. The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamics *p* and *f*.

BEAT HIERARCHY

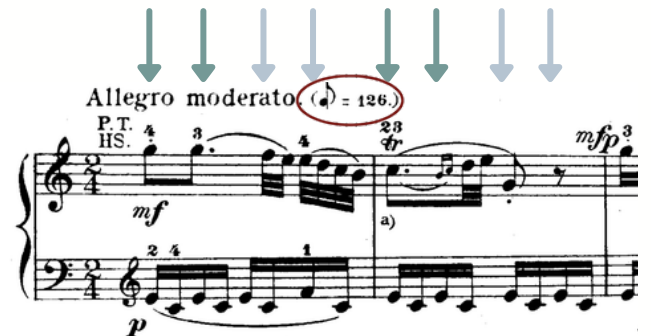
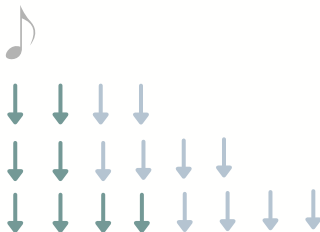
Similar to breathing, where the exhale often carries more presence than the inhale, a balanced inner pulsation—with its natural alternation of stronger and lighter beats—is essential for maintaining a natural flow of energy in the music.

Simple Time

- 2/4
- 3/4
- 4/4 and C
- C

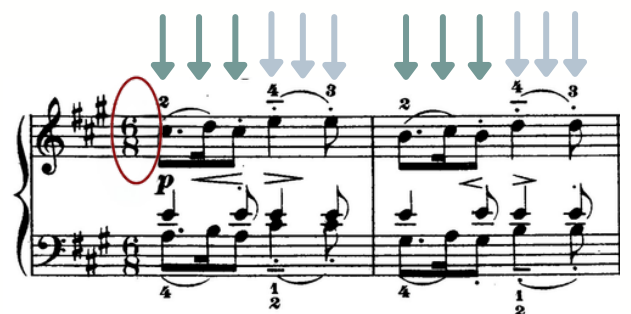
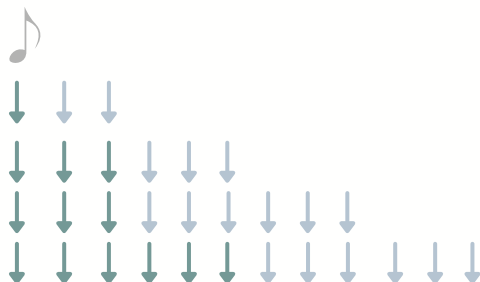


- 2/4
- 3/4
- 4/4 and C

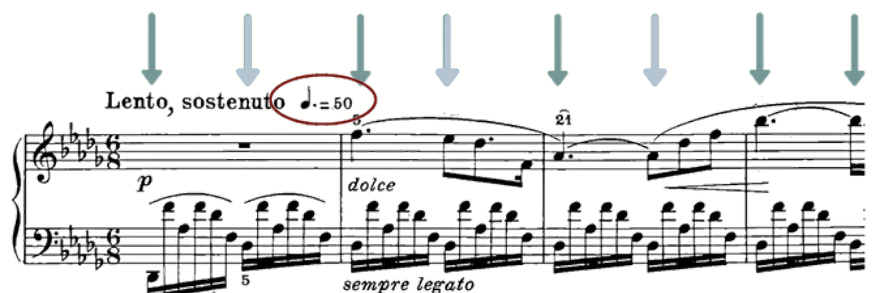
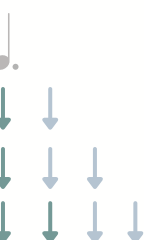


Compound Time

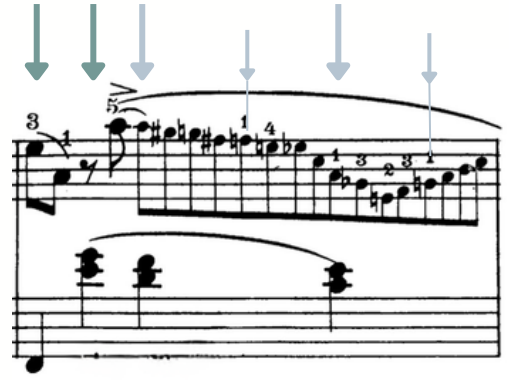
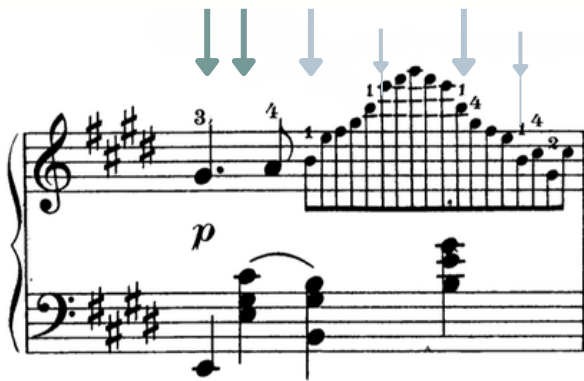
- 3/8
- 6/8
- 9/8
- 12/8



- 6/8
- 9/8
- 12/8



In cadenzas or fioritura sections, adding additional pulsation can help stabilize and organize the runs. For example, in a simple time piece where the main pulse is felt in quarter notes, you may begin pulsating in eighth notes during a cadenza. Feel this additional pulse as an upbeat leading toward the main quarter-note beat. This helps preserve the original timing and character of the piece.



TEMPO

As we have seen, each new element in playing becomes part of an integrated system. In timing, this means connecting inner pulsation to the character and energy of the music—your musical image. The pulse becomes the heartbeat of that energy.

Tempo Categories

Timing 1 — Calm · Peaceful

Slow — Grave, Lento, Largo, Larghetto, Adagio, Adagietto

Timing 2 — Calm · Peaceful with Movement

Slow / Moderate — Andante, Andante moderato, Andante sostenuto

Timing 3 — Animated

Moderate — Andantino, Moderato, Andante con moto

Timing 4 — Excited

Moderate / Fast — Allegretto, Allegro moderato

Timing 5 — Energetic

Fast — Vivo, Vivace, Allegro, Presto

The suggested timing indications are intended as a guide; ultimately, allow your intuition to determine the most natural feeling.

For example, I most often use:

- **Timing 2 for slower music**
- **Timing 3 for faster pieces**

More occasionally:

- Timing 1 for very calm music
- Timing 5 for Presto pieces

When practicing Timing, each Tempo category should be experienced as a reflection of your musical image. For example, Timing 1 is not simply about playing slowly, but about bringing a sense of peace and tranquillity into the music.

To experience Timing as a physical and emotional sensation rather than only a mental concept, include breathing in your preparation. Exhaling on stronger beats and inhaling on lighter beats helps the body—and the heartbeat—align naturally with the character and energy of the tempo.

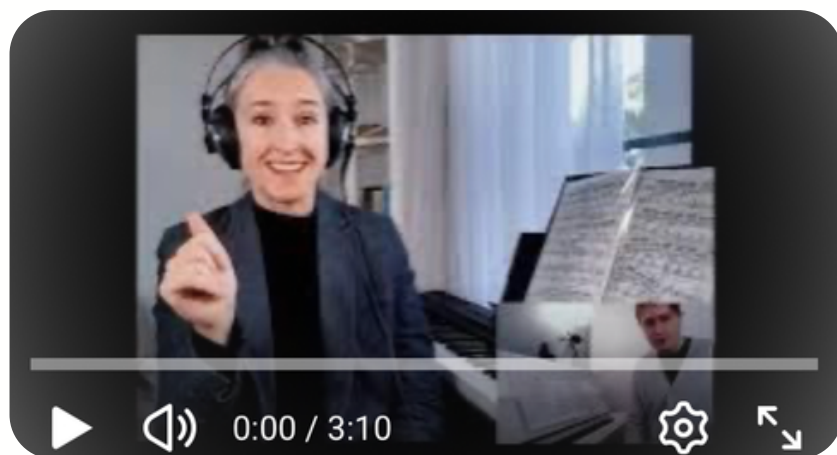
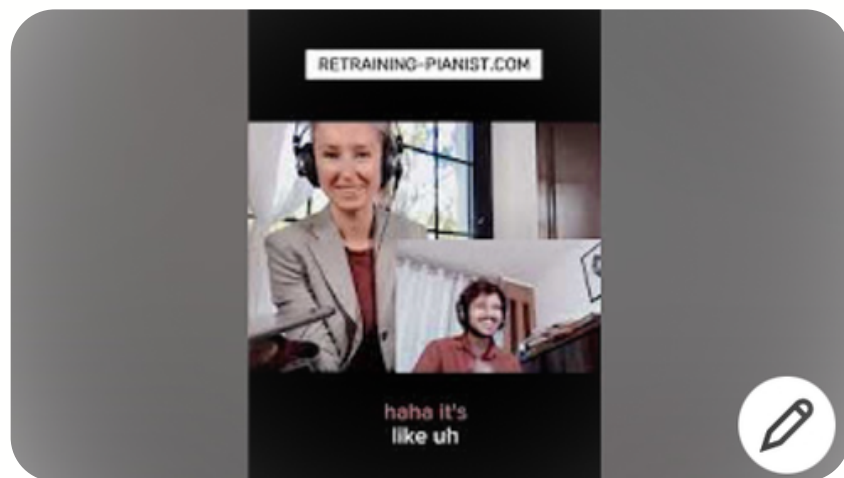
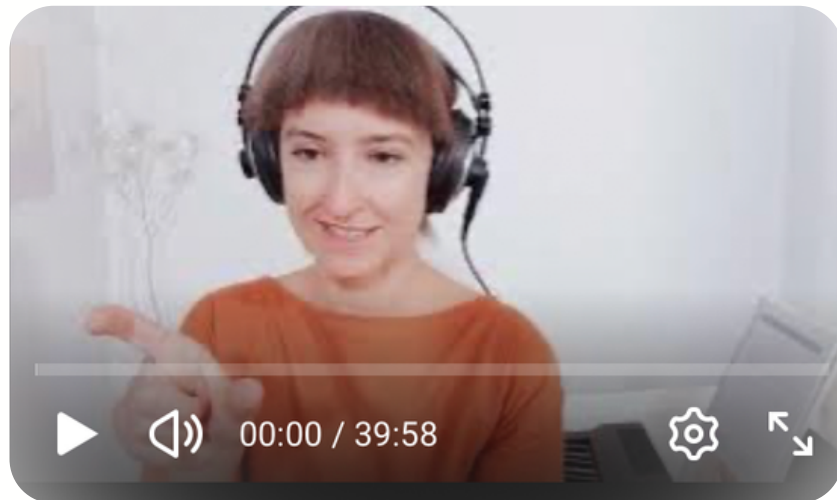


Notice that Timing 1–5 is not fixed to a specific metronome speed. Timing is primarily a matter of *feeling* rather than exact tempo. For example, Allegro may have different speeds in different pieces, while the energetic quality of the pulse remains similar.

If you feel anxious before performing and believe you are in Timing 2, you may unintentionally shift into Timing 3—a level of energy you may not have practiced, and which may not reflect the character of the music. To tune accurately into your chosen timing before playing, begin by grounding yourself in Timing 1 as a foundation, and only then gradually advance toward the movement of Timing 2 or 3.



OPEN LESSONS



Adagio.

-rall.

pp smorz. e rall...

legatissimo

ppp

pp e poco riten.

cresc.

con forza

string.

m.s.

riten.

Doppio movimento.

sotto voce

sempre più stretto e forte

appassionato

ff

cresc.

sostenuto

fff

riten.

dim.

agitato

sotto voce

poco a poco cresc.

ed accelerando

poco accel.

cresc.

m.d.m.s.

Più mosso. (♩ = 54.)

ten.

p

ed accelerando

ritard.

lento

pp

riten.

f. acceler.

p

Doppio movimento.

mp agitato

mp agitato

Molto più lento.

mf

p

f

Lento.

mf

Poco più mosso.

sempre piano e legato

sempre più stretto e forte

Più mosso.

appassionato

Poco più mosso.

sostenuto

poco animato

ritenuto

dim. ed accel.

con anima *ten.* *stretto* *ten.*

poco rubato *m. s.*

calmato *dim.* *p sostenuto*

largamente *p* *smorz.* *corde*

ten. *sotto voce* *una corda*

Poco più lento. *tr.* *dim.* *p dolce*

stretto
riten.
cresc.

rit. -
a tempo

a tempo
poco ritenuto
a tempo

f *p* *f* *p*

m. s. una corda
tre corde una corda
tre corde m. s.

rallent. -
stretto

ritenuto
Tempo I.
cantabile

poco dimin.
riten. -

poco dimin.
riten. -

a tempo

f

tr

pp
calando

pp molto legato e stretto