

Glossary of Manuscript Terms

GENERAL TERMS

Codex	Latin term used generally for a manuscript volume or gatherings of manuscript leaves bound as a book.
Folio	From Latin <i>folium</i> , meaning “leaf.” Term used for individual piece of <i>vellum</i> or <i>parchment</i> . The manuscript equivalent of the “page.” Parchment folded in half to make two connected leaves is known as <i>Bifolium</i> .
Gathering	See <i>Quire</i> .
Leaf	See <i>Folio</i> .
Manuscript	Latin compound of <i>manu</i> (abl. form of <i>manus</i>), meaning “by hand, and <i>scriptum</i> , meaning a mark or line, a composition, or piece of writing. Anything that is “hand written” (rather than “printed”).
MS	Abbreviation for “manuscript”, MSS (plural).
Paper	A more economical alternative to parchment that gained widespread in western Europe between the 12 th and 15 th centuries. Early paper was produced from cloth rags.
Parchment	The skin of a sheep or goat that has been prepared for use as a support for writing. Also see <i>vellum</i> . The terms <i>parchment</i> and <i>vellum</i> are often used interchangeably as specialized knowledge and a microscope are necessary to distinguish between <i>parchment</i> and <i>vellum</i> .
Quire	A collection or gathering of leaves (often four in Medieval MSS), nested then bound together in groups making up a <i>codex</i> .
Recto	From the Latin <i>rectus</i> , meaning “right.” Term used to indicate the front face of a manuscript leaf or right-hand page of an open book. Also see <i>verso</i> .
Rubric	From the Latin for “red.” A title, heading, or direction in a manuscript, often in red ink.
Vellum	The skin of a calf that has been prepared for use as a support for writing. Also see <i>Parchment</i> .
Verso	From the Latin meaning “to turn”. Term used to indicate the side of a leaf visible to the eye when it has been “turned over”. Abbreviated ^v or ^v ^o . The left-hand page of a book is the <i>verso</i> of that leaf, and faces the <i>recto</i> of the next.

MUSIC-SPECIFIC TERMS

Clef	Sign placed at the beginning of a staff to indicate the position of some particular pitch. Clefs were first used with regularity in the 12 th century, with F and C clefs being the most common. Originally clefs represented the shape of the letter for the pitch they represented. Later they became more of a stylized symbol that represented the pitch letter.
Diastematic	From the Greek, meaning “characterized by intervals,” referring to neumes that specify precise pitches.
Dry-point	A line scratched into the parchment of manuscripts without the use of ink.
<i>in campo aperto</i>	Latin phrase meaning “in an open field.” Term used for non-diastematic, oratorical, or staffless neumes which do not imply specific pitch relationships.
Neumes	Any of the signs employed in the notation of plainsong beginning in about the 9 th century.
Staff	A line or group of lines on which notes are placed in such a way as to indicate pitch or relative pitch. Early chant notation employed a single horizontal line scratched into parchment. Some examples show red or yellow lines which specify the pitch of that particular line, usually F and C. By the late Middle Ages, the musical staff usually consisted of four parallel red lines, though examples of five or six lines do occur.