Vocal Ranges


Vocal Ranges according to *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*

Definitions for use in music cataloging

RDA does not define the ranges of vocal types. General practice is to follow the instructions given in the Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings section H 1917.5: Base vocal range on the verbal indication on the item. If no vocal range is indicated, use the ranges specified in the New Harvard Dictionary of Music:

These ranges correspond to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High voice</th>
<th>Medium voice</th>
<th>Low voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soprano: C4-A5</td>
<td>Mezzo soprano: A3-F5</td>
<td>Alto: F3-D5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: these definitions, from the New Harvard Dictionary of Music, are used in music cataloging, using the Library of Congress Subject Headings [3] and RDA [4].

Vocal ranges for solo or choral works may differ, as evidenced from the different ranges found in other sources. For example, see:

° The Wikipedia article on vocal range [5], which gives different ranges for operatic works and choral works.
° Catherine Schmidt-Jones’ article [6] and chart [7].
° Grove Music Online definitions:

  - soprano: C4 to A5
  - mezzo-soprano: A3 to F#5
  - alto: G3 to E5 (and contralto as F3-D5)
  - tenor: roughly C3 to A4
  - baritone: A2 to F4
  - bass: F2 to E4

**Octave designation:** The International Standards Organization (ISO) system for register designations assigns "C4" to middle C (the first ledger line below the staff in treble clef). A commonly found British standard assigns "c1" to middle C.
Octave designations

International Standards Organization (ISO) system:

[Diagram of the International Standards Organization (ISO) system for vocal ranges]

C1  C2  C3  C4  C5  C6  C7

British system:

[Diagram of the British system for vocal ranges]

C2  C1  c  c1  c2  c3  c4

Source URL: https://web.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/vocal-ranges

Links