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:**

C1  C2  C3  C4  C5  C6  C7

**British system:**

C2  C1  c  c1  c2  c3  c4

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

Links