Dynamics are symbols that show how loud to play or sing.

Dynamics are usually placed below the staff on instrumental parts, and above the staff for vocal parts... to stay out of the way of the lyrics!

Specific interpretation is left to the performer!

Gradual dynamic changes are indicated with hairpin symbols or the Italian terms crescendo (increase volume) or diminuendo (decrease volume).

Other symbols affect groups of notes...

Articulations are symbols that show how to treat specific notes.

- Accent: With additional emphasis
- Staccato: Short and detached
- Tenuto: Emphasized and held for full value
- Marcato: Short and accented
- Staccatissimo: Very short and forceful
- Sforzando: Suddenly loud and accented
- Fermata: Hold longer than indicated
- Tremolo: Rapidly alternate between two notes
- Up bow: (Bowed instruments) Start at tip of bow
- Down bow: (Bowed instruments) Start at frog of bow
- Trill: Rapidly alternate two adjacent notes
- Arpeggio: "Roll" chord; notes added separately

All' ottava: Play the notes an octave higher or lower, depending on where the symbol is. (Two octaves is 15', and three octaves is 22'.)

Pedaling: On the piano, this symbol indicates when the damper pedal should be held down, allowing the piano strings to ring freely. Older scores use  for down and  for up.

And then there's this thing... a simple shape with a bunch of different uses!

In vocal parts, it shows melismas: groups of notes sung on a single syllable!

In any score, it can also be used on larger groups of notes, where it serves as a phrase marking... helping the performer see the overall shape of the music!

Music is made up of a lot more than pitch and rhythm!