Articulation Marks & Musical Symbols

Articulations specify how individual notes are to be performed within a phrase or passage. They can be fine-tuned by combining more than one symbol over or under a note. Mark these in your music when a Conductor directs it!

**Staccato**
Sing the note shorter than notated, detached.

**Accent**
The note is played louder or with a harder attack.

**Marcato**
Sing note much louder or with a much stronger attack. Like a combination of staccato and accent, it provides a sharp sound.

**Tenuto** (or “ten.”)
Usually indicates that the note is played for its full value, or slightly longer. I like to think of it as “leaning in” to the note.

**Fermata**
An indefinitely-sustained note. Usually appears over all parts at the same metrical location in a piece, to show a halt in tempo.

**Breath mark**
Take a breath. This pause does not usually affect the overall tempo.

**Caesura** or “railroad tracks”
Indicates a brief, silent pause, during which time is not counted. Time resumes when so indicated by the Conductor.

**Ties** (1st example) connect two or more notes of the same pitch together, forming essentially one longer note. This can also indicate (3rd example) a note sustained over two or more measures. **Slurs** (2nd example) smoothly connect notes of different pitch. It also means to sing the notes without breaks -- **No Breath**. Also indicates *legato* (more on legato later).
Dynamics

\textit{ppp} \quad \text{Extremely soft}
\textit{pp} \quad \text{Pianissimo, very soft}
\textit{p} \quad \text{Piano, soft}
\textit{mp} \quad \text{Mezzo-piano, moderately soft}
\textit{mf} \quad \text{Mezzo forte, moderately loud}
\textit{f} \quad \text{Forte, loud}
\textit{ff} \quad \text{Fortissimo, very loud}
\textit{fff} \quad \text{Fortississimo, extremely loud}

\textbf{cresc.} (crescendo) – grow progressively louder
\textbf{dim.} (diminuendo) – grow progressively softer
\textbf{poco a poco} – little by little
\textbf{subito} - suddenly

Tempo Markings

\textbf{Tempo} - Indicates the velocity of a song, in beats per minute.

\[\text{\textbullet~} \frac{1}{4} = 60\] In this case there will be 60 quarter notes per minute – the same as seconds on a clock. This is what Metronomes are for!

\textbf{rit.} (ritard) - Immediately slowing down
\textbf{accel.} (Accelerando) - Speeding up
\textbf{a tempo} - Return to the original Tempo
\textbf{rall} (rallentando) - Gradual slowing down
\textbf{rubato} - Freely
\textbf{piu} - more
\textbf{meno} - less
\textbf{molto} – much, very
\textbf{mosso} - Movement, as in “piu mosso” or “meno mosso”
Repetition, Codas and more

Repeat signs Enclose a passage that is to be played more than once. If there is no left repeat sign, the right repeat sign sends you back to the start of the piece or the nearest double bar.

1st and 2nd endings (Volta brackets)
Used to mark different endings for a repeat.

Da capo Repeat from the beginning (literally, the “head”). This is followed by al fine - repeat to the word fine and stop, or al coda, which means repeat to the coda sign and then jump forward.

Dal segno Tells the performer to repeat playing of the music starting at the nearest segno. This is followed by al fine or al coda just as with da capo.

Segno Mark used with dal segno. It’s a sign!

Coda A closing section appended to a piece. Indicates a forward jump in the music to its ending passage, marked with the same sign. Only used after playing through a D.S. al coda or D.C. al coda.

So, putting a few more elements together:
Legato can be indicated by "leg." or by a slur. It literally means "tied together". Sing the notes smoothly and connected:

(not to be confused with "leggiero", which means light and delicate.)

Sforzando

Literally "forced", denotes an abrupt, fierce accent on a single sound or chord. When written out in full, it applies to the sequence of sounds or chords under or over which it is placed.

Forte-piano

A section of music in which the music should initially be played loudly (forte), then immediately softly (piano).

More terms, categorized much better than I have:

http://www.musesrealm.net/music/terms.html