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Ad libitum

Ad libitum (/ædˈlɪbɪtəm/) is Latin for "at one's pleasure" or "as you desire"; it is often shortened to "**ad lib**" (as an adjective or adverb) or "ad-lib" (as a verb or noun). The roughly synonymous phrase *a bene placito* ("in accordance with [one's] good pleasure") is less common but, in its Italian form *a piacere*, entered the musical *lingua franca* (see below).

The phrase "at liberty" is often associated mnemonically (because of the alliteration of the *lib*- syllable), although it is not the translation (there is no cognation between *libitum* and *liber*). Libido is the etymologically closer cognate known in English.

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Music or rhythm

As a direction in sheet music, *ad libitum* indicates that the performer or conductor has one of a variety of types of discretion with respect to a given passage:

- to play the passage in free time rather than in strict or "metronomic" tempo (a practice known as *rubato* when not expressly indicated by the composer);
- to improvise a melodic line fitting the general structure prescribed by the passage's written notes or chords;
- to omit an instrument part, such as a nonessential accompaniment, for the duration of the passage; or
- in the phrase "repeat *ad libitum*," to play the passage an arbitrary number of times (*cf.* vamp).

Note that the direction *a piacere* (see above) has a more restricted meaning, generally referring to only the first two types of discretion. Baroque music, especially, has a written or implied *ad libitum*, with most composers intimating the freedom the performer and conductor have.

For post-Baroque classical music and jazz, see cadenza.

Biology

Ad libitum is also used in psychology and biology to refer to the "free-feeding" weight of an animal, as opposed, for example, to the weight after a restricted diet or pair feeding. For example, "The rat's *ad libitum* weight was about 320 g." In nutritional studies, this phrase denotes providing an animal free access to feed or water, thereby allowing the animal to self-regulate intake according to its biological needs. For example, "Rats were given *ad libitum* access to food and water."

In biological field studies, it can also mean that information or data were obtained spontaneously without a specific method.

Medical prescriptions may use the abbreviation *ad lib.* to indicate "freely" or that as much as one desires should be used. More common is *pro re nata* dosing, in which a drug is used only if needed and only up to some maximum amount.

Drama

Ad-lib is used to describe individual moments during live theatre when an actor speaks through their character using words not found in the play's text. When the entire performance is predicated on spontaneous creation, the process is called improvisational theatre.

In film, the term *ad-lib* usually refers to the interpolation of unscripted material in an otherwise scripted performance. For example, in interviews, Dustin Hoffman says he *ad-libbed* the now famous line, "I'm walking here! I'm walking here!" as "Ratso" Rizzo in *Midnight Cowboy*.

Live performers such as television talk-show hosts sometimes deliver material that sounds ad-libbed but is actually scripted. They may employ *ad-lib writers* to prepare such material.^[1] Some actors are also known for their ability or tendency to ad-lib, such as Peter Falk (of the series *Columbo*), who would ad-lib such mannerisms as absent-mindedness while in character.

The HBO sitcom *Curb Your Enthusiasm* by Seinfeld co-creator Larry David primarily uses retroscripting and ad lib instead of scripted dialogue.

See also

- List of Latin phrases
- Ad infinitum*
- Ad nauseam*
- Improvisation
- Mad Libs

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