A challenge common to many courses is the introduction of a new vocabulary. Students taking Music Humanities are exposed to many new musical terms in a short period. The Sonic Glossary is an innovative teaching tool for music appreciation. It assumes no musical training on the part of the user and defines musical terms by combining text, spoken voice, pictures, graphic images, and musical sound in creative ways, delivering them in high-quality audio for private study. The Sonic Glossary does not replace classroom teaching; at Columbia University Music Humanities is taught by small-group discussion, which the Sonic Glossary reinforces and amplifies.

The Sonic Glossary is available to Columbia students over the campus network. Definitions are written by the teaching staff of Music Humanities, sound is recorded and mixed by the Computer Music Center, and the illustrations and animations are generated at CCNMTL. The finished components are then compiled and released on the Web. There are sixty definitions, and the Sonic Glossary will continued to grow as more definitions are written by the teaching staff.

The Sonic Glossary project is led by Anne Parsons Bender Professor of Music, Ian Bent. It was created using basic HTML and incorporates audio and video using RealMedia.