

**Alternative rock** (also called **alternative music**, **alt-rock** or simply **alternative**) is a genre of rock music that emerged in the 1980s and became widely popular in the 1990s. Alternative rock consists of various subgenres that have emerged from the independent music scene since the 1980s, such as grunge

,  
Britpop

,  
gothic rock  
, and  
indie pop

. These genres are unified by their collective debt to the style and/or ethos of punk rock, which laid the groundwork for alternative music in the 1970s.

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At times alternative rock has been used as a catch-all phrase for rock music from underground artists in the 1980s, and all music descended from punk rock (including punk itself, New Wave, and post-punk).

While a few bands like R.E.M. and The Cure achieved commercial success and mainstream critical recognition, many alternative rock artists during the 1980s were cult acts that recorded on independent labels and received their exposure through college radio airplay and word-of-mouth. With the breakthrough of Nirvana and the popularity of the grunge and Britpop movements in the 1990s, alternative rock entered the musical mainstream and many alternative bands became commercially successful.