

SPECIES COUNTERPOINT

CANTI FIRMI

Species counterpoint involves the addition of a melody above or below a given melody. The added melody (the *counterpoint*) becomes increasingly complex and interesting in each of the five species.

The given melody is called *cantus firmus*, which means "firm" or "unalterable melody". We shall use the following *canti firmi* throughout the species unit.

The image displays five musical staves, each representing a different *cantus firmus* used in species counterpoint. The staves are numbered 1 through 5. Staff 1 shows a melody in G major (one sharp) on a treble clef staff, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. Staff 2 shows the same melody in G major on a treble clef staff. Staff 3 shows the melody in G major on a treble clef staff, but with a thick black bar obscuring the notes. Staff 4 shows the melody in F major (one flat) on a treble clef staff, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Staff 5 shows the melody in F major on a bass clef staff, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

GUIDELINES FOR FIRST SPECIES COUNTERPOINT

In first species, the counterpoint moves in the same rhythm as t

4. Independence of range; the voices must not invade each other's space. Actual crossing of voices (a lower counterpoint being above the c.f., or an upper counterpoint being below the c.f.) is forbidden in first species. It is also forbidden for a lower counterpoint to rise above the immediately preceding c.f. note, or an upper counterpoint to fall below the immediately preceding c.f. note; this type of invasion of the c.f.'s space is called "overlapping".

II. WHILE THE TWO VOICES SHOULD BE INDEPENDENT, THEY MUST NEVERTHELESS AUDIBLY BELONG TOGETHER

1. The counterpoint must be written in the same style as the c.f.
2. The two voices must not move too far apart; rarely exceed the distance of a tenth between voices. (Labelling all vertical intervals will help you check on this point.)

III. THE COUNTERPOINT SHOULD BE AS PLEASING AS POSSIBLE IN ITSELF

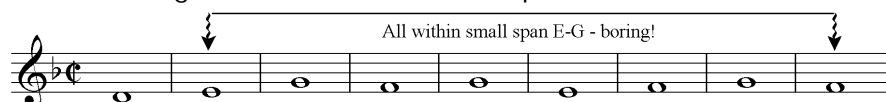
For the purposes of beginning counterpoint, we shall define "pleasing" as "singable and interesting". To make a counterpoint **singable**:

1. Use no dissonant leaps (dissonances are hard to sing). Be especially careful of the tritone F/B, and of augmented seconds in minor melodies (B[?]/C[?]; the B[?] will be in the signature, and is easily forgotten!). Note that the P4 is not considered dissonant when used as a melodic leap; most good melodies use the P4 somewhere!

2. Use more steps than leaps; too many leaps result in an instrumental rather than a vocal style.
3. Use mainly small leaps. The permissible large leaps (5, 6, 8) should be reserved for "special effects." Immediately after a large leap, move by step in the opposite direction.
4. Stay within appropriate vocal ranges (see Aldwell and Schachter, p. 64).

To make a counterpoint **interesting**:

1. Use a blend of steps and leaps.
2. Change direction frequently.
3. Build up to a high point and come back down, i.e. give the melody a sense of purposefulness—don't let it meander aimlessly.
4. Avoid hovering within a small intervallic span.



IV. AIM FOR A SENSE OF CONTINUITY AND FLOW, i.e., AVOID ANYTHING STATIC OR JARRING

1. No single vertical interval should stick out.
 - i. Don't overuse fifths and octaves; these very stable intervals tend to interrupt the flow. Use more thirds and sixths than fifths and octaves.
 - ii. Don't approach fifths or octaves in similar motion. Such **direct fifths and octaves** stick out unpleasantly.

Find the direct fifths and octaves. ⑤ ⑨

This is NOT a direct fifth (both voices must be moving for a direct fifth or octave to occur).

- iii. Use the unison only at the beginning and end. When used anywhere else, it produces the very jarring effect of a gap in a note-against-note counterpoint.
- iv. Use no dissonant intervals (2, 4, tritone, 7, 9, etc.).

Find the dissonant intervals. ⑤ ⑨

Labeling all vertical intervals will help you keep track of these points.

2. No single note of the counterpoint should stick out.
 - i. Don't immediately repeat a note. (You may, however, use **one** tie within a first species counterpoint.)
 - ii. Don't circle around a particular note for bars and bars.

Which note is "encircled"?



3. No melodic segment should stick out.
 - i. Don't immediately repeat a melodic segment.
 - ii. Don't immediately transpose a melodic segment (i.e. avoid the **sequence** for now).

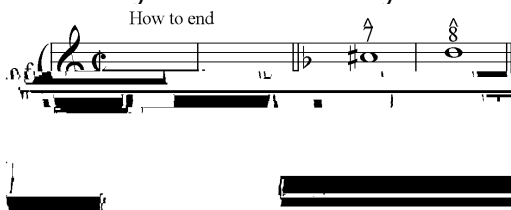


4. Avoid indirect horizontal dissonance, i.e. the melodic outlining of a dissonant interval between points where the direction changes. Such dissonances are audible in the simple melodies of first species.



V. CLEARLY ESTABLISH A TONALITY

1. Start with the tonic note in the lower voice, and with scale degree 1 (8) or 5 in the upper voice.
2. Always end with scale degrees 7-8 in the counterpoint. The leading-note to tonic motion is the best way to establish the key in two-voice texture.



3. Use no accidentals unless they are necessary to create a leading tone at the end of the piece, or to avoid dissonant leaps. For example, to avoid the augmented second between scale degrees 6 and 7 in D minor, you may raise the B \flat to B \natural .



4. Avoid chromaticism; never juxtapose two forms of the same basic note (e.g. C \flat and C \sharp). Chromaticism can result in confusion about the key.
5. Start on stable intervals that clearly express the tonality—P5 or P8 above, P1 or P8 below.

GUIDELINES FOR SECOND SPECIES COUNTERPOINT

Most of the guidelines for first species counterpoint still apply; the following material, organized under the same headings as the first species handout, spells out the new freedoms

II. WHILE THE TWO VOICES SHOULD BE INDEPENDENT, THEY MUST NEVERTHELESS AUDIBLY BELONG TOGETHER (no changes here – refer to first species handout)

III. THE COUNTERPOINT SHOULD BE AS PLEASING AS POSSIBLE IN ITSELF

GUIDELINES FOR FOURTH SPECIES COUNTERPOINT

The pulse of fourth species counterpoint is in half notes, as is that of second species, but here the half notes are tied over the bar. This syncopated half-note rhythm must be maintained throughout, with the following exceptions:

1. The penultimate bar must end with an untied half note, and the last bar must consist of a whole note (the tonic).
2. If, as sometimes happens, you “paint yourself into a corner” and simply cannot come up with a good tied-half-note pair, you may use a pair of untied (different) half notes. You may do this TWICE within an exercise—but do not use more than two untied half notes in a row (to avoid the impression that you have reverted to second species!). Note: the untied half note that is always present in the penultimate bar is not included in the permissible two pairs of untied half notes.

Ties m

Suspensions are labeled with two numbers, designating the vertical intervals involved in the suspension and the resolution. The following are the numbers for the acceptable suspensions:

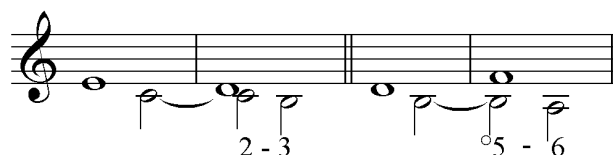
Above the c.f.:

- ✓ by far the most common types are 7-6 and 4-3
- ✓ also possible, but less common: 9-8 and 2-1 (note that unisons on WEAK beats are fine, as in second species)



Below the c.f.:

- ✓ 2-3, 9-10, d5-6.



Theoretically possible, but **forbidden** lower-voice suspensions are 4-5 (two perfect intervals in a row give a “bare” effect) and 7-8 (these just don’t sound good in two-voice texture). Note that this means that **FOURTHS AND SEVENTHS CANNOT BE USED IN THE LOWER VOICE**.

7-6, 4-3 and 2-3 suspensions may be used in “chains”—but do not use more than three of one suspension type in a row; this would result in a loss of independence (as does the use of more than three thirds or sixths in first species).

9-8 and 2-1 suspensions may not be used in chains; such chains would sound like embellished parallel octaves and unisons.



One more point about parallels: you may place octaves or fifths on successive strong beats, or on successive weak beats, as long as there is a CONSONANT interval between them. Recall that strong-beat parallels were not allowed in second species; they are less audible and

