Species Counterpoint: General Notes (All Species)

Basics:

The cantus firmus (c.f.) will always be written in alto clef. Upper counterpoint is written in treble clef, lower counterpoint in bass clef.

(Note: this is for species exercises only; analysis and composition will be done on the grand staff.)

The range of the upper counterpoint is from C4 (below the staff) to A5 (above the staff).

The range of the lower counterpoint is from D2 (below the staff) to D4 (above the staff).

Always label intervals between the staves; circle dissonant intervals. Do not include the quality of the interval (write 6, not m6) except in the case of diminished fifths (d5).

Remember categories of consonance and dissonance:

Perfect consonance: P1, P5, P8 Imperfect consonance: M/m3, M/m6

Dissonance: all seconds and sevenths, all diminished and augmented intervals

Special Case: P4 is dissonant(!) as a harmonic (vertical) interval, consonant as a melodic interval

Melodic Construction (single voice):

No leaps greater than 8ve, no dissonant leaps, no chromatic half steps (G to G#, etc.)

Have one single (non repeated) climax. The climax of an upper CTP is always a high point. The climax of a lower CTP may be either a high or a low point.

The climax must not occur in the first measure or in the last measure. It also does not occur in the next-to-last measure, with one exception: in 2nd and 3rd species, when writing lower CTP, the climax may occur in the next-to-last measure so long as it is below the leading tone.

Lines should have a vocal quality and be singable; they should not be leapy. The balance between steps are leaps varies by species. In all species, steps and leaps should be used to create variety.

Leaps larger than a 3rd must be followed by motion in the other direction. The larger the leap, the stronger the tendency for the motion back to be small. If the leap is a sixth or an octave, the motion back should be by step. (In 2nd species consecutive leaps in same direction are possible, see notes.)

Avoid dissonant contour (dissonant interval from local low point to next local high point (or vice versa). This must be gauged by ear; in some cases the dissonance is salient, in others it is not.

Avoid unresolved leading tones (delay can be ok). The subtonic has no need to resolve.

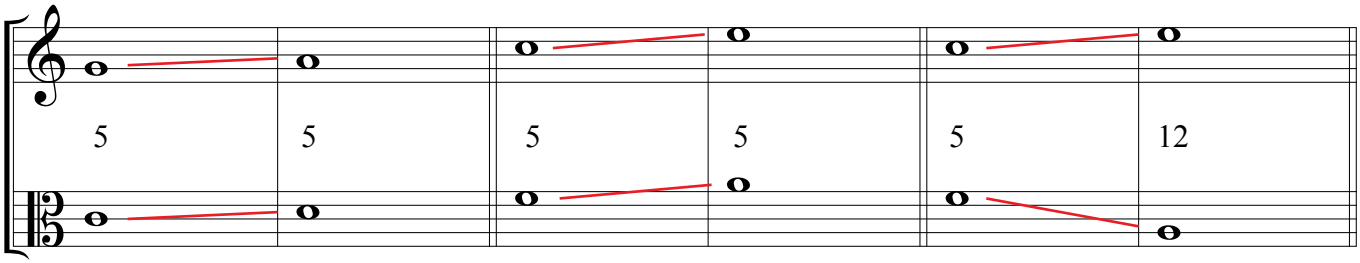
Overarching goal for melodic construction: variety

Relating Two Voices:

Motion types: similar, parallel, contrary, oblique

No parallel or consecutive/contrary 1, 5, 8

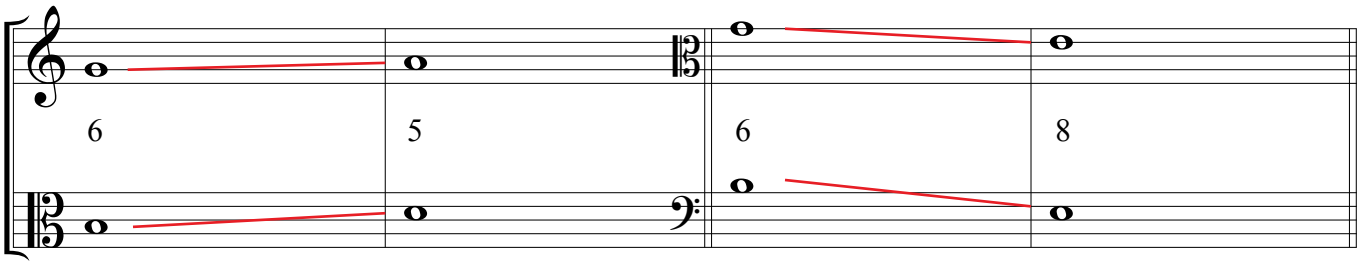
Consecutive fifths and octaves result from trying to avoid parallels by increasing or decreasing the octave separation between the voices. It doesn't work.



parallel fifths parallel fifths consecutive fifths

No direct 1, 5, 8

Direct (aka hidden) fifths and octaves are created by similar motion into a perfect interval



direct fifths direct octaves

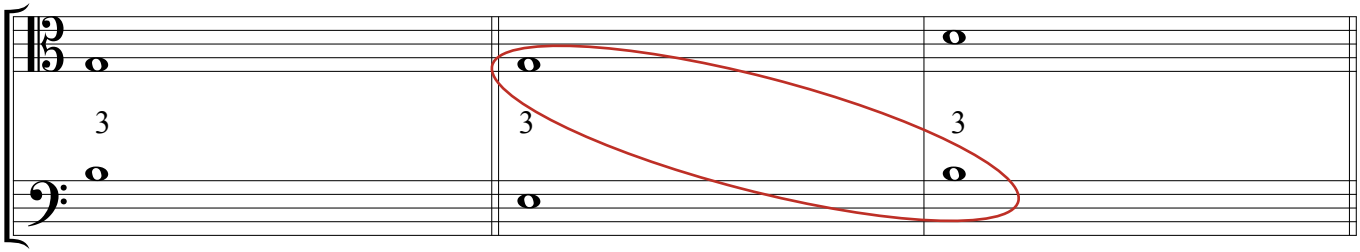
(Note: in species exercises, direct fifths and octaves are always forbidden. In analysis and composition, they are generally forbidden, but they are permitted if the upper voice moves by step or if the harmony doesn't change.)

3 max parallel imperfect intervals in a row

Imperfect consonance should predominate in the middle

No voice crossings, no overlaps

Voice crossings occur when the upper voice moves below the lower voice.
Overlaps occur when the lower voice moves above where the upper voice was *on the previous note* (or vice versa).



voice crossing overlap

Avoid simultaneous leaps – esp large (if one >P4), esp in same direction

The climax in the CTP should not be in the same measure as the climax in the c.f. (the climax in the c.f. is always a high point)

Overarching goal for relationship between voices: independence, variety

<u>Beginning and ending:</u>

If writing upper CTP, start with P1, P5, or P8

If writing lower CTP, start with P1 or P8

End: one voice 7-1, other 2-1; c.f. usually has 2-1, so CTP usually has 7-1

In minor, always raise the leading tone at end (but never in middle)

In minor, it is legal to approach the raised leading tone from a raised scale-degree 6, so long as other rules are observed (no chromatic half steps, no dissonant leaps).