

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).

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).

The image shows a grand staff with two systems. The first system shows a voice crossing: the upper voice (treble clef) has a note on the second line (G4), and the lower voice (bass clef) has a note on the first line (F4). The second system shows an overlap: the upper voice has a note on the first line (F4) and the lower voice has a note on the second line (G4). A red oval highlights the overlapping notes in the second system. The number '3' is written below each staff in both systems.

voice crossing

overlap

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):

Leaps

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

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

Changing direction after a leap:

Leaps of a 4th should be followed by motion in the other direction (not a rule).

Leaps of a fifth must be followed by motion in the other direction, but not necessarily by step.

Leaps of a sixth or an octave must be followed by stepwise motion in the opposite direction.

(In 2nd species consecutive leaps in same direction are possible, see notes.)

In relation to the CF, avoid simultaneous leaps, especially if large (>P4), especially if in the same direction (at least one >P4 and in same direction is an error).

Climax

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.

In relation to the CF, the climaxes of the two lines must not occur in the same measure. (A CF is always understood to have an upper climax, even when it is the lower voice.)

Misc.

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. (It is harsher when high and low points are closer together.) In borderline cases, flagging the dissonant contour on your paper will avoid a penalty.

In major, do not use the leading tone as an upper climax, because this will leave it unresolved. (Delayed resolution of leading tones is fine.) The subtonic has no need to resolve.

Overarching goal for melodic construction: variety

Beginning and ending:

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).

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.

The image shows a musical score with two staves, Treble and Bass clefs. The Treble staff contains notes with the number '5' below them, and the Bass staff contains notes with the number '5' below them. Red lines connect the notes in each staff, showing the intervals between them. The first two measures show parallel fifths, the next two measures show parallel fifths, and the final measure shows consecutive fifths. The numbers '5' and '12' are placed below the notes in the final measure to indicate the intervals.

parallel fifths parallel fifths consecutive fifths

