

Analysis in terms of counterpoint: First species

We will start with passages that have been selected because they may be analyzed in terms of first species; that is, the analysis will proceed in note-vs-note counterpoint, using whole notes only.

1) Range and register

You already know that the cf, which will be the lower part, will consist of the main notes from the bass line, those chord tones that are labeled as new chords or new inversions in a harmonic analysis.

There are no set restrictions on the range of a melody or the spacing between the voices in contrapuntal reductions (analyses done in terms of counterpoint), but try and keep each line within a comfortably singable range (ideally a tenth or a twelfth or so) and try to keep each line mostly in the middle of its staff (using treble clef for the upper part and bass clef, not alto clef, for the lower part).

This means that you will sometimes need to adjust the register of the reduction relative to the actual score, either moving an entire line or switching one midway, for example turning an octave leap into a repeated note or a seventh into a second.

This is illustrated in the following example.

The image shows a musical score in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two systems. The first system consists of four measures of chords in the treble clef and a single bass note in the bass clef. The second system consists of eight measures of single notes in both the treble and bass clefs. Below the notes in the second system are numerical labels: 5, 10, 5, (d5), 3, 6, 3, 8. The label (d5) is circled.

2) Selecting main melodic tones

When doing reductions to first species, you will be given examples that can work in first species, meaning that just one note from the melody can be chosen to accompany each bass note in the reduction (that is, one main melodic tone per chord or per main inversion).

Sometimes this is easy, e.g. if there is only one melodic note over a given bass note.

It is equally easy when there is only one chord tone in the melody over a bass note, as non-harmonic tones are not included in first-species reductions.

But there are real decisions to be made when there are multiple chord tones in the melody over a single bass note. In these cases you must decide which one tone is the most important one.

There are several criteria you can use in making these decisions:

The upper voice in the reduction is more likely to move by step or by small leap than to move by large leap.

Though repeated tones are found, melodic motion is often more interesting.

It is often a sign of having found the most important notes to retain in the reduction when then reduction uses harmonic idioms (parallel 10th's, voice exchanges, etc.).

A leapy melody often alternates between the true melody or soprano voice and an inner voice, often an alto (lower) voice. Sometimes this same technique is used, but with the (less interesting) notes of the alto voice appearing in a higher register than the true main melodic tones.

Some obvious factors: chord tones heard first, that last longest, that are the highest ones – but other considerations can outweigh these tendencies.

Several of these criteria are at work in the following example, from the aria “Voi che sapete” from Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*.

Andante con moto.

8	10	10	10	8	5
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