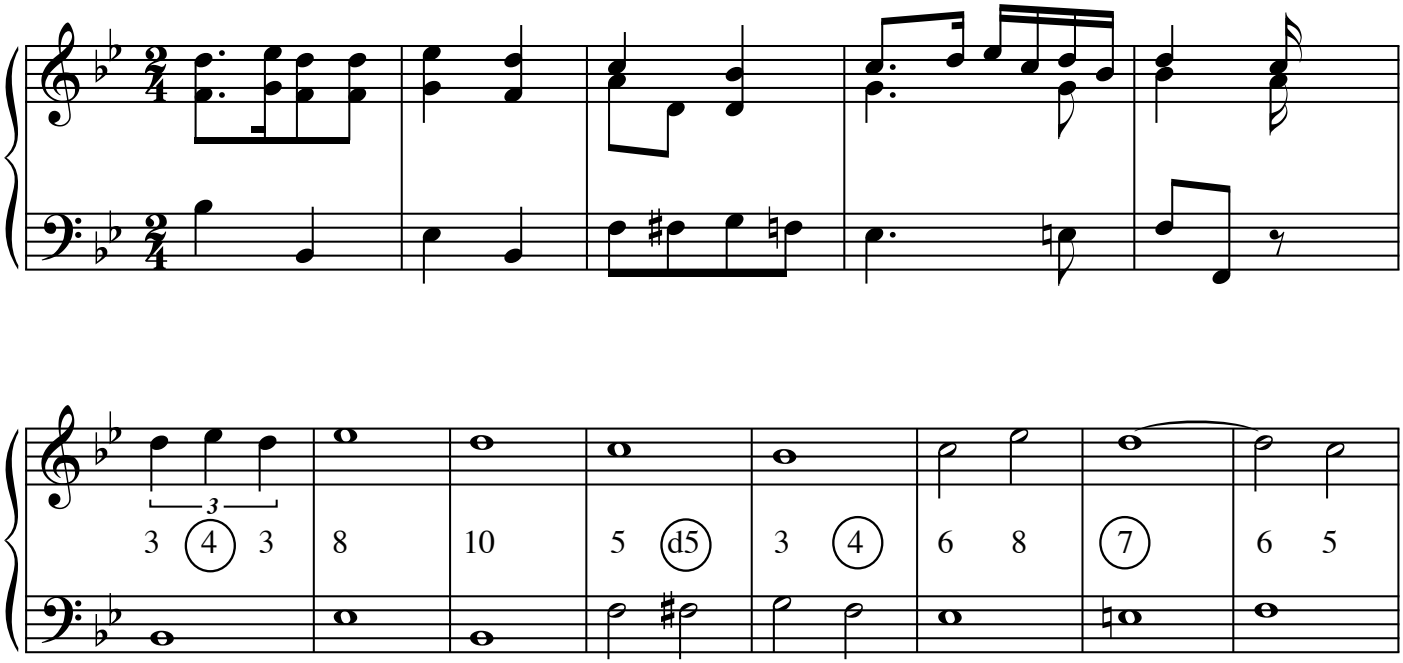
Analysis in terms of counterpoint: Third species

In species counterpoint exercises, third species is usually four notes against one. You may have noticed, however, that Salzer and Schachter also discuss the possibility of three notes against one in 3/4, with a counterpoint in quarter notes moving against a cantus firmus in dotted half notes. In discussing analysis, they further generalize this, include an example with six notes in the counterpoint against one in the cantus firmus.

In analysis, we will understand third species as involving measures in which the counterpoint has any number of notes greater than two. The cantus firmus will still move in whole notes, and a tuplet indication will be used to indicate that the extra or missing quarter notes are not simply accidental.

You can use third species in order to include non-harmonic tones in the reduction; these may be either passing tones or neighbor tones, and it is especially appropriate when there are neighbor tones, as this is one of the distinctive features of third species.

You should use third species when chords are moving above a pedal tone in the bass; in such cases each chord will probably be represented by a single melodic tone, notated as a quarter note, using the tuplet notation as needed.

When neighboring 6/4's are found, their special role – as both neighboring tones and chords above a pedal – makes use of third species particularly appropriate. (This parallels the use of second species for sevenths that arise as passing tones.) Brahms's Haydn Variations illustrates this, also previewing use of fourth species.