

## Notes on Form

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### **Multiple Phrases II: Three-Phrase Period, Double Period**

#### The Three-Phrase Period:

You will occasionally see periods consisting of three phrases; these are called, predictably enough, **three-phrase periods**. In a three-phrase period, the antecedent/consequent structure is present, together with the usual cadential structure, but one of the two basic phrases occurs twice (possibly with some degree of variation). In full, then, we speak a three-phrase period with either a **double antecedent** or a **double consequent**.

In deciding how to label a three-phrase period, it is important to pay close attention to the cadences. If the first two phrases end with weaker cadences, there is a double antecedent. If phrases two and three end with stronger cadences, there is a double consequent. Example 9, the beginning of the last movement of Haydn's Symphony no. 102, is a three-phrase period; because two half cadences (in mm. 4 and 8) are answered by an IAC, this three-phrase period has a double antecedent.

Be especially careful when deciding whether the three-phrase period is parallel, sequential, or contrasting. The comparison that counts is between antecedent and consequent phrases. At first glance, Example 9 might seem to have a parallel structure, because phrases 1 and 2 begin identically. But because Example 9 has a double antecedent, the parallel between phrases 1 and 2 isn't what determines the type of three-phrase period. It is the relationship between phrases 1 and 2 on the one hand and phrase 3 on the other that determines, in this case, that Example 9 is a contrasting three-phrase period with a double antecedent.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Double Period:

Sometimes the basic outlines of a parallel period can be seen in a structure that has four phrases; Example 10, the opening of Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 26, illustrates this. Like a parallel period, we find very similar material starting in mm. 1 and 9, and the strong PAC in m. 16 answers the solid HC in m. 8. But there are "extra cadences", in this case weaker HC's in mm. 4 and 12; as a result we have two pairs of phrases rather than

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<sup>1</sup> The three-phrase period is a somewhat odd animal, and while some fit the picture sketched above, others will strain against it. In particular, in some cases you may have difficulty deciding whether there is a double antecedent or a double consequent, for example if the cadences are HC, IAC, PAC. In such cases you may want to both pick one answer and make a brief note explaining why another designation could also make sense.

just two phrases. Because of the double proportions, we call this a **double period**. The general pattern for double periods is as follows: phrase 1 and phrase 3 have parallel material, and cadence 4 is more conclusive than cadence 2. Cadences 1 and 3 are generally rather weak, usually IAC's or HC's. Because cadences 2 and 4 must bind together a larger structure, they will generally be strong. Cadence 4 is virtually always a PAC, and cadence 2 is in the great majority of cases a strong HC. Strong IAC's are occasionally found, but they make the outlines of the larger structure less obvious –an IAC will not demand continuation as compellingly as a strong HC. Note that we won't use the term 'parallel double period', because the double period *always* features melodic parallelism between phrases 1 and 3.<sup>2</sup>

The period is relatively flexible, and it comes in a great many flavors. The double period is much less flexible. It always features a parallel between the openings of the first and third phrases, cadences 1 and 3 are always weak, cadence 4 is always a strong PAC, and cadence 2 is never a PAC. If you encounter four phrases that belong together as a grouping unit but that do not meet these criteria, they are not a double period.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the double period gets its name from the doubling of the proportions of the period, not because it consists of two periods. For one thing, cadence 2 is usually an HC, and in such cases the first two phrases will not meet the criteria for being a period. More fundamentally, though, a period is a group of phrases that is bound together as whole, offering a sense of completion at the end. The double period offers a far stronger sense of unity and completion at the end than it does in the middle. This is best illustrated by contrast. Look back at Example 1, noting the repeat signs; in performance we hear this music twice. There is a world of difference between hearing Example 1 played twice in succession (two periods) and hearing Example 8 played once (a double period).