

1.1 Note Nomenclature

To use this textbook, you need to be familiar with the following internationally recognized system of note nomenclature, in which 'middle C' is written as c':

... E F G A B c d e f g a b c' d' e' f' g' a' b' c'' d'' e'' f'' ...

Lower or higher notes than these are seldom needed in counterpoint; those belonging to lower or higher octaves than the four shown here are written with additional apostrophes (B', c'', etc.). The standard pianoforte compass is thus A''-a''''.

Letter names given here in quotation marks denote pitch classes rather than actual pitches: 'A', for example, means A', A, a, a', a'', etc.

1.2 Melodic Intervals

A voice moving from one note to another passes through a **melodic interval**. The movement may be either by **step** or by **leap**: a step involves two conjunct notes (for example a→b, b→c', a'→g'); a leap involves two disjunct notes (a→c', b→e', a'→d').

(Semitones or minor Seconds are often referred to as 'half-steps', but to keep things simple that distinction is not made in this textbook.)

On paper, notes in a melodic succession appear side by side, so their relationship is said to be **horizontal**.

In counterpoint, the following melodic intervals are permitted **in ascent and descent**:

the minor Second or diatonic Semitone (b→c', f'→e')
the major Second or Tone (d'→e', g'→f')
the minor Third (a→c', g'→e')
the major Third (f→a, e'→c')
the perfect Fourth (g→c', f'→c')
the perfect Fifth (f→c', g'→c')
the Octave (f→f', a'→a)

This melodic interval is permitted **in ascent only**:

the minor Sixth (e→c', a→f')

And these melodic intervals are prohibited:

the chromatic Semitone (b→b^b, f'→f'[#])
the augmented Fourth (b→f, g→c[#])
the diminished Fifth (b→f', g→c[#])
all other augmented and diminished intervals (f→g[#], f→c[#])
the minor Sixth **in descent** (c'→e, f'→a)
the major Sixth (f→d', a'→c')
the minor and major Sevenths (a→g', e'→f)
all intervals exceeding the Octave (e→f')

Task 1.2.1—Under the headings 'Permitted' and 'Prohibited', notate in the alto clef the specimens of melodic intervals given above (b→c', f'→e', d'→e', etc.). Use semibreves only; label the intervals beneath the staff.

Copy and continue:

PERMITTED MELODIC INTERVALS

min. 2 or diatonic Semitone maj. 2 or Tone etc.

1.3 Harmonic Intervals

Two notes sounding simultaneously are related by a **harmonic interval**. That interval may be either **consonant** (d+d', d+a, f+a) or **dissonant** (d+e, f+b, f+e').

On paper, notes forming a harmonic interval appear one above the other, so their relationship is said to be **vertical**. In descriptions of harmonic intervals, the note belonging to the lower voice is always given first.

The following harmonic intervals are classed as **perfect consonances**:

the Unison (d+d)
the perfect Fifth (d+a)
the Octave (d+d')
the Twelfth (d+a')
the Fifteenth (d+d'')
all other compounds of the Fifth and Octave

These harmonic intervals are classed as **imperfect consonances**:

the minor Third (e+g, a+c')
the major Third (c+e, f+a)
the minor Sixth (e+c', a+f')
the major Sixth (g+e', c'+a')
minor and major Tenths (d+f', c+e')
minor and major Thirteenth (B+g', c+a')
all other compounds of Thirds and Sixths

And—in two-part work—these harmonic intervals are classed as **dissonances**:

the minor Second (b+c')
the major Second (c'+d')
the perfect Fourth (d+g, a+d')
the augmented Fourth (f+b, g+c'#)
the diminished Fifth (b+f', c'#+g')
all other augmented and diminished intervals (f+g#, f+d'#)
the minor Seventh (d'+c'')
the major Seventh (c'+b')
Ninths (d+e', e+f')
Elevenths (e+a', f+b')
all other compounds of the above dissonances

Task 1.3.1—Under the headings 'Perfect Consonances', 'Imperfect Consonances' and 'Dissonances', notate for tenor and alto on two staves the specimens of harmonic intervals given above (d+d, d+a, d+d', d+a', etc.). Use semibreves only; label every interval with an Arabic numeral (1, 2, 3) between the staves.

Copy and continue:

PERFECT CONSONANCES

The image shows a musical exercise titled "PERFECT CONSONANCES". It consists of two staves, Tenor (top) and Alto (bottom), both in C major. The first staff has a treble clef and the second has an alto clef. Three measures are shown, each containing a semibreve note on the Tenor staff and a semibreve note on the Alto staff. The intervals between the notes are labeled with Arabic numerals: 1 (Unison), 5 (Perfect Fifth), and 8 (Octave). The notes are C4, C5, and C6 respectively. To the right of the third measure, the word "etc." is written.

1.4 Motion Between Harmonic Intervals

Harmonic intervals can succeed one another via three forms of motion that are differentiated by the form(s) of melodic movement involved:

Similar motion—both voices move in the same direction

(a+e'→b+g'→c'+a'→b+d')

Oblique motion—one moves and the other stays put

(g+d'→g+e'→c'+e'→c'+g')

Contrary motion—the voices move in opposite directions

(c'+e'→a+f'→g+g'→b+d')

Task 1.4.1—Under the headings 'Similar Motion', 'Oblique Motion' and 'Contrary Motion', notate the foregoing examples for tenor and alto on two staves. Use semibreves only; label every interval with an Arabic numeral (3, 5, 6) between the staves.

In the examples you have just notated, observe that the range of the tenor is g–c' and the range of the alto is d'–a'. In other words, each voice observes its own range and never enters the range of the other voice.

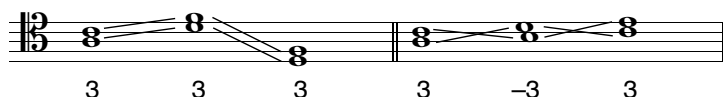
Voices are nonetheless always free to enter those parts of their range they share with adjacent lower or higher voices. Even within a succession of just two harmonic intervals, they may do this in two distinct ways:

Overlapping—when the voices move in similar motion and the second interval lies completely above or completely below the first interval

(a+c'→d'+f'→d+f)

Crossing—when the voices move in oblique or contrary motion and the lower voice takes the higher note while the higher voice takes the lower note

(a+c'→d'+b→c'+e')

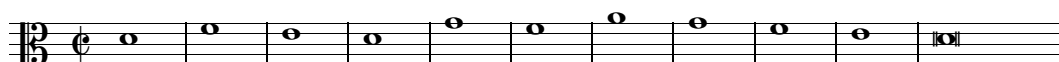


Overlapping and crossing are perfectly acceptable. But since crossing upsets the natural order of the voices, you should resort to it only if the lower voice lies high, or the higher voice lies low. Note that crossed intervals are labelled in this textbook with a minus sign (–3, –5, etc.).

1.5 The Cantus firmus

Counterpoint involves the writing of melodies against a cantus firmus or 'fixed song', a prescribed melody that may not be altered in any way. By convention, the cantus firmus is notated in semibreves with one note per bar and an allabreve time signature. The number of notes varies but is typically eleven or twelve. The last note is invariably approached by a descending step, and is conventionally notated as a breve.

Here is an example from Fux's 1725 textbook *Gradus ad Parnassum*:



A cantus firmus begins and ends at the same pitch, and thus has a final or tonic. It uses neither a key signature nor accidentals. For these reasons, cantus firmi are said to be modal. They come in sets of six ordered by the six finals of modal music: 'D', 'E', 'F', 'G', 'A' and 'C'. They are written in the alto or, less often, the tenor clef. Their range neither exceeds an octave nor extends to notes requiring a ledger line above or below the staff.

1.6 Scoring

Counterpoint is a vocal idiom, and demands strict observance of four vocal ranges: bass (F–b), tenor (c–f'), alto (e–a') and soprano (b–e''). You will obtain these ranges simply by using the correct clefs and confining each voice to the limits of its staff; in cases of absolute necessity, however, you may resort to higher or lower notes requiring a ledger line.

Score your two-part exercises for adjacent voices: alto + soprano, tenor + alto, or bass + tenor. You will write counterpoints both above and below the cantus firmus; thus, when the cantus firmus is for alto, the counterpoint will be for soprano or tenor, and when the cantus firmus is for tenor, the counterpoint will be for alto or bass:

The diagram illustrates scoring for adjacent voices. It shows four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Three examples are shown: 1. Cantus firmus for Alto (c.f.) between Alto and Tenor staves, with counterpoint (cpt) above and below. 2. Cantus firmus for Tenor (c.f.) between Tenor and Bass staves, with counterpoint (cpt) above and below. 3. Cantus firmus for Alto (c.f.) between Alto and Tenor staves, with counterpoint (cpt) above and below.

Do **not** write counterpoints for the same voice-type as the cantus firmus, and never score your exercises for voices that are not adjacent (such as bass + alto, or tenor + soprano).

1.7 Format of Exercises

This textbook supplies sets of cantus firmi as strings of note-names prefixed by clef name. Before you convert these strings to staff notation, it is a good idea to copy them into spaces between the staves of your manuscript paper, reserving a pair of staves above and a pair below on which to work out your exercises. On twelve-stave paper, therefore, you should copy the cantus firmus note-names between the second and third staves, the sixth and seventh staves, and the tenth and eleventh staves. You will thus accommodate six exercises on each page.

The musical notation shows two systems of staves. The first system has a soprano staff and an alto staff. The second system has an alto staff and a bass staff. The notes are: d', f', e', d', g', f', a', g', f', e', d'.

etc.

Task 1.7.1—Prepare staves for exercises on the Set One [cantus firmi](#).