

2.1 First Species

Exercises in the first species consist only of semibreves—one for each note of the cantus firmus—and are entirely free of dissonances.

5 3 3 3 6 3 6 6 6 8

N. Greenwood (2001)

Exercises in all species end with cadences that are entirely different in conception from cadences in four-part harmony:

above the cantus firmus end with an Octave preceded by a major Sixth: | 6 | 8 ||

below the cantus firmus end with a Unison preceded by a minor Third: | 3 | 1 ||

In exercises in 'D', 'G' and 'A' you must add a **sharp** to the second-last note of the counterpoint to make the Sixth major or the Third minor. Sharps are not required in 'E', 'F' or 'C'.

Task 2.1.1—Write the last two notes of each of your Set One exercises. Be sure to use sharps in all the right places, and make the last note a breve. Indicate the intervals (1, 3, 6, 8) between the staves.

In all species, exercises must begin with a perfect consonance: a Unison or an Octave—or, when the counterpoint is above the cantus firmus, a Fifth. Never begin counterpoints below the cantus firmus with a Fifth, since that would imply an alien final or tonic.

In first species, a careful choice of opening interval will prevent unnecessary crossing or overlapping of the voices. The correct choice depends on whether the cantus firmus rises or falls to its second note.

With a **rising** cantus firmus:

begin counterpoints above with a Fifth or an Octave

begin counterpoints below with a Unison

With a **falling** cantus firmus:

begin counterpoints above with a Unison or a Fifth

begin counterpoints below with an Octave

Task 2.1.2—Write the first note of each of your Set One exercises. This must be a semibreve forming a perfect consonance with the cantus firmus. Indicate each interval with an Arabic numeral (1, 5, 8) between the staves.

The rules for completing first-species counterpoints are:

Use consonances only

Do **not** use the Unison (except at the beginning and/or the end of an exercise)

Avoid prohibited steps and leaps

Repeat a note if you wish to (for example a'→a'→a'—g'→g')

—but **only** in first species

Observe also the following golden rule, which applies in all species:

Approach all perfect consonances in contrary or oblique motion only—never in similar motion

Task 2.1.3—Complete your Set One exercises. Indicate all intervals between the staves

Sample Workings

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Some purists insist on moving to Octaves by divergence only—i.e. in contrary motion from a smaller interval ($d'+b'-c'+c''$). An Octave approached by convergence—i.e. in contrary motion from a larger interval ($b+d''-c'+c''$)—is said to be *battuta* or ‘beaten’. The beaten Octave, however, has never ranked very highly in the contrapuntist’s demonology, and observance of this rule is optional.

An essential refinement you must introduce to your work sooner or later is avoidance of the **melodic Tritone**, or outlined augmented Fourth. The Tritone occurs naturally between ‘F’ and ‘B’ in many a stepwise passage:

$e \rightarrow f \rightarrow g \rightarrow a \rightarrow b \rightarrow a$
 $g' \rightarrow f' \rightarrow g' \rightarrow a' \rightarrow b' \rightarrow c''$

In both these passages the Tritone is unobjectionable because lower or higher notes conceal it. Without lower or higher notes, however, its dissonant character predominates:

$g \rightarrow f \rightarrow g \rightarrow a \rightarrow b \rightarrow a$
 $a' \rightarrow f' \rightarrow a' \rightarrow b' \rightarrow g'$

Passages such as these must be rewritten, either with lower or higher notes added or with the ‘F’ and/or the ‘B’ removed.

NB Though the diminished Fifth likewise contains ‘B’ and ‘F’, it is **not** a Tritone, and it may predominate with happy effect:

$e' \rightarrow f' \rightarrow d' \rightarrow b \rightarrow c'$

Task 2.1.4—Write out and annotate these examples in tenor or soprano clefs, as appropriate.

Task 2.1.5—Once you have revised your Set One exercises so that they are free of errors, complete similar sets of exercises on further sets of cantus firmi.