2.2 Second Species

In second species, two minims are written against each semibreve of the cantus firmus. Dissonances are introduced in the form of passing notes.

Write the cadence first:

> Above the cantus firmus end | 5 6 | 8 ‖
> Below the cantus firmus end | 5 3 | 1 ‖ or, when the exercise is in 'E', | 6 3 | 1 ‖

As in first species the Sixth must be major and the Third minor, so you must add a sharp where necessary. Counterpoints above a cantus firmus in 'A' must end with | f'♯ g'♯ | a' ‖—the extra sharp is required to make the Fifth perfect.

Task 2.2.1—Prepare staves for exercises on the Set One cantus firmi and write the last three notes of each exercise. Indicate the intervals (1, 3, 5, 6, 8) between the staves.

If you like, you may begin second-species counterpoints with a minim rest. But your first interval must still be a Unison or an Octave—or, when the counterpoint is above the cantus firmus, a Fifth.

The rules for completing second-species counterpoints are:

> Minim 1 (the downbeat) **must** be consonant
> Minim 2 (the upbeat) **may** be dissonant—a passing note—provided it lies between
>   two notes a Third apart, as in | a b | c' or | b a | g

> Do **not** sound the same note twice in succession
> Avoid prohibited melodic intervals

The last two prohibitions continue to apply in third, fourth and fifth species.

Do **not** use the auxiliary note (i.e. a dissonance lying between two notes that are both either higher or lower than it).

Unisons are allowed anywhere in a second-species exercise, but like all perfect consonances they must be approached in contrary or oblique motion.

Before completing any exercise, you **must** work out the third-last bar to secure a contrary-motion approach to the Fifth at the beginning of the second-last bar. Failure to do this is the most common mistake in second species.

Task 2.2.2—Draft the first two of your Set One exercises. Begin with the third-last bar; indicate all intervals between the staves.

Certain patterns require special care:

> | 5 3 | 5, | 8 6 | 8 and | 8 10 | 8 (where similar perfect consonances fall on
>   consecutive downbeats) are prohibited
> 5 | 3 5 | (where Fifths fall on consecutive upbeats) and | 8 5 | 8 (which involves the
>   leap of a Fourth) are permitted, but may only be used **sparingly**

Remember that the augmented Fourth and diminished Fifth are dissonances, and may be used only as passing notes.

Task 2.2.3—Revise your first two exercises, and complete the remainder. Indicate all intervals between the staves.

Task 2.2.4—Complete similar sets of exercises on further sets of cantus firmi.

If you fight shy of dissonances, your counterpoints will turn out jagged and inelegant. Passing notes contribute stepwise motion to an exercise, and improve its melodic contour. You should therefore miss no opportunity of using them.

Sample Workings

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O. Flanagan (1995)

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M. O'Grady (2004)

B. de la Malène (2002)