

2.3 Third Species

Third species is the most labour-intensive of the five: four crotchets must be written against each semibreve of the cantus firmus. Dissonances are introduced in the form of the passing note and the *nota cambiata*, but **not** (for the time being) in the form of the auxiliary note (which, along with further varieties of dissonance, is covered in Appendix B).

D. Solon (2004)

To form cadences:

Above the cantus firmus end | 3456 | 8 ||
 Below the cantus firmus end | 6543 | 1 || or, when the exercise is in 'E', | 6363 | 1 ||

With exercises above a cantus firmus in 'A', be sure to add a sharp not only to the second-last note of your counterpoint ('G#') but also to the third-last note ('F#'). Failure to do this will result in prohibited melodic and harmonic intervals.

Note that the cadence below 'E' is a special case. Do **not** write anything resembling its repetitious | 6363 | pattern anywhere else in this species.

Task 2.3.1—Prepare staves for exercises on the Set One [cantus firmi](#), and write the last five notes of each exercise. Indicate the intervals (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8) between the staves.

As usual your first interval must be a Unison or an Octave—or, when the counterpoint is above the cantus firmus, a Fifth. Begin with a note, **not** a rest.

From your exercises in second species you will have learned that the more passing notes you include, the smoother your counterpoint will be. This principle is all the more applicable in third species, where you should aim to move by step as much as possible. (Remember that repeated notes are prohibited.)

The rules for handling passing notes are a little more complicated in third species than they were in second species. While crotchet 1 **must** be consonant, passing notes **may** occur on crotchet 2, 3 or 4, or on any two of those crotchets. The following seven arrangements of consonant notes (**c**) and passing notes (**p**) are therefore possible:

| c c c c |
 | c c c p |
 | c c p c | (recommended)
 | c c p p | (infrequent)
 | c p c c |
 | c p c p |
 | c p p c | in **descending** motion only

The first of these patterns may be realised as broken chords such as | 1358 | or | 3585 |; pentatonic activity such as | 8653 | or | 3658 |, however, is foreign to the diatonic idiom of counterpoint, and you should avoid it.

The prohibition of the last of the seven patterns in **ascending** motion accounts for the exceptional cadence formula for counterpoints below a cantus firmus in 'E', where the usual | 6543 | 1 || formula would yield a diminished Fifth on crotchet 2 followed by a perfect Fourth on crotchet 3.

Of all the third-species rules, this one is the hardest to grasp, but in practice its observance is extremely simple:

Never write | 3456 | above 'B' (except at a cadence on 'A',
 where the Fifth and Sixth are both sharp)
 Never write | 6543 | below 'F'

Task 2.3.2—Draft your first two exercises. Indicate all intervals between the staves.

Crotchet 2 may be dissonant not only as a passing note but also as part of the *nota cambiata* or 'exchanged note' figure. In this figure, crotchets 3 and 4 exchange places, converting | 8765 | **above** the cantus firmus to | 8756 |, and converting | 3456 | **below** the cantus firmus to | 3465 |. Crotchet 2 is thus no longer a passing note, because it lies between two notes that are a Fourth rather than a Third apart.



The *nota cambiata* can be formed **only** in the manner just illustrated: a falling Second, then a falling Third, then a rising Second. The inverse progressions | 3465 | **above** the cantus firmus and | 8756 | **below** the cantus firmus are therefore unacceptable.

You may include a diminished Fifth in the pattern, either as | 6534 | above 'B' or | 3465 | below 'F'. But these progressions require crotchet 4 to be a passing note.

You may also use the *nota cambiata*'s melodic pattern in contexts where crotchet 2 is consonant: | 6534 | above any note other than 'B', and | 5687 | below any note other than 'F'. These progressions too require crotchet 4 to be a passing note.

Task 2.3.3—Draft your next two exercises, including at least one instance of the *nota cambiata* figure in each one. Indicate all intervals between the staves.

Repetitive or sequential patterns are **not** considered to be characteristic of good counterpoint. In third species, therefore, a passage such as | 3543 | 3543 | 3543 | is deemed poor, and should be amended to include at least as much variety as | 3543 | 3453 | 3543 |.

With exercises in 'F', notice how the usual cadence formulas introduce a 'B' into the penultimate bar, causing a disagreeable effect akin to that of the melodic tritone (see § 2.1). You must avoid that effect by using one of the following variant cadence formulas:

Above the cantus firmus | 5856 | 8 ||, | 5876 | 8 ||, | 8756 | 8 ||
 Below the cantus firmus | 3543 | 1 ||

You may use these cadence formulas in exercises ending on other notes, too. The only third-species cadence that does not admit a variation of this kind is the cadence below 'E', where there is no alternative to | 6363 | 1 ||.

Perfect consonances in close proximity to each other are not prohibited by any absolute rules, but you should try to keep them as far apart as possible. Thus, | 6876 | 8 is preferable to | 6786 | 8, and | 3543 | 5 is preferable to | 3453 | 5.

Try not to accompany leaps in the cantus firmus with simultaneous leaps in the counterpoint. The second of the following two workings of the same passage is vastly superior to the first because its counterpoint leaps independently of the leap in the cantus firmus:

The image shows two musical staves in G-clef and C-clef, both in 3/4 time. The top staff is the cantus firmus, and the bottom staff is the counterpoint. The first example, labeled 'feeble', has fingerings: 3 4 5 6 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 5 6 7 | 6 5 4 3. The second example, labeled 'cogent', has the same fingerings. Arrows point to the leaps in the cantus firmus in both examples.

Task 2.3.4—Revise your first four Set One exercises, and complete the remainder. Indicate all intervals between the staves.

Task 2.3.5—Complete similar sets of exercises on further sets of [cantus firmi](#).

Sample Workings

Sample working 1: Cantus firmus (top staff) has fingerings: 1 3 4 5 | 3 5 3 2 | 3 4 6 5 | 6 3 6 5 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 4 5 6 | 6 8 6 5 | 3 4 5 6 | 6 3 6 3 | 1. Counterpoint (bottom staff) has a corresponding melodic line.

Sample working 2: Cantus firmus (top staff) has fingerings: 8 7 5 6 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 4 5 6 | 3 4 5 6 | 3 1 2 3 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 2 1 3 | 6 5 4 3 | 5 8 7 6 | 8. Counterpoint (bottom staff) has a corresponding melodic line.

M. O'Reilly (2004)

Sample working 3: Cantus firmus (top staff) has fingerings: 1 2 3 1 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 4 5 6 | 8 10 9 8 | 6 5 3 4 | 3 4 6 5 | 3 4 5 6 | 6 5 4 3 | 1. Counterpoint (bottom staff) has a corresponding melodic line.

E. Jones-McAuley (2009)

Sample working 4: Cantus firmus (top staff) has fingerings: 5 4 3 4 | 6 8 7 6 | 3 6 8 7 | 5 8 7 6 | 6 7 8 6 | 3 4 5 6 | 8 7 6 5 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 4 5 6 | 8. Counterpoint (bottom staff) has a corresponding melodic line.