

3.2 Invertible Counterpoint at the Octave

The transformation of intervals that takes place in invertible cadences can be expressed in the form of a table:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

The top row shows the intervals that result from placing the counterpoint above the cantus firmus; the bottom row shows the intervals that result from placing it below. Because in invertible counterpoint each voice has the double capacity of appearing either above or below the other voice, and because that capacity is exploited by transposing the counterpoint by an Octave, the type of invertible counterpoint represented by the table is called 'double counterpoint at the Octave'.

Entire exercises can be written in this and other types of double counterpoint. This is done simply by excluding intervals wherever they cannot invert. In first species, therefore, where no dissonances are used and the Unison is allowed only in the first and last bars, the Fifth must be excluded altogether because it would invert to a Fourth, while the Octave can be used only in the first and last bars because it inverts to a Unison.

Question—Excepting the first and last bars, what intervals may be used in first-species double counterpoint at the Octave?

In second and third species, the Fifth must be avoided on the downbeat (minimum 1 or crotchet 1), and elsewhere must be written as if it were a passing note; for this reason, second-species exercises in double counterpoint at the Octave cannot be ended in the usual way, and must be ended with fourth-species cadences instead.

Question—How might you deal, in an exercise invertible at the Octave, with that irregular third-species cadence?

For a double counterpoint to be entirely invertible, none of its intervals can be greater than the interval of transposition. Consider the result of breaking this rule in double counterpoint at the Octave:

6	7	8	9	10
3	2	1	-2	-3

The last two intervals in the top row represent notes more than an octave above the cantus firmus; the bottom row shows how, after transposition, those notes are still above it. Instead of inverting the last two intervals, the transposition has simply converted them from compound to simple.

For the same reason, the voices may not cross.

In summary, the rules for double counterpoint at the Octave are:

- Treat the Fifth as if it were a dissonance
- Use no interval greater than an Octave
- Do **not** cross voices

Task 3.2.1—Write double counterpoints at the Octave, in all five species, on cantus firmi in 'D', 'E' and 'F'. End your second-species exercises with fourth-species cadences.

Sample Workings

8 6 5 3 6 3 2 3 6 1 6 6 3 3 6 7 6 8

1 3 4 6 3 6 7 6 3 8 3 3 6 6 3 2 3 1

8 7 6 5 3 6 8 6 5 3 2 1 3 4 5 6 5 3 1 3 2 3 4 5 6 7 6 8

1 2 3 4 6 3 1 3 4 6 7 8 6 5 4 3 4 6 8 6 7 6 5 4 3 2 3 1