

4.1 Simple Subjects

Whereas the prescribed material of a counterpoint exercise—its cantus firmus—is presented only once, and is confined to a single voice, the prescribed material of a fugue—its subject—is presented several times, and is assigned to each voice by turns.

Every occurrence of a fugue's prescribed material is known as an **entry**. The essence of fugue is that it mixes entries in the tonic key—termed **subjects**—with contrasting entries in the dominant key—termed **answers**.

The following sketch shows the subjects and answers of an embryonic fugue for two voices:

The sketch consists of two systems of musical notation, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (measures 1-10) shows the subject in the treble clef (measures 1-5) and the answer in the bass clef (measures 7-10). The second system (measures 11-19) shows the answer in the treble clef (measures 11-15) and the subject in the bass clef (measures 16-19). Bar numbers 1 through 19 are indicated above the staves.

Observe the following points:

- The answer is an exact transposition of the subject. To be so, it must have at least one accidental if the key is minor.
- The first two entries (subject and answer) occupy ranges that are as close together as possible. They form what is termed the fugue's **exposition**.
- The last two entries (answer and subject) occupy ranges that are further apart, thereby creating an impression of expansion or growth. They form what is termed the fugue's **final section**.
- All entries occur in odd-numbered bars, and the fugue terminates in an odd-numbered bar. This ensures balanced phrasing.
- The principle of variety that obliges entries to occur at different pitches also obliges them to occur at differing intervals of time. The first two entries are therefore separated by a time interval wider than that separating any other two entries.

Task 4.1.1—Copy the foregoing sketch. Use pencil, because you will have to make certain revisions. Label the exposition, the final section, and the subjects and answers.

As a rule, a fugue's opening entry is stated by one voice alone. Subsequent entries, however, are accompanied by counterpoint in the other voice. When that counterpoint is invertible, and is deployed against every subsequent entry, it is termed a **regular countersubject**.

Using counterpoint invertible at the Octave, we may add a regular countersubject to our sketch thus:

Notice how certain notes must now be shorter:

- In bars 11 and 15, the last note of the preceding entry is shortened to a minim, to make way for the first note of the ensuing countersubject.
- In bar 15, the first note of the ensuing entry is similarly shortened to a minim, to make way for the last note of the preceding countersubject.
- In bar 11, the last note of the preceding countersubject simultaneously functions as the first note of the ensuing entry.

Task 4.1.2—Add the countersubjects to your copy of the sketch and label them.

All that remains is to connect the end of the initial entry to the beginning of the ensuing countersubject. This short, freely composed passage is termed the **codetta** (or ‘little tail’).

- The codetta starts to move straight away, the last note of the preceding entry being shortened to a minim.
- Not to distract attention from the surrounding entries, the codetta is extremely plain.
- The codetta ends on a suspension which is resolved by the first note of the countersubject. Though this is not always possible, it is strongly recommended.

Task 4.1.3—Add the codetta to your copy of the sketch and label it.

Our first fugue illustrates nearly all the principles of fugal writing, including the following one:

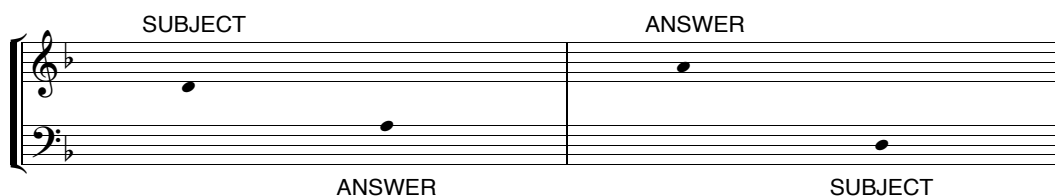
- From the end of the opening entry, every minim is marked by the sounding of a note in at least one of the voices. This is the minimum level of rhythmic activity in fugal writing.

According to this principle, our present countersubject could not, in fact, be less rhythmically active than it is. It could, however, be made more active, causing the fugue as a whole to be more elaborate:

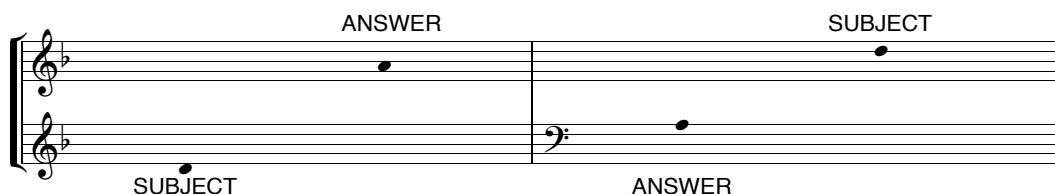


Task 4.1.4—Write a second version of the fugue, substituting the third of the foregoing countersubjects (suitably transposed) for the original one throughout. You will need to compose a new codetta: be sure to keep it plain. You will also need to use a hitherto prohibited melodic leap—the descending major Sixth; this will be acceptable because it is unavoidable.

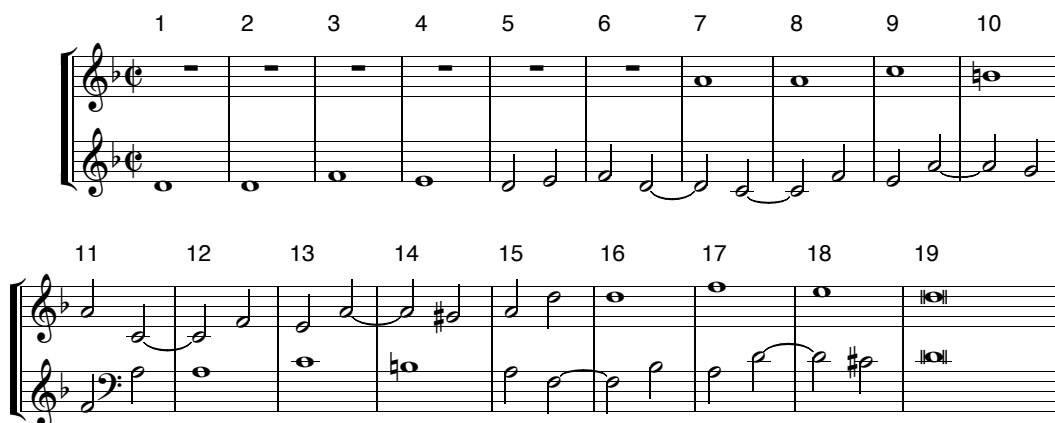
The structure of our fugue may be reduced to a plan appropriate for any subject in the key of 'D' minor:



The next plan shows an alternative arrangement of the entries, whereby the lower voice, rather than the upper one, sounds the opening subject:



The alternative plan realized:



• Note that in bars 10–11, the cadence | 2 3 | 1 that usually terminates the countersubject has been slightly modified to | 2 3 | 3, and has lost its accidental. Because it promises to be a cadence but turns out to be something rather different, this modification is termed an *inganno* ('deception'). Its purpose is to avoid an undesirable Unison.

Task 4.1.5—Copy the foregoing fugue. Label the subjects, the answers, the countersubjects, the codetta and the *inganno*.

Task 4.1.6—Write a second version, substituting the last of the four countersubjects given above. You are advised to amend the codetta. Pay particular attention to the accidentals.

To compose fugues on a given subject, first find the answer.

Task 4.1.7—Copy the Set One subjects and write out their answers. Ensure that each melodic interval in your answers is a precise transposition of the corresponding melodic interval in the subjects.

Then devise a regular countersubject of your own according to the following special rules:

End with a fourth-species cadence
 Begin on minim 2 with an imperfect consonance—a Third above the subject is possible, but a Sixth is preferable
 Use invertible counterpoint at the Octave—do **not** allow the voices to cross or to stray more than an Octave apart
 Avoid Unisons and Octaves (except on the last note)

The image shows two musical staves in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The first staff shows a subject in the upper voice and a countersubject in the lower voice. The subject starts on a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, quarter notes A4, B4, C5, D5. The countersubject starts on a whole rest, followed by a half note G3, quarter notes F3, E3, D3. The second staff shows the subject in the lower voice and the countersubject in the upper voice. The subject starts on a whole rest, followed by a half note G3, quarter notes A3, B3, C4, D4. The countersubject starts on a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, quarter notes A4, B4, C5, D5. Both staves end with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Task 4.1.8—Devise a regular countersubject, in double counterpoint at the Octave, for each of the Set One subjects.

Then plan your entries:

A musical staff in G major (one sharp) showing a five-bar subject. The first bar has a Soprano (S.) entry with a half note G4 in the treble clef and a half note G2 in the bass clef. The second bar has an Answer (A.) entry with a half note A4 in the treble clef and a half note A2 in the bass clef. The staff is divided into two measures by a bar line.

A musical staff in G major (one sharp) showing a five-bar subject. The first bar has an Answer (A.) entry with a half note A4 in the treble clef and a half note A2 in the bass clef. The second bar has a Soprano (S.) entry with a half note G4 in the treble clef and a half note G2 in the bass clef. The staff is divided into two measures by a bar line.

Task 4.1.9—Plan the entries for two fugues on each subject, one beginning with the upper voice and the other with the lower voice.

Like the subject of the example fugues given above, the Set One subjects are five bars long. For the time being, then, your fugues on those subjects should conform to the same nineteen-bar template, with entries at bars 1, 7, 11 and 15, a codetta in bars 5–6, and—if a cadential Unison needs to be avoided—an *inganno* at bar 11.

Task 4.1.10—Compose your Set One fugues.