

Summary of Rules for Species Counterpoint

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First-Species (1:1) Counterpoint Rules

1. In first species counterpoint, you may write one and only one note in your new melody for each note in the *cantus firmus*.
This is a "rule of the game" that will be superseded later. For now, you will write one whole note for every whole note you are given.
2. The first note and the last note must form either an octave or unison with the *cantus firmus*.
 - a. If you choose an octave for the first note, the last note must be an octave.
 - b. If you choose a unison for the first note, the last note must be a unison.
This rule forces you to have a sense of unity to your composition. It will later be superseded when we compose for more than two voices.
3. The next to last note of your melody should help to prepare a cadence.
 - a. If the last note is a unison, the next to last note should create a third. Each voice should move by step to the unison.
 - b. If the last note is an octave, the next to last note should create a sixth. Each voice should move by step to the octave.
 - c. The last note should be approached from a half-step below by one of the voices. An sharp on the next-to-last note may be needed for this. You may also need a sharp on the third-to-last note to prevent an augmented second (the origin of melodic minor)
A cadence is a musical stopping point. The two options above are typical of this time period and this style. In your study of other styles, you will find other cadence patterns. Rule 3c intensifies the feeling of a cadence at the end of the line.
4. The harmonic intervals between the beginning and the next-to-last note may be major or minor thirds, major or minor sixths, perfect or augmented fifths, perfect octaves or perfect unisons. Use thirds and sixths the most. If you use an augmented fifth, both voices must move by contrary motion and by second to form a third on the following note.
Note that for now you are only using consonant intervals and the tritone.
5. Your melody should move *mostly* by seconds.
 - a. Thirds are permitted, but should not be used as frequently as seconds.
 - b. If you choose to leap by a fourth or more, the note following the leap should move in the direction opposite the leap.
 - c. You should not leap by a tritone (diminished fifth or augmented fourth) or by a descending minor sixth.
 - d. Use accidentals only to avoid augmented seconds or at the cadence.
These rules are meant to help you write in a vocal style. Music is easily singable when it follows the above guidelines.
6. You must use parallel motion very carefully because it obscures the independence of the voices.
 - a. Parallel thirds and sixths are acceptable in groups of two or three.
 - b. Parallel fifths and octaves are forbidden in this style. Always. Forever. Period.
This rule seems arbitrary but actually has a justification grounded in the science of acoustics. Ask me sometime.
 - c. A perfect fifth may move to a diminished fifth, but not the other way.
This rule also seems arbitrary but it also has a musical justification. The diminished fifth (or tritone) must always be left by contrary motion, creating a third (the voices will move inward). To do otherwise confuses our sense of mode or key.
 - d. A corollary to rule 6b: Fifths should be moved into by contrary or oblique motion, not similar motion.
This is true in the 16th-century style, but not in later or earlier styles. This is referred to as "hidden fifths," because the voice that moves further could be filled in with passing tones and the result would be parallel fifths.
7. The overall shape of your melody should have a single high-point, preferably in the second half of the line.
This rule can be best justified on aesthetic grounds—it is more interesting to have the high point closer to the end.

Second-Species (2:1) Counterpoint Rules

1. In second species counterpoint, you will write two notes for every note in the *cantus firmus*, except for the last note.
You will be writing mostly half-notes in second species.
2. The first note and the last note must form either an octave or unison with the *cantus firmus*.
 - a. If you choose an octave for the first note, the last note must be an octave.
 - b. If you choose a unison for the first note, the last note must be a unison.
3. The next to last note of your melody should help to prepare a cadence.
 - a. If the last note is a unison, the next to last note should create a third. Each voice should move by step to the unison.
 - b. If the last note is an octave, the next to last note should create a sixth. Each voice should move by step to the octave.
 - c. On the last note should be approached from a half-step below by one of the voices. An accidental may be needed for this.
4. The interval formed between the voices on the downbeat of every measure must be a consonance—unison, third, fifth, sixth or octave.
Downbeats must be consonances in second-species.
5. The interval formed between the voices on the second beat of every measure may be either a consonance or a dissonance.
 - a. If the interval is a consonance, be careful not to write parallel fifths or octaves between the second beat of the measure and the downbeat of the next measure or between consecutive downbeats.
 - b. If the interval is a dissonance, it must be either a passing tone or a neighbor tone and must resolve correctly in the next measure.
This is the new part for second-species counterpoint.
6. Your melody should move *mostly* by seconds.
 - a. Thirds are permitted, but should not be used as frequently as seconds.
 - b. If you choose to leap by a fourth or more, the note following the leap should move in the direction opposite the leap.
 - c. You should not leap by a tritone (diminished fifth or augmented fourth) or by a descending minor sixth.
 - d. Use accidentals only to avoid augmented seconds or at the cadence.
 - e. All dissonances must be approached and left by step, never by skip or leap.
7. You must use parallel motion very carefully because it obscures the independence of the voices.
 - a. Parallel thirds and sixths are acceptable in groups of two or three.
 - b. Parallel fifths and octaves are forbidden in this style. Always. Forever. Period.
Parallel fifths or octaves can be between downbeats or between an upbeat and a downbeat.
 - c. A perfect fifth may move to a diminished fifth, but not the other way.
 - d. A corollary to rule 7b: Fifths should be moved into by contrary or oblique motion, not similar motion.
8. Repetition between notes in your new line is not permitted.
Repetition was acceptable in first-species, but in second species, it too closely resembles a type of embellishment that comes later, the suspension, which has very specific rules of its own.
9. The overall shape of your melody should have a single high-point, preferably in the second half of the line.

Third-Species (4:1) Counterpoint Rules

1. In third-species counterpoint, you will write four notes for every note in the *cantus firmus*, except for last note.
You will be writing mostly quarter-notes in third-species. Most authors of books on counterpoint apply the rules from third-species writing to situations where there are three notes in the new melody for every note in the cantus as well.
2. The first note and the last note must form either an octave or unison with the *cantus firmus*
 - a. If you choose an octave for the first note, the last note must be an octave.
 - b. If you choose a unison for the first note, the last note must be a unison.
3. The next to last note of your melody should help to prepare a cadence.
 - a. If the last note is a unison, the next to last note should create a third. Each voice should move by step to the unison.
 - b. If the last note is an octave, the next to last note should create a sixth. Each voice should move by step to the octave.
 - c. The last note should be approached from a half-step below by one of the voices. An accidental may be needed for this.
4. The interval formed between the voices on the downbeat of every measure must be a consonance—unison, third, fifth, sixth or octave.
5. The interval formed between the voices on the second beat of every measure may be either a consonance or a dissonance.
 - a. If the interval is a consonance, be careful not to write parallel fifths or octaves between the second beat of the measure and the downbeat of the next measure.
 - b. If the interval is a dissonance, it must be either a passing tone or a neighbor tone and must resolve correctly.
6. The interval formed between the voices on the third and fourth beats may be either a consonance or a dissonance, but only one of these notes can create a dissonance with the *cantus firmus*. All dissonances must be correctly-approached and –resolved passing tones or neighbor tones. Leaps to or from dissonances are not permitted.
If you write passing tones correctly, this will not be a problem.
7. *Unchanged:* Your melody should move *mostly* by seconds.
 - a. Thirds are permitted, but should not be used as frequently as seconds.
 - b. If you choose to leap by a fourth or more, the note following the leap should move in the direction opposite the leap.
 - c. You should not leap by a tritone (diminished fifth or augmented fourth) or by a descending minor sixth.
 - d. Use accidentals only to avoid augmented seconds or at the cadence.
 - e. All dissonances must be approached and left by step, never by skip or leap.
8. *Expanded:* You must use parallel motion very carefully because it obscures the independence of the voices.
 - a. Parallel thirds and sixths are acceptable in groups of two or three.
 - b. Parallel fifths and octaves are forbidden in this style. Always. Forever. Period.
 - c. A perfect fifth may move to a diminished fifth, but not the other way.
 - d. A corollary to rule 7b: Fifths should be moved into by contrary or oblique motion, not similar motion.
 - e. There are three ways to write parallel motion in third species:
 1. Between downbeats
 2. Between the third note of a measure and the following downbeat
 3. Between the fourth note of a measure and the following downbeat
9. Repetition between notes in your new line is not permitted.
10. The overall shape of your melody should have a single high-point, preferably in the second half of the line.

Fourth-Species (Rhythmic Displacement) Counterpoint Rules

1. In fourth-species counterpoint, you will write two notes for every note in the *cantus firmus*, except for last note.
You will be writing mostly half-notes in fourth-species.
2. The first note and the last note must form either an octave or unison with the *cantus firmus*. Because the tendency in fourth-species writing is to move downward, you may begin with an octave and end with a unison.
3. The next to last note of your melody should help to prepare a cadence.
 - a. If the last note is a unison, the next to last note should create a third. Each voice should move by step to the unison.
 - b. If the last note is an octave, the next to last note should create a sixth. Each voice should move by step to the octave.
 - c. On the last note should be approached from a half-step below by one of the voices. An accidental may be needed for this.
4. The interval formed between the voices on the downbeat of every measure may be dissonant if it is part of a suspension. Otherwise, it must be a consonance—unison, third, fifth, sixth or octave.
5. The interval formed between the voices on the second beat of every measure may be either a consonance or a dissonance.
 - a. If the interval on the downbeat is a consonance, the second beat may be either consonant or dissonant, following the rules of second-species writing.
 - b. If the second beat is the preparation of a suspension, it must be consonant. The suspended voice will remain on this note on the following downbeat (it may either be tied across the barline or simply repeated).
 - c. If the second beat is the resolution of a suspension, it must be consonant and the suspended voice will be a step lower than the previous downbeat.
 - d. The second beat may be *both* a resolution of a suspension on the previous downbeat *and* the preparation for a suspension on the next downbeat.
6. Your melody should move *mostly* by seconds.
 - a. Thirds are permitted, but should not be used as frequently as seconds.
 - b. If you choose to leap by a fourth or more, the note following the leap should move in the direction opposite the leap.
 - c. You should not leap by a tritone (diminished fifth or augmented fourth) or by a minor sixth.
 - d. Use accidentals only to avoid augmented seconds or at the cadence.
 - e. All dissonances must be approached and left by step, never by skip or leap.
7. Include as many suspensions as possible in your new melody.
 - a. Use chains of 4-3 or 7-6 suspensions in a melody above a *cantus firmus* when possible
 - b. Use chains of 2-3 suspensions in a melody below a *cantus firmus* when possible
 - c. Use individual 9-8 suspensions as needed.
 - d. If a single 6-5 or 5-6 figure will allow you to move into a new chain of suspension without breaking the rhythm of the exercise, you should write it, but a chain of 6-5s or 5-6s implies parallel fifths and is forbidden.
 - e. When no suspension is possible, revert to the rules for second-species counterpoint.
8. You must use parallel motion very carefully because it obscures the independence of the voices.
 - a. You may write as many thirds or sixths in a row as possible if they are all resolutions of suspensions.
 - b. Parallel fifths and octaves are forbidden in this style. Always. Forever. Period.
This means that chains of 9-8 suspensions and 6-5 figures are forbidden as well.
 - c. A perfect fifth may move to a diminished fifth, but not the other way.
 - d. A corollary to rule 7b: Fifths should be moved into by contrary or oblique motion, not similar motion.
9. Repetition between notes in your new line is not permitted, unless the first note is a preparation for a suspension and the second note is the suspension proper.
Other types of repetition break down the flow and momentum of the line.
10. *Revised:* The overall shape of your melody should have a single high-point, preferably in the second half of the line, but it is more important to write as many suspensions as possible.