

MUSC 0550: Guidelines for writing a cantus firmus melody

Overall, your melody should strike a balance between simplicity and variety, within the restrictions listed below. Make sure to sing your melody while (and after) composing.

Basic rules:

- **Length:** Your melody should be 8-16 notes long.
- **Rhythm:** For purposes of the exercise, we will be ignoring rhythm and focusing on pitch relations. Notate these melodies as whole notes, with one note per measure: make sure to include barlines so these are readable.
- **Clef:** Write your melody in **alto clef**.
- **Mode:** Your melody should remain in a single diatonic (white key) mode—don't use any accidentals.
 - Melodies should begin and end on the **modal final** (e.g. D for Dorian, E for Phrygian, etc.) in the same octave.
 - The penultimate note should be a step above the modal final, so the CF ends with a **stepwise descent**.
- **Range:** Keep to an overall range of 1 octave or less. Even a more restrictive range within the compass of a 5th or 6th is okay; a 4th is too narrow.

Melodic intervals:

- You may not use any **melodic dissonances**: any type of seventh, or augmented/diminished intervals (e.g., tritones) are forbidden.
 - Also avoid “outlining” dissonant intervals, especially tritones—they can stick out even if you don't move directly between the two boundary pitches.
 - Tritones within a single gesture—even if not involving boundary pitches—are also not preferred.
- You may not immediately repeat a single note (no melodic unisons).
- Leaps greater than an octave are also not allowed.
- Move **primarily** by step but also incorporate some skips or leaps for variety.

Handling leaps (do this carefully!):

- Try to prepare and follow leaps with motion in the opposite direction, preferably by step.
- Avoid consecutive leaps, **especially in the same direction**.

Other considerations:

- Your melody should have a strong background shape, with **multiple** changes in direction and a **single** high point (climax pitch).
 - The climax should not be repeated.

- Avoid using the 7th above the final as the climax—this creates a sense of tension we want to avoid in this exercise.
- Avoid repeating a single note excessively or circling around a group of notes, since this gets monotonous very quickly!
- Similarly, avoid excessive repetition of a melodic gesture/motive (including sequential repetition), which will break up the phrase too much.
- Do not arpeggiate through triads, to avoid implying a harmonic progression.