

## T251 / Two-part counterpoint / Terminology and grounding concepts

*Texture:* the given melody is called the cantus firmus, to which an additional line, the counterpoint, will be added. The counterpoint can be added above or below the cantus firmus.

*Vertical intervals.* divided into two categories, consonances and dissonances.

Consonances can be perfect (P1, P5, P8) or imperfect (M/m 3 and 6).

Dissonances: 2 and 7, P4, and any diminished or augmented interval.

*Guiding principle:* all lines should be designed for singing.

*Types of motion:*



contrary: voices move in opposition direction



oblique: one voice moves, the other stays still.



similar: both voices move in the same direction



parallel: specific type of similar motion, in which interval size is preserved (e.g., consecutive thirds or fifths)

*Some clefs you might see* (all showing middle C):

Treble clef



Alto clef



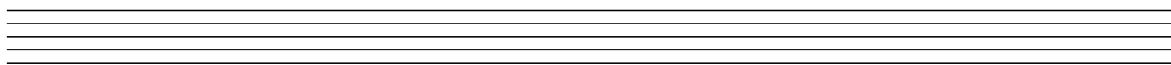
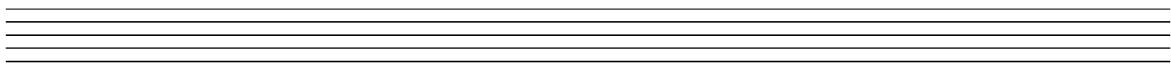
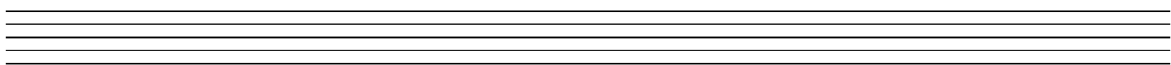
often used for cantus firmus

Treble clef sounding 8ve lower



often used for tenor voice  
in modern editions of choral music

Bass clef



## Whole-note (first species) counterpoint: principles.

- Note against note: each voice uses only whole notes.
- Use only consonances. Imperfect consonances should predominate. Unisons should be avoided in the main body of the exercise. Remember that in two-voice counterpoint, a P4 is counted as a dissonance.
- Move into perfect consonances only by contrary or oblique motion; into imperfect consonances anything goes. Aim for a variety of types of motion in an exercise.
- Leaps create welcome variety, but can leave holes in the musical line and can be awkward to sing. Avoid dissonant leaps (e.g., tritone or seventh), or a leap of a M6. Most leaps will be 3, 4 or 5, but m6 and P8 can be used sparingly. After a large leap try to turn back and fill in the notes that were skipped.
- Each line should have a definite high point; it's ok to repeat the peak note, but try to create an overall arch shape.
- You can tie one whole note to another in either voice (creating oblique motion), but each voice should do this no more than twice in an exercise, and never at the same time as the other voice.
- In general, use only natural notes and B $\flat$ ; if B $\flat$  is in the signature, E $\flat$  can be used. (Other accidentals can be found at cadences, to make leading tones; for now cadences will be provided for you).

*Some examples of first species counterpoint:*

