

T251 / Second species counterpoint: principles

Basics

The basic rhythmic relationship between cantus firmus (CF) and counterpoint is 2:1. For each note of the cantus firmus, there will be two notes in the counterpoint. In any bar, two rhythms are available, $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ or $\text{♩} \text{♩}$, depending on whether the second note is consonant or dissonant.



First note

The first note of each bar must always form a consonance with the CF. Motion into this first note is governed by first species rules. No unisons are allowed (except as starting or cadencing intervals), and perfect consonances can only be approached by oblique or contrary motion.



Second note

If the rhythm is $\text{♩} \text{♩}$, the second half note must be consonant with the cantus firmus.

■ You may leap to or from this note. Avoid chaining too many consecutive leaps in the same direction, though.



If the rhythm is $\text{♩} \text{♩}$, the second note (the quarter note) must be a dissonant passing tone.

■ Remember that a passing tone forms a stepwise connection between two pitches that are a third apart. This implies that you can never leap to or from a dissonance.

■ The passing tone is the only dissonance allowed in this species (no dissonant neighbor notes).

In general

Once or twice in the main body exercise, you can tie a half note across the barline (but only if it's consonant with both notes of the CF).

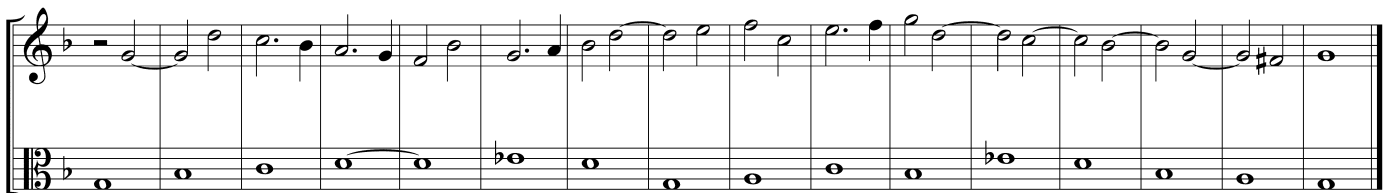
Be careful with perfect intervals on consecutive strong beats. Rule of thumb: ok if the intervening interval (on the weak beat) is a consonance, but not ok if it's a dissonance. Avoid fifths or octaves on more than two strong beats in a row.

Aim for as much stepwise motion as possible, with an overall arch shape. Stagger the high points in the CF and counterpoint, so that they don't occur at the same time.

Note on endings. For the time being, the last few bars of each exercise will be given to you. As in the sample below, they incorporate the dissonant syncopation figures that will characterize fourth species (and are common in 16C style); they're not native to second species, however.

Illustrations of second species counterpoint:

(Francesco di San Daniele)



(Francesco di San Daniele)

