

## Real Answer

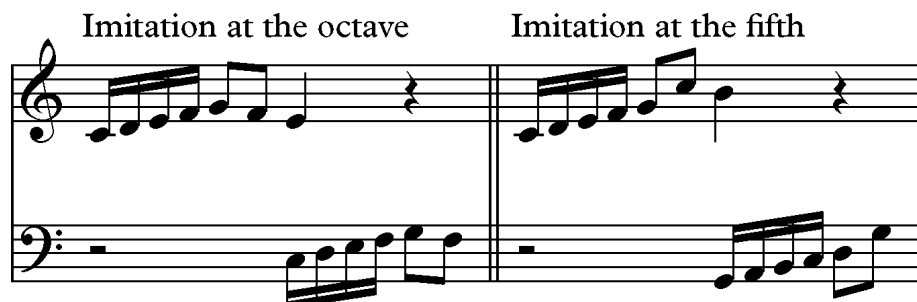
Malcolm Sailor

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(Some of the ideas in this handout are borrowed from Peter Schubert and Christoph Neidhöfer's textbook, *Baroque Counterpoint*, chapter 7.)

## Imitation at the fifth and the “answer”

A very important pattern in Baroque counterpoint is for entries of the subject to occur, alternating between “tonic” and “dominant” versions. When the subject is repeated in a dominant version, we can speak of “**imitation at the fifth**,” in contrast to “imitation at the octave,” which is what we have looked at so far in this class.



Imitation at the fifth is such a common procedure that the dominant version has a special name, the “**answer**.” **The usual exposition** (i.e., initial section) **of an imitative piece** (like a fugue or trio sonata) **consists of alternating entries of the “subject” and the “answer.”**

There are two types of answer, **real**, and **tonal**. This handout is about real answer, which is simpler, but probably less common. We will look at tonal answer in depth in a future class.

## Real answer

In **real answer** the subject is simply transposed note-for-note to the dominant key. Thus, writing real answers is easy: if you have a subject, you already have the real answer. You only need to transpose the subject.

The harder part is smoothly connecting the subject to the answer and vice versa.

For instance, if the subject begins and ends in the tonic, then the answer will begin and end in the dominant. Thus, we cannot elide the end of the subject with the beginning of a real answer, nor the end of the answer with the beginning of the subject, because they will be in different keys. (But see 3. below.)

Three of the most common techniques for achieving a smooth connection are as follows:

1. Simply jump directly from one to the other, without a smooth “join.” (Schubert & Niedhöfer call this the **simple splice**, because the music jumps abruptly from one key to the next.)

This option and the next work when the subject

- begins during a strong beat
- ends during a weak beat

Subject

counterpoint continues

Answer

Key: C major G major C major Subject

2. Jump from one to the other, but add some freely composed music (which could be as little as an extra note or two) to lead from one key to the next. (Schubert & Niedhöfer call this the **embellished splice**.)

counterpoint continues

3. (This option can be considered “optional/advanced.”) In fugues and other works where the initial entries are unaccompanied, the subject can elide with the answer if

- the subject begins on  $\hat{1}$  and ends on  $\hat{1}$  or  $\hat{3}$
- the answer enters above the subject

This works because the answer will begin on  $\hat{5}$  in the main key (which is  $\hat{1}$  in the dominant key). If supported below by  $\hat{1}$  or  $\hat{3}$ , we can interpret this note as the fifth of the tonic triad.

In order to support the rest of the answer in the dominant, the music will then need to quickly move to the dominant key.

It is harder to elide the answer with the subject in a similar way, especially if the subject ends on 3̣.



## “Retransition” or “remodulation”

Very often, there is a **longer passage of freely composed music—one or more bars—that connects the answer (ending in the dominant) back to the subject (beginning in the tonic)**. This passage is known as the “**retransition**.”

There seem to be at least two reasons why retractions work especially well following the answer:

1. Tonal music goes very often from the tonic key to the dominant key. Perhaps because this is such an ubiquitous pattern, our ears are very ready to accept this modulation, and we can carry it out with only a few notes. On the other hand, the reciprocal motion, from the dominant key to the tonic key, is somewhat less common, and perhaps therefore requires a somewhat longer passage of music.
2. We’ve already heard the subject twice in quick succession, so following the answer is a nice place for a contrast, and the new material of a freely composed retransition can fulfill this function well.

The image displays a musical score for a fugue in D major, featuring two systems of staves. The first system shows the initial entry of the 'Subject' in the bass clef and the 'Answer' in the treble clef. The second system, marked with a box and the number 8, shows a 'Retransition' in the bass clef followed by a 'Subject' entry in the treble clef. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and note values.

Figure 1: Bach, Fugue in D Major, Well-tempered Clavier, Book 1