Workbooks for undergraduate counterpoint 1-4

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Workbook

for

Counterpoint I

by

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Course plan

Prerequisite

- at least one semester of tonal harmony

Objectives

- mastering species counterpoint in 2 and 3 parts
- mastering elementary vocal writing

Criteria

- quality of the melodic lines
- vocal ease
- clear harmonic basis and direction
- musicality of the solutions, given the constraints

Correction codes

These are codes for common problems; they also can be used by the student as a checklist in evaluating his/her own work.

- > = inappropriate accent
- ? = unsatisfactory resolution of a dissonance or an active note (e.g. the leading tone)
- 8d (5d, 7d, etc.) = direct 8ve (5th, 7th, etc.)
- p8 (p5) = parallel octaves (fifths)
- C = cluster
- D = a dissonance problem (preparation and/or resolution)
- E = empty sound, a gap in the texture
- FR = false relation
- H = harsh (often due to doubling an active note)
- H? = harmony unclear
- INV = illogical inversion in the bass line
- L = an awkward melodic leap, weakness in the melodic line
- LM = loss of rhythmic momentum (in 5th species)
- N = notation problem (stems, etc.)
- SM = sudden modulation, badly prepared
- ST = static harmony, a dead spot
- UT = unbalanced texture, e.g. 3 voices very high and one very low
- V = a problem in the vocal writing
- WP = weak harmonic progression
N.B. This is a workbook, and therefore contains very little explanation. For more in depth discussion about counterpoint, see my (free) online counterpoint book, at: http://alanbelkinmusic.com/bk.C/index.html. Note that the online book was not written as a textbook to accompany this workbook. However it does explain the guiding principles of applied counterpoint. To really learn the craft of counterpoint the student will need a qualified teacher.

Some general observations

There are two kinds of rules in counterpoint. First, there are the rules of musical reality, like the range of a given voice or instrument. These are not negotiable. The other kind of rule is pedagogical, like avoiding dissonances on the beat during your first exercises. Obviously there is plenty of real music with dissonances on the beat; this “rule” is really just a way of focusing on one thing at a time, e.g. the shape of your lines. This second kind of rule will evolve as you progress.

Knowing what is easy or hard to sing is very important: aim for lines which are comfortable to sing. You are writing for real human voices!

The student should aim at independence of contour between the parts. Do not move for more than three notes in parallel motion, and do not peak all the voices at the same time.

Once we combine lines, we create harmonies. The harmonies in elementary counterpoint can be tonal and/or modal, but their voice leading and progressions have to make sense.

Here are the (choral) ranges of the basic four human voices. These ranges are for untrained singers; trained singers' ranges are larger. For the most comfortable vocal writing, each voice should spend most of its time in the middle of its range.

![Diagram of vocal ranges](image-url)
The goal of species counterpoint is fluency and sensitivity to line and to dissonance. Species counterpoint is not intended to teach any given style of music; it is simply a useful pedagogical progression to attain the desired fluency and sensitivity. Quantity matters; doing two exercises in each species is simply not worth the trouble.

All the exercises start with a given line in whole notes, the cantus firmus. The student should sometimes do multiple (successive) counterpoints to the same cantus. The latter can be transposed at will, and assigned to any voice. This encourages finding more than one solution to a given musical situation, which is an important goal of elementary counterpoint study. I call it "making friends with the notes".

In first species no dissonances are allowed; the focus is just on the lines. The student will write one note for each note of the cantus, trying to create an independent line.

From second species on, dissonances are permitted, but on the weak beats only. Since dissonances must be approached and left by step, this means that the only kinds of dissonance possible for now are passing tones and neighbour notes. In second species the student writes two notes for every one note of the cantus. The last bar finishes with a whole note.

In third species the student will write four notes for each note of the cantus. It is also useful to do some exercises in 3/4 time (three notes to one). Avoid entire bars of arpeggiation, without any non-harmonic tones.

The fourth species is the only time dissonance will occur on the strong beat in species counterpoint, in the form of a suspension. Given the limited number of suspensions available, in fourth species it is permitted to break the species rhythm once per exercise. Otherwise the rhythm is syncopated from start to finish, excluding the last bar of course.

The fifth species introduces rhythmic variety and a few elementary forms of ornamented dissonance. In the fifth species, usually rhythmic momentum will increase slightly overall during each exercise, to avoid stagnation.

All combinations of voices are common in two parts, except soprano + bass, which can sound empty if the voices are too far apart. It is sometimes a good idea to try doing an exercise with two of the same voice, e.g. soprano #1 + soprano #2.
Canti (given melodies)

These first canti are non-modulating. However the student can use secondary dominants, to the extent that the cantus allows, provided that they resolve normally.
Summary

1\textsuperscript{st} species: note against note
2\textsuperscript{nd} species: 2 notes against 1
3\textsuperscript{rd} species: 4 (or 3 notes, in \(\frac{3}{4}\) time) against 1
4\textsuperscript{th} species: note against note, but syncopated (suspensions)
5\textsuperscript{th} species: florid counterpoint (varied rhythms, see below)

Note that repeated notes are not used in species counterpoint, with one minor exception in 5th species.

In the 5\textsuperscript{th} species, the rhythms of the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, and 4\textsuperscript{th} species are all available, as well as several others:

Suspensions (fourth species)

Here is a list of the classical suspensions used in species counterpoint:
Workbook

for

Counterpoint II

by

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Course plan

Prerequisite

- Counterpoint 1

Objectives

- continue the discipline of strict vocal counterpoint in 2 and 3 parts; mixed species
- counterpoint with modulation to closely related keys
- counterpoint without a cantus firmus

Program

- mixed species, exercises with two florid (i.e. 5th species) parts
- exercises with modulating canti
- exercises with florid canti, variable harmonic rhythm
- exercises using harmonic progressions as a starting point instead of canti
- motives, in imitation and in stratified texture
- simple canons

Criteria

- quality of the melodic lines
- vocal ease
- clear harmonic basis and direction
- musicality of the solutions, given the constraints
Correction codes. These are codes for common problems; they also can be used by the student as a checklist in evaluating his/her own work.

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Canti for mixed species

Modulating canti
Florid canti, with mildly varied harmonic rhythm

1.

2.

3. N.B. This cantus finishes on the third of the tonic harmony, so it cannot appear in the bass.

4.

5.

6.

Motives for imitations (the value of the last note can be changed as required)

1.

2.

3.

4.
Workbook

for

Counterpoint III

by

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Course plan

Prerequisite

- Counterpoint II

Objectives

- intensive work in four part vocal counterpoint

Contents of the course

- strict vocal contrepoint in 4 parts
- florid counterpoint up to 4 parts with and without cantus firmus
- motives, exercises without cantus firmus: cadences, modulations
- imitation

Criteria

- quality of the melodic lines
- vocal ease
- clear harmonic basis and direction
- musicality of the solutions, given the constraints
Correction codes.

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Strict 4 Part (Vocal) Counterpoint

N.B. Never do two exercises in a row with the same cantus in the same voice. Work in various keys, since they fall in different parts of the vocal ranges. The canti (on the following page) should be transposed as needed.

Sequence of the exercises:

1. 1st species: 4 voices in whole notes
2. 2nd species: 1 voice in half notes, 3 other voices in whole notes
3. 3rd species: 1 voice in quarter notes, 3 other voices in whole notes
4. 4th species: 1 voice in suspensions (half notes), 3 other voices in whole notes
5. 5th species: florid counterpoint in 1, then 2, and then in 3 voices, with the other voices in whole notes.
6. florid counterpoint in 2 voices, over a cantus also in florid style
7. mixed species
8. florid counterpoint in 3 voices, over a cantus also in florid style

Pedagogical constraints for strict counterpoint

N.B.: These constraints apply only to strict counterpoint; they will gradually be loosened as the student progresses.

Chords:
- only major and minor 3 note chords, in root position or 1st inversion; diminished chords only in first inversion.
- 7th chords and cadential 6/4 chords will gradually be introduced, provided that they are used correctly according to the principles of tonal harmony, and providing they fit well into the exercise.
- 1 chord per bar. Certain exceptions will be discussed in class.

Dissonances:
- no leaps to or from a dissonance. Exceptions (to be discussed in class): 7ths by octave displacement, in a scale passage and in some V7 chords, the double neighbour, certain ornaments when resolving suspensions.
- no dissonance is ever attacked on the strong beat.

Parallel octaves and fifths: must be separated by more than one bar. Exceptions to be discussed in class.
Direct octaves and fifths: generally permitted between inner voices. Also between outer parts, provided the top voice is conjunct.

Melody:
- In addition to the intervals already in use, we now add augmented and diminished intervals, as well as the 7th by octave displacement (in a scale passage), as long as they are used in accordance with normal practice in tonal harmony.
- avoid creating motives (by repetition or sequence), since these short exercises do not provide enough time for their proper development.

Rhythms (in 5th species):
- whole note, only in the final bar.
- half notes
- dotted half notes, on the 1st and 3rd beats (in 4/4 time)
- syncopated 1/2 note (quarter note suspension) at the cadence only
- quarter notes
- eighth notes: no more than two, conjunct and on the weak beat
Canti for strict counterpoint

These canti can be used in major or in minor. In minor, alter the 6th and seventh scale degrees as required, according to the melodic minor scale.

1.

2.

3.

4.

with V/V

5.

6.

modulating

7.

(V/ IV)

8.

9.

dim. 7th

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Florid Counterpoint in 4 voices

N.B. As usual, the canti can be transposed at will.

Instead of the cantus being in whole notes, now it is also in florid style.

Changes, compared to strict counterpoint:

Rhythm:
- 1/8 notes are a bit more frequent, but they remain always conjunct, except for an occasional leap to the first 1/8 note, which must be a chord tone. At the cadence only, to create extra momentum, occasionally 2 voices can be in 1/8 notes at the same time. However, the unit of pulsation remains the 1/4 note.
- the harmonic rhythm is more flexible, and sometimes includes 2 or 3 chords per bar.

Harmony:
- All 7th chords are now permissible, as long as the voice leading conforms to the principles of tonal harmony.

Melody:
- Leaps of a 7th, as well as diminished and augmented intervals are now permitted, as long as the underlying harmony makes sense. Normally after a leap, the line will change direction.

Procedure:
1) analyse the harmonic implications of the cantus
2) note any possible suspensions
3) if the cantus is not in the bass, take note of any essential harmonic movements in the bass line
4) fill in the other voices

Example:
(cantus in the soprano)

Canti for florid counterpoint in 3 or 4 voices

Treat the cantus like the other florid voices. **Do not introduce any new motives.**

Transcribe as desired.

1.

2.

3. (tenor)

4.

5. (tenor)

6.
Cadences and Modulations

1) Cadences: Continue each beginning in florid style for 7-8 bars. Make sure the tonality is solidly established and that there is a clear cadential direction.

2) Modulations: Continue each beginning in florid style for 7-8 bars. Firmly establish the first key, and then modulate clearly, and cadence strongly in a new (closely related) key.

1.

2.

4.
Tonal Answer

Definition: In the exposition of a fugue, entries alternate between tonic and dominant. If the head of the subject melodically emphasizes the tonic/dominant relationship, in the answer this will lead to emphasizing II (V of V = II). To avoid this problem, we can subtly modify the theme to point back to the tonic instead. Here are a few examples of such "mutations":

ex. a

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{instead of} \quad \text{becomes}
\end{array}
\]

ex. b

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{instead of} \quad \text{becomes}
\end{array}
\]

Procedure:
1) transpose the subject as is to the dominant
2) If the head of the subject melodically emphasizes the tonic/dominant relationship, modify the answer as subtly as possible.

Find the tonal answers for the following subjects:

1.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{instead of} \quad \text{becomes}
\end{array}
\]

2.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{instead of} \quad \text{becomes}
\end{array}
\]

3.
**Imitation**

These exercises constitute preparation for fugue.

**Changes compared to 4 part florid counterpoint:**

- all 7th chords are permitted, if prepared and resolved correctly.
- all melodic movements are permitted, with the same conditions as in tonal harmony
- occasional silences are permitted, in one voice at a time. The voice which stops should come to a melodic point of rest before dropping out.

**Procedure:**

Analyse the theme from a motivic point of view: contour, rhythm, dissonance formulas, use of leaps, note values, etc.

1) the first voice presents the theme as is
2) the next voice imitates the theme at the tonic or the dominant
3) the other voices are made out of motives derived from the theme, in various combinations
4) the cadence is in 4 voices, either in the main tonality, or in a neighbouring key.
Free imitation in 4 voices
Themes for imitations

These themes can be transposed as desired. The rhythmic value of the last note can be modified freely. For #1 and #4, use the tonal answers provided. Do not add new motives!

1.

\( T \)he( tonal answer)hese themes can be transposed as desired. The rhythmic value of the last note can be modified freely.
For #1 and #4, use the tonal answers provided. Do not add new motives!

2.

3.

4.

(tonal answer)

5.

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5ths and 8ves, for discussion
Dissonances, for discussion

Alan Belkin
Common harmonic problems

Alan Belkin
Workbook

for

Counterpoint IV

by

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Course plan

Objectives:
- preparation for fugue
- composition of small contrapuntal forms, in instrumental style

Contents of the course:
1. instrumental counterpoint in 4 parts
2. contrapuntal sequences
3. stratified counterpoint
4. basic notions of invertible counterpoint and countersubjects
5. canons
6. composition in small contrapuntal forms:
   - binary form (a dance) in 2 voices in instrumental style
   - 3 part invention in instrumental style

Bibliography:
• Benjamin, Thomas, *Counterpoint in the Style of J.S. Bach*
• Schoenberg, Arnold, *Preliminary Exercises in Counterpoint*
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**Instrumental Counterpoint**

**Comparison with vocal counterpoint:**

Instrumental counterpoint makes use of the enlarged possibilities of instruments, compared to voices.

Here are the main principles behind instrumental counterpoint:

- All the techniques found in vocal counterpoint are also found in instrumental counterpoint

- It is essential to respect the registers of each instrument. Generally speaking, instruments allow for:
  
  - faster figuration
  - more chromaticism and accented dissonances, e.g. appogiaturas
  - more leaps

  - note that leaps need to have some motivic coherence if they are not to sound arbitrary. It is especially important to have a clear idea of the harmonic background when leaping.

  - When a melody continually leaps between two or more registers ("compound line"), it is essential to organise each of the component lines in a coherent way. They must be well directed, and active notes should be resolved in the following harmony.

**How to proceed:**

1) Always clearly establish the harmonic framework *around the important notes in the line* before working out melodic details.

2) Aim for motivic coherence, especially in the way dissonances are used (appoggiaturas, suspensions, neighbour notes, etc.)
Instrumental Conterpoint: preparatory exercises

Analyse the harmonic implications of the bass, then complete the right hand in the same style as the beginning. Do NOT add new motives.

harpichord
Fill in pitches for the "x" notes, following the harmony and the existing motives.
Sequences (in counterpoint)

Definition

A sequence consists of transposed repetitions of a pattern. In counterpoint, sequences are usually enriched by imitation.

The basic unit

The unit of sequence can be as small as two or three notes or as large as a complete phrase. Usually the most compact sequences occur before a climax. Harmonically the beginning and the ending of the sequence must be solidly anchored, whereas during the sequence the linear pattern suffices for coherence. If the sequence has more than three repetitions, it is a good idea to start varying them.

Harmonic pattern

There are many possible harmonic patterns for sequences. Here are a few very common ones.
- the circle of fifths
- III I II VII I VI ...
- I₆ II₆ III₆ IV₆ ...

How to write an imitative sequence

a) Decide the harmonic pattern.
b) Distribute the imitation of the main motive.
c) Fill in the gaps in contrapuntal style, taking care to leave the imitation clearly audible.

(See the examples on the following page)

Exercises

Create 3 voice imitative sequences on each of the harmonic progressions listed above, using one of the following motives (on the next page).
Stratified Counterpoint in 4 parts

In stratified counterpoint, the parts have independent motives, instead of being in imitation.

Continue the given beginnings for 6-8 mesures, in the same style. Include slurs, dynamics, etc.
Do not add new motives.


**Canon**

**Definition:**

A canon is the complete, exact imitation of one line by another. The leading part is called the "dux" and the following part the "comes".

There are canons corresponding to each kind of imitation (inversion, augmentation, etc.).

Canons are named according to the interval of time and the interval of pitch between the first notes of the respective parts, e.g. "canon at the 10th above, at 2 bars".

Canons at intervals other than the octave can be done using diatonic intervals (e.g. a major second will become a minor second, because it falls on a different scale degree) or exact chromatic intervals. The latter is quite difficult, since it can engender odd modulations.

The ending of the canon can be done first in the dux, which stops and allows the comes to finish alone. However, more frequently the canon will be broken to allow a convincing cadence in two (or more) parts.

Sometimes the composer will add a free bass under a canon, in order to complete and enrich the harmony. Bach does this in the Goldberg Variations.

It is possible to write two canons at the same time (double canon).

See the examples on the following page.
Continue these canons for at least 10 bars, as directed. Specify instruments, tempo, etc.

1. lower 8ve

2. uppr 8ve

3. 5th above

4. 4th lower

5. 7th lower

6. 5th higher, by inversion
Canons

Complete the (free) bass for this canon, in the same style as the beginning, clarifying and enriching the harmony. Do not introduce any new motives.
Invertible Counterpoint

**Definition:**

Invertible counterpoint is counterpoint where any of the lines can appear as the melody or the bass, without harmonic problems. It is mainly useful for contrasting themes, which will appear in various voices in turn.

**2 parts:**

- at the 8ve (or the 15th)

```
1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8
8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1
```

- do not exceed an 8ve (or a 15th) between the voices
- treat the 5th as a dissonance (since when inverted it becomes a 4th)
- no 4-5 suspensions

- at the 10th

```
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
10  9   8   7   6   5   4   3   2   1
```

- do not exceed a 10th between the voices
- no parallel movement between the parts
- no 4-3 suspensions. The preparation of the suspension must not be the same interval as the resolution (to avoid parallelism)

- at the 12e

```
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10  11  12
12  11  10  9   8   7   6   5   4   3   2   1
```

- do not exceed a 12th between the voices
- treat the 6th like a dissonance
- no 7-6 suspensions

*N.B. When transposing invertible combinations to other scale degrees, accidentals may be changed as desired.*

**3 voices and more:**

- do not exceed an 8ve between adjacent voices
- treat the 5th of a triad as the bass of a 6/5 chord
- 7th chords allow for many more invertible possibilities than simple triads
invertible counterpoint
variants of the countersubject

m. 5: tonal answer + CS (Note: intervals all named within one 8ve)

m. 13: inv at 8ve

m. 28: inv at 12th

m. 37: inv at 10th

m. 59: inv at 10th w. added 3rds

m. 32: inv at 10th and then at 8ve (note that this version requires an added bass part)
3 part invertible counterpoint
Suspensions in invertible counterpoint

inv. at the 8ve

\[ \begin{array}{cccccc}
2-3 & 4-3 & 4-5 & 7-6 & 9-8 \\
\end{array} \]

N.B.: inv. not dissonant
N.B.: must be conjunct res. with change of bass
N.B.: unusable

inv. at the 10th

\[ \begin{array}{cccccc}
\end{array} \]

N.B.: don't prepare with a 3rd
N.B.: unusable
N.B.: must be conjunct

inv. at the 12th

\[ \begin{array}{cccccc}
\end{array} \]

N.B. don't prepare with a 6th
N.B.: inv. not dissonant, continue conjunctly or resolve with change of bass
Themes for invertible counterpoint

Compose countersubjects in invertible counterpoint, as directed. The countersubject should add new motives and enhance the subject with good contrasts. (These themes can be transposed as desired.)

A) in 2 parts
1. at the 8ve
2. at the 8ve
3. at the 8ve (modulating)
4. at the 8ve
5. at the 15th
6. at the 10th
7. at the 12th

B) in 3 parts (at the 8ve)
8.
9.
Short themes for cadences and modulations
Themes for instrumental imitation exercises

Always specify instruments, tempo, articulation, etc.

1.

2. (N.B. appogiaturas)

3. (suspensions!)

4.

5.

6.
Projects

N.B. Always include all necessary performance information (e.g. tempo, articulation, etc.).

1) A baroque binary dance form, for keyboard, in 2 real parts, minimum 24 bars long, on the following theme:

```
\[\text{\footnotesize\begin{align*}
\frac{\text{\texttt{\#3}}}{\text{\texttt{\#3}}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} \quad \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} \quad \text{\texttt{\#3}} \\
\text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}}
\end{align*}}\]
```

Model: Bach French Suite #5, Gavotte.

- 1st section: presentation of the thematic material, leading to a cadence on the dominant, (double bar, repeat).
- 2nd section: longer, on the same motives, modulating through a few related keys, then finishing solidly in the tonic. The final phrase should recall the end of the first section.

2) An invention for keyboard, in 3 real parts, minimum 24 bars long, on the following theme:

```
\[\text{\footnotesize\begin{align*}
\frac{\text{\texttt{\#3}}}{\text{\texttt{\#3}}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} \\
\text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}} & \text{\texttt{\#3}}
\end{align*}}\]
```

Model: Bach Sinfonia #11, in G minor.

- presentation of the theme in free imitation, leading to a mild cadence in a related key.
- modulations (including sequences) to other closely related keys
- preparation of the final return to the tonic, using a short dominant pedal.
- Recall the subject at the end

3) Final project: An organ passacaglia, in 4 parts, including at least 6 variations on the following theme. The theme can move from one voice to another. The last variation should be strongly conclusive.