

Prof. Nancy Rogers

FOURTH-SPECIES COUNTERPOINT

Fourth-species counterpoint is somewhat similar to first-species counterpoint, except that the added voice has been displaced. The syncopation causes dissonant suspensions, which are used as frequently as possible. The rules for fourth-species counterpoint are not terribly complicated, especially since many of them should be familiar from your work in first- and second-species counterpoint.

1. For every note in the *cantus firmus*, write two notes in the added voice (but see guideline #14 — the two voices will end together with a long note). Traditionally, the *cantus firmus* uses whole notes (one note per measure) and the added voice moves in tied half notes until the last measure.
2. The lower voice almost always begins on $\hat{1}$, while the upper voice may begin on $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, or $\hat{5}$. The added voice must begin with a rest worth half the duration of the *cantus firmus*'s first note. No rests are allowed in the middle of the exercise.
3. The suspension is the only allowable form of dissonance in this species. In fact, the primary goal of fourth-species counterpoint is to write as many suspensions as possible (without violating any other rules, of course). Only three types of suspensions are suitable for a two-voice texture:

4-3 suspension in the upper voice
7-6 suspension in the upper voice
2-3 suspension in the lower voice

If necessary, you may use a 4-5 bass suspension in isolation, but do not follow it with another 4-5 suspension; this would create the impression of parallel perfect fifths.

4. Since the vast majority of motion will be oblique, the danger of illegal perfect consonances is greatly reduced. As usual, however, you should be careful in your use of perfect intervals.
 - A. Parallel perfect intervals are absolutely forbidden.
 - B. Do not approach a perfect interval by similar motion unless the upper voice moves by step (this is referred to as “direct” or “hidden” fifths/octaves). Contrary motion to perfect intervals is acceptable, although we still prefer to hear the higher voice moving by step. Oblique motion to perfect intervals is also acceptable, even if the upper voice leaps.
 - C. Except for the first and last notes, generally avoid perfect consonances, if possible. They tend to stick out and undermine the sense of forward motion. In the middle of a phrase, we tend to prefer imperfect consonances.
 - D. Strong-beat perfect intervals are especially attention-grabbing and therefore demand particular care. Do not write parallel fifths and octaves on successive strong beats.

5. A note may be held over a barline (even if it does not form a suspension), but you should never repeat a note unless the *cantus firmus* moves to a different note.
6. In fourth-species counterpoint, we expect mostly oblique stepwise motion. However, other kinds of motion are allowable. If at some point you cannot set up a suspension and you cannot tie a note to another consonance, or if your register has become too low, you may “break the species” and resort to second-species counterpoint for a little while. Try to get back to fourth-species style as soon as possible, however.
7. Too many suspensions of the same type in a row would become somewhat boring. Do not write more than three identical suspensions (e.g., 4-3, 4-3, 4-3) in a row.
8. Leaps into consonant harmonic intervals in the added voice are possible but not required by any means; they generally only occur leading into a weak beat (for the sake of setting up a suspension). As usual, try to balance any large leaps with stepwise motion in the opposite direction. Dissonant leaps are illegal; of course, a melodic perfect fourth is *not* considered a dissonant leap.
9. Avoid simultaneous leaps in both voices as well as two successive leaps in a single voice. Expect a lot of descending stepwise motion.
10. Never allow the voices to cross. Also avoid overlap (for example, the bottom voice should not go higher than the previous note in the top voice).
11. Both voices should have a conservative range (generally between a sixth and an octave).
12. When you write in a minor key, be sure to raise $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$ when appropriate (i.e., when approaching the tonic). Be careful to avoid the A2 between $\downarrow\hat{6}$ and $\uparrow\hat{7}$. It is generally unwise to leap away from $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$ (although $\uparrow\hat{7}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ is fine).
13. If at all possible, use a suspension right before the final cadence.
14. Traditionally, both voices end with a long note on $\hat{1}$. More recently, it is considered acceptable for the upper voice to end on $\hat{3}$. The upper voice must approach its final note by step. The lower voice may either approach the final $\hat{1}$ by step or may leap from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$. (A direct octave is acceptable because the upper voice will be moving by step.)

Helpful hint: drawing lines to connect the interval of the suspension with the interval of the resolution helps avoid errors. The line should always extend from a stronger beat to a weaker beat, and you will consistently see the familiar number pairs 4-3 and 7-6 (or 2-3).

An example of good fourth-species counterpoint:

The musical score shows two voices in a two-staff system. The upper voice is in treble clef and the lower voice is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score consists of ten measures. The intervals between the voices are indicated by numbers below the notes: 8, 7-6, 6 8, 7-6, 7-6, 4-3, 4-3, 3 6, 7-6, 8.