# Melodic Composition Guidelines

Composing an 8-bar Melody

Step 1: Structure
- A phrase is usually 4 bars in length and they come in pairs to form a musical sentence: the first 4-bar phrase is like a question (*antecedent*) and the second 4-bar phrase is like the answer (*consequent*).
- The 1st 'question' phrase could end on an imperfect cadence (chord V)
- The 2nd 'answer' phrase could end on a perfect cadence (I):
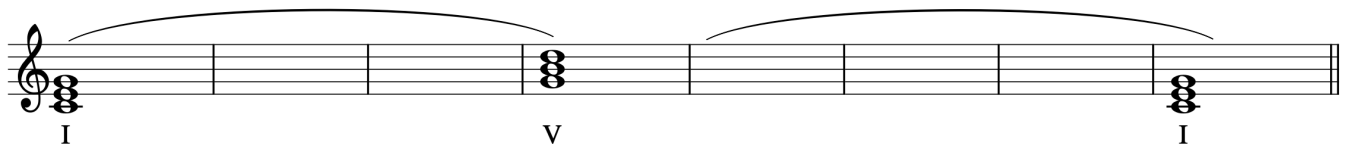
Step 2: Melodic Motif
- A motif is a short melodic or rhythmic idea which gives character to the melody.
- It's a good idea to have the motif based on first chord (I). If there is an upbeat at the beginning (on a weak beat) use the dominant (V), to be followed by a tonic (I) on the first beat of the first bar!
- Choose a rhythm and time signature to fit the character of the melody. For a soft gentle character a slow 6/8 time might be suitable:
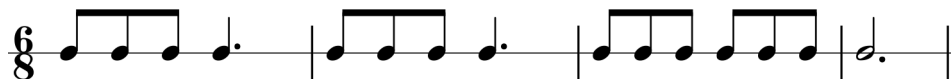

Step 3: Development of 1st Phrase Rhythm
- Establish the rhythmic motif of the 1st phrase by repeating it:
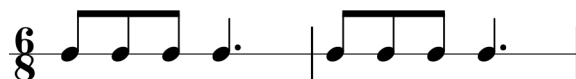
- Add some variety for the next two bars. As the first two bars stop on a dotted crotchet, continuing with quicker movement to direct the melody towards the first cadence at bar 4:

Step 4: Development of 2nd Phrase Rhythm
- You can either do an exact repeat of the first phrase or use a contrasting but related rhythm:
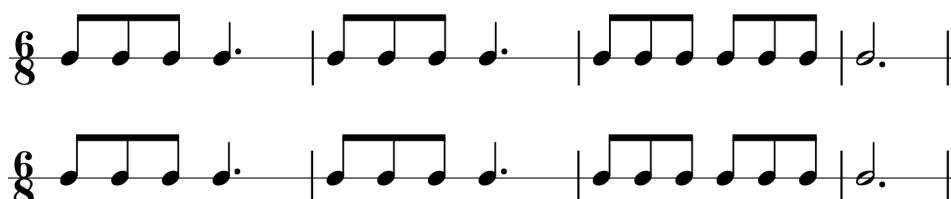
Step 5: Chord Progression

- Work out a proper harmonic foundation for the melody, which is extremely important! Your melody should imply a proper musical progression of chords. First, find approach chords to the cadences.
- The first 4 bars end on an imperfect cadence (I-V), and chord V would work well at bar 2.
- The second 4 bars end on a perfect cadence (V-I), and chord IV could be used at bar 6 for variety, which could be approached by another chord I.

Step 6: Complete the Melody

- Design a melody using the chords and the completed rhythm from Step 4.
  - a) Avoid awaked intervals and leaps (see Melodic Motion handout)
  - b) Think of chords in inverted patterns

  - c) Use some decorative notes (non-harmonic notes like passing notes and auxiliary notes) to give further interest to the 1st phrase.

  - d) It is common for the opening of the 2nd phrase to repeat the opening of the 1st phrase!
  - e) Consider the overall range of your melody (which should not be too narrow) by putting a curve in your melody so the listener is taken on a musical journey. This can be easily done by introducing a climax point ¾ of the way through your 8-bar phrase.

  - f) Use non-harmonic decorative notes in your 2nd phrase (auxiliary notes and a cambiata)

Step 7: Melodic Development

- Analyse the **rhythmic**, **pitch** and **intervallic** patterns of the melody as the basis for the rest of the composition. These motives can be reused in a number of ways (see Melodic Development handout).
  - a) _Inversion_ is usually a good way to add variety, but maintain a sense of unity.

b) Adding more *melodic decoration* can give the melody its own unique character!
Passing Notes
Auxiliary Notes
Appoggiaturas (and Cambiatas)
Suspensions

c) *Harmonic decoration* can also be implied: for example at the imperfect cadence at bar 4, a second inversion first chord (Ic) can be used with chord V. The melody would need to be altered to reflect this change:

Additional Considerations:

- For longer melodic phrases (e.g. more than 8 bars long), you can use *interpolation*: that is, extra material in the middle of two phrases that could have been omitted.

- **Revise, Revise, Revise**. The revision process is an important process in composition. It is this phase that a motif/phrase can be revised, rejected, or accepted. Like writing an essay, you will need to make corrections and polish up what you've written!

- Insert **appropriate performance markings**: dynamics, articulation, tempo, and anything required for the instrument, such as bowings, breath marks (luftpause) etc. Slower tempi allow wind players to breathe between phrases; faster tempi may require rests. Note that some instruments are easier to play depending on their register: e.g. it's easier to play loudly on the lowest notes of the bassoon/oboe; it's easier for the flute to play low notes quietly and difficult for the horn/trumpet to play high notes quietly.

Example of Balanced Phrase Structure (4+4)

Hook: Minuet from Guida di Musica, Op. 37

Example of Irregular Phrase Structure (4+6)

Handel: Bourrée

Example of Interpolation

J.S. Bach: March, from Anna Magdalena Notebook