

# COUNTERPOINT

## FOURTH SPECIES

The last muscle to develop before getting in “free” counterpoint is the suspension muscle. Dissonant suspensions imbue a counterpoint line with a sense of urgency and forward motion not approached in the first three species. The need for a dissonant tone to resolve in the correct direction supercedes any larger scale melodic considerations, at least at the particular moment of resolution. It is for this reason that your distinguished professor is less strict about large scale melodic shapes and other linear considerations than he has been in the previous species.

In the fourth species, the cantus firmus (CF) moves in whole notes. The counterpoint also moves in whole notes, but in whole notes that have been delayed by the duration of a half note. The rules are as follows: the counterpoint begins with a half rest, followed by a half note that forms a perfect consonance with the cantus firmus (as in all other species). This half note is tied (suspended) to another half in the next bar. If the suspension is dissonant, it must resolve by step to an imperfect consonance. If the suspension is consonant, the choice of the next note is free, providing it is consonant with the CF, and providing it does not move to a perfect consonance in the same direction as the CF had just moved. Then the new note is suspended to the next bar, etc.

*DISSONANCE TREATMENT:* all suspended dissonant tones must resolve by step to an imperfect consonance. Thus the resolutions of any dissonance are clear, as in the little chart below:


<i>Dissonance</i>		<i>Resolution</i>
2	→	3
4	→	3
5	→	6
7	→	6
9	→	10

Please note that 2nds may not resolve to unisons, nor 7th and 9ths to octaves. This happens in later music, which has not been composed yet. Also note that F above B, while being a fifth and looking like a consonance if you are not paying attention, is NOT A CONSONANCE; if F is suspended above a B in the CF it must move to G; if B is suspended below F in the CF, the B must move to A.

The whole thing comes down to these easy rules: every anacrusis must be consonant; a suspended downbeat may be consonant or dissonant--if it is dissonant, it must resolve on the anacrusis, by step, to an imperfect consonance and if it is consonant the next choice is free, given the usual rules. *Hint:* go for suspensions that are forced downward and use a consonant suspension as an opportunity to leap up. This is generally the best line.

You should strive to form a good line that forms as many dissonant suspensions as possible so you can get its sound in your ear and so you can witness the irresistible force of such dissonances. As such, your itinerant professor is less strict about overall linear plans than in the other species. The “no-more-than-three consecutive thirds, sixths or tenths” rule applies, however. Pay attention to your line and its relationship to the CF: it is quite easy simply to write a line in parallel sixths with the CF, as follows:



Six consecutive anacrusis consonances are sixths, hence the whole counterpoint simply follows the CF in parallel sixths a half-note later. *This is not an independent line!* Be aware also, far in advance, that long scalar passages in the CF are going to necessitate long sequences like the one at the end of the above example. For this very reason, you are given the "escape hatch" to break up such long sequences. Once per exercise, you may break the suspension sequence and insert a passage of second species counterpoint. The escape hatch looks like 

rhythmically. The second, third and fourth notes of this example must all be consonant, and the third one (the downbeat half of the second measure) may not be an octave or a unison.

*ENDING.* You probably won't be surprised to find that the preferred ending for the counterpoint in this species is the suspension cadence. The preferred ending is to suspend 8 into the first half of the penultimate measure, follow it with a half-note leading tone, followed by a whole note tonic. You must ALWAYS end on a whole note tonic. This ending is preferred for both above and below. Alternatively, the penultimate measure may be a whole-note leading tone, putting the last two whole measures squarely into first species. For the last Phrygian cantus firmus, the preferred ending is



Alternatively, you may end as you would in second species (suspended 6-7-8 above or suspended 5-7-8 below).

FINALLY, please be aware that all of the examples below are wrong because they contain direct motion to a perfect consonance.

