

## Musical analysis, lesson 4: Phrase and period content

Various subdivisions of rhythmic structure may be made that illustrate how the composer applies economically the thematic material he employs. "Economically" describes the careful use of material by the skilled composer, in that he formulates only such as lends itself to infinite adaptability. Out of this practice there comes a unity, in the musical composition, that is of great interest; when this unity is the handmaid of beauty we have the highest form of constructive music.

We have seen that the period may be a complete musical thought. For instance, the following folk song is a period only, in length, and yet it is a complete expression in melody.

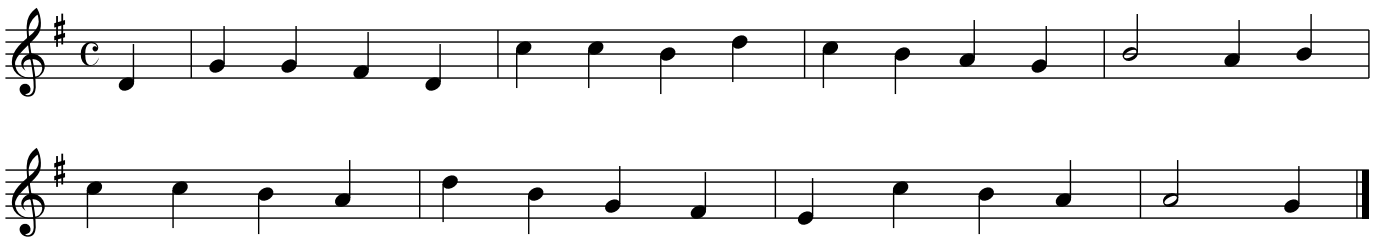
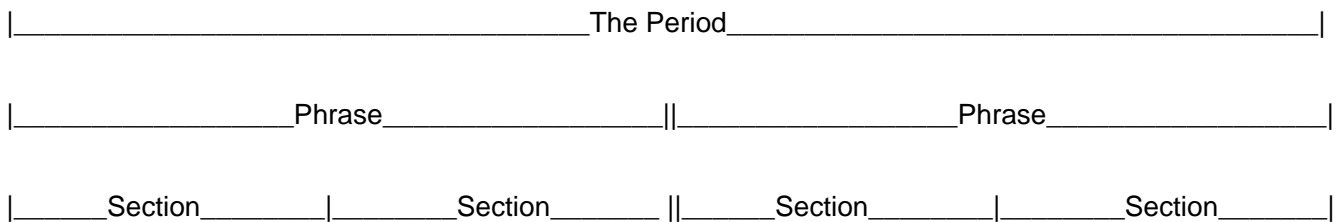


Figure 1

Again, as we have seen, the period is divisible into two equal parts, each called a phrase. The division of the phrase into two sections may be purely mechanical or it may be natural; mechanical when there is no pause that creates a feeling of subdivision; natural when a caesural ending creates a breathing point.

The following outline will present these parts in their interrelation:



Often the section is divisible into equal portions. In the case of an eight measure period the subdivided section becomes two single measures called Monometers, or one measure rhythms. These various subdivisions are shown in the following period:

**First Phrase (Thesis)**

Monometer                      Monometer                      Monometer                      Monometer

Section - - - - - Section - - - - -

**Second Phrase (Antithesis)**

Monometer                      Monometer                      Monometer                      Monometer

Section - - - - - Section - - - - -

The student should study these quotations, and mark the monometers, sections, and phrases in each.

1

Exercise 1 consists of two staves of music in C major and common time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The second staff continues the melody from measure 5 to measure 8, ending with a double bar line.

2

Exercise 2 consists of three staves of music in D major and 3/4 time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, starting with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The second and third staves continue the melody from measure 5 to measure 8, ending with a double bar line.

3

Exercise 3 consists of two staves of music in D major and common time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The second staff continues the melody from measure 5 to measure 8, ending with a double bar line.

4

Exercise 4 consists of two staves of music in D major and common time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The second staff continues the melody from measure 5 to measure 8, ending with a double bar line.

## Questions: Mignon, by Robert Schumann (score next page)

Note the prevalence of the opening monometric figure (rhythm). This initial group, or motive, appears with very slight rhythmic change in nearly every measure. The bass departs only in two measures from the bass figure of measure 1.

1. Measure three: What key enters here?
2. Measures eight and nine: What key?
3. Part 2 (measure thirteen): Opens on what chord?
4. What is the influence of the F sharp in the following measures (fourteen to eighteen)?
5. Beginning with measure twenty-two: What key?
6. What grouping of measures (as to phrasal division) is evident?
7. What purpose is served by measures sixteen and seventeen ?
8. Indicate the one measure (Monometer), and more than one measure (Sections, etc.) groups throughout.

# Mignon

Langsam, zart.

The musical score for Mignon is presented in a grand staff format, consisting of a treble clef (right hand) and a bass clef (left hand) on a single grand staff. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo and mood are indicated as "Langsam, zart." (Slowly, tenderly).

The score is divided into six systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the right hand and a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic in the left hand. The left hand features a steady eighth-note accompaniment, with phrasing marked by slurs and asterisks (\*). The right hand plays a melodic line with slurs and phrasing marks.

The second system continues the melodic and accompanimental lines. The third system includes a dynamic shift to fortissimo (*ff*) in the right hand. The fourth system features a piano (*p*) dynamic in the right hand and a crescendo (*cresc.*) in the left hand. The fifth system begins with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic in the right hand. The sixth system concludes with a first ending (*1.*) marked *dim.* (diminuendo) and a second ending (*2.*) marked *ritard.* (ritardando).

Throughout the piece, the left hand accompaniment is marked with slurs and asterisks (\*), indicating phrasing and period content. The right hand melody is also marked with slurs and phrasing marks.

The student should write simple phrases and periods in which a one measure rhythm is developed; others should contain the one and two measure rhythms.

Reference has been made to irregular period forms. It often occurs that the composer desires to defer the final cadence. This is done by a momentary turning aside from the naturally anticipated final chord and (generally) by a repetition, arriving at the close after an unexpected delay. This is often attained through the deceptive cadence. This is illustrated in Schumann's *Mai, lieber Mai* Op. 68, no. 13 (score below).

The ear anticipates in measure eight a close on the tonic of B major. This expected ending is turned aside through the introduction of a momentary pause through V – VI, following which the two measures are repeated with more forcible climax, concluding on the expected tonic chord of B major.

The first complete rhythmic group is of two measures. This is followed by another, and similar, two measure group; then two monometers, after which two (cadence) measures occur twice.

May, Sweet May

*Nicht schnell.*

The musical score for 'May, Sweet May' is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is B major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo marking is 'Nicht schnell.' and the dynamic marking is 'p' (piano). The score shows a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, with some measures featuring slurs and accents. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the tonic key of B major.

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This lesson is a modification of Tapper's First Year Analysis –Musical Form– and has been typeset with MC Musiceditor 6.0.8 ([www.mcmusiceditor.com](http://www.mcmusiceditor.com) – [www.bestmusicteacher.com](http://www.bestmusicteacher.com))

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