

Tonal Counterpoint Guidelines

Compiled from Kennan's *Counterpoint* by Mark Feezell, Ph.D.

Tonal counterpoint rules are given here. Chapter and page numbers refer to Kennan's *Counterpoint*, 4th edition.

If significantly different, the corresponding rule for MODAL counterpoint is given here as a reminder.

MELODIC GUIDELINES (Chapter 2):

1. Melodies should have a sense of direction and a climax point, usually the line ascends to the highest point and then descends.
2. Avoid "noodling"
3. Various methods are available to emphasize notes (p. 8)
4. Melodies should suggest a harmonic background that forms an appropriate harmonic progression. (See harmonic progression handout.)
5. RANGE: Keep each melody in the range of a 12th
6. Active steps (tendency tones): 4→3, 6→5, 7→8
7. Avoid augmented melodic intervals; dim. 7ths are o.k. but should not be overused.
8. Consecutive leaps in the same direction must form a triad.
9. After a large leap, it is best to have the melody move in the opposite direction (often by step).
10. LEAP, then STEP (regardless of direction)
11. SEQUENCE is extremely common and important in this period; limit a sequence to 3 sequential repetitions of the pattern.
12. Abrupt halts in rhythmic motion are to be avoided (avoid "Jingle Bells" rhythm)

MODAL: Harmony is based largely on a progression of intervals

MODAL: Scale degrees not considered active, except clausula vera formula

MODAL: Avoid augmented AND diminished intervals

MODAL: Larger intervals at the bottom of the melodic contour.

MODAL: Melodic sequences should NOT occur aligned with the meter.

FIRST SPECIES (Chapters 3 and 4):

1. All melodic guidelines apply.
2. Strive for rhythmic independence and independence in terms of melodic contour, although occasional similarity between the lines provides variety and interest.
3. No || 8ves, 5ths, or unisons
4. No direct 8ves, 5ths, or unisons. Definition: SIMILAR motion into a 5th or 8ve involving the highest and lowest voices, with a LEAP in the highest voice
5. Unequal 5ths are ok, EXCEPT °5→P5 involving the lowest sounding voice
6. No more than SIX (6) parallel 3rds or 6ths in a row.
7. Generally, omit the 5th in 2-voice writing.

MODAL: Harmonic tritones are not allowed, so unequal 5ths are not possible.

MODAL: No more than THREE (3) parallel 3rds or 6ths in a row.

MODAL: Interval successions are more prominent than harmonic progressions

8. Avoid open 5ths!
9. Don't double tendency tones.
10. Approach and leave octaves using contrary motion.
11. All 6/4 harmonies must be cadential, passing, arpeggio, or pedal. This is because the 4th is still dissonant and must be handled correctly in the harmonic context.
12. Common harmonic rhythm patterns

Quadruple:	Triple:
a	e
b	f
c	g
d	<u>AVOID!</u> →

13. Don't repeat a bass note across a barline or across the 2 halves of a bar in quadruple meter.
14. Cadence patterns for authentic cadences:
 - I(6)/vi → IV → V → I
 - I(6)/vi → ii(6) → (I6/4) → V → I
 - I(6) → (I6/4) → V → I
15. Use mostly 3rds, 6ths, and 8ves. Octaves occur less frequently, and occur most often on the tonic note at the beginnings or ends of phrases or sections, sometimes on dominant, occasionally on other notes.
16. Only essential intervals - NO NCT's.

MODAL: 5ths are a perfect consonance and may be used freely.
MODAL: There are no tendency tones.

MODAL: the 4th is considered a dissonance in the same category as 2nds and 7ths.

MODAL: Interval successions are more prominent than harmonic progressions; hence, harmonic rhythm is not an issue per se.

MODAL: Clausula vera cadence formula

MODAL: The fifth is often used as a harmonic interval, since it is considered a perfect consonance.

SECOND SPECIES – 2:1 (Chapters 4 and 5)

1. All melodic guidelines and rules of first species apply.
2. 2nd species: All NCT's are allowed, except those that use ties (sus and ret). Resolve by STEP (except escape tones). See NCT table, p. 40
3. Avoid 5ths/8ves on consecutive strong beats.
4. Use the raised form of the accidental for ascending chromaticism, the lowered form for descending.
5. Avoid cross relations; i.e., give the chromatic alteration to the voice that has just stated the unaltered form of the tone.
6. Secondary dominants may be implied through the use of a tritone formed by the 3rd and 7th of the secondary dominant.

MODAL: ONLY PASSING TONES in second species!

MODAL: No chromaticism except the raised note in the clausula vera cadence formula, and occasional lowered notes to avoid modal tritones.

MODAL: AVOID melodic patterns such as C-C#-D in a single voice!

MODAL: NO HARMONIC TRITONES.

SECOND SPECIES – 3:1 (Chapter 6)

1. All previous guidelines apply.
2. Stick with 2 or 3 main patterns per passage; often they occur sequentially.
3. Avoid || 8ves or 5ths between any part of a beat and the first note of the next beat.

MODAL: Avoid sequential patterns aligned with the meter.

THIRD SPECIES – 4:1 (Chapter 6)

1. The 4-note patterns nearly always consist of chord tones plus nonharmonic tones.
2. All four notes of a group generally center around a single harmony.
3. Patterns to avoid:
 - unresolved NCTs
 - repeated notes (except rarely in sequences)
 - avoid using the pitch that occurs on the downbeat following the group of 4
4. Avoid || 8ves and 5ths between part of one beat and the beginning of the next beat.

FOURTH SPECIES – TIES (Chapter 6):

1. ONLY 3 options for the tied note:
 - Suspension (Preparation note, suspended note in strong metric position, resolution note); 7-6, 4-3, 9-8, 2-3, or 6-5
 - Anticipation of upcoming harmony; seen most frequently at cadences
 - Chord tone common to two harmonies
2. Avoid syncopated || octaves and 5ths.
3. Avoid ties between groups of four (p. 75)
4. Don't tie a note to another note that has a longer rhythmic value.
5. "Launch" faster rhythmic values by starting them off-beat:

MODAL: Tied notes are either suspensions or form consonances.

Usable:	AVOID:
	
	
	
	
	

INVERTIBLE COUNTERPOINT (Chapter 9, esp. p. 122):

At the OCTAVE: 5ths become 4ths, and so must be resolved like NCTs in the original to be invertible.

At the TWELFTH: 6ths become 7ths, and so must be resolved like NCT's in the original to be invertible.

At the TENTH: Rarely seen.

THREE-VOICE COUNTERPOINT (Chapter 11):

Suspensions	• One of the voices is often tied to the next beat, while the other two voices move. • Suspensions into the 3rd or root of the chord are stronger than those that resolve to the fifth. (p. 153) • When a suspension resolves by half step to the 3rd of a chord, the note of resolution should not be doubled (in any octave). • In suspensions involving more than one beat, the suspended note must fall on a strong beat.
Doublings	• The THIRD must be present • The FIFTH is often omitted • The ROOT may be omitted for 6/4 chords ONLY (use the 4 standard types).
7 th chords	• Usually omit the 5th • Rarely, may omit the 3rd, but DON'T omit the 3rd AND the 5th. • Don't double the 7th (tendency tone).
Misc	• The middle voice (only) may repeat notes in 1:1 exercises. • Use strong harmonic progressions (see harmonic progression handout). • Follow the ranges on p. 159: • Top voice=C4-A5 • Middle voice=F3-F5 • Bottom voice=E2-C4 • It is sometimes necessary to have more than an octave between the upper voices, though such arrangements should not continue for long.