

Terms and Concepts of Phrase Structure

from
Form in Tonal Music
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General terms and definitions:

Analysis: discovering the component parts of a given whole and relating these to each other.

Phrase: the shortest passage of music which, having reached a point of relative repose has expressed a more or less complete musical thought. (A phrase, then, will generally end with a chord in root position, otherwise it would be unlikely to convey a quality of *relative repose*).

Phrase member (sub phrase): A phrase member is present when a phrase seems to be made up of two or more component parts.

Musical period: a series of two or more phrases, the last of which completes a harmonic or melodic progression left incomplete by the previous phrase(s). It usually consists of one or more phrases ending with *inconclusive cadences* (*antecedent* or *antecedent group*) followed by a phrase with a *conclusive cadence* (*consequent*). It is also possible the have a *consequent group*.

Types of harmonic movement in the period:

Complete harmonic movement: a harmonic movement away from the tonic with a return to that tonic via a conclusive cadence.

antecedent (I-----?)	consequent (?-----I)
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Interrupted harmonic movement: occurs when a passage makes its way as far as the cadential V, but does not reach I. Instead, the harmonic motion is repeated—either exactly or with variation—and the end is altered to conclude on I.

antecedent (I-----V)	consequent (I-----I)
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Progressive harmonic movement: a move away from tonic without an immediate return. Such a move may embody a real modulation or only a brief tonicization.

antecedent (I-----?)	consequent (?-----I) [In a new key]
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Repeated harmonic movement: the harmonic goal of the antecedent is the same as the consequent. However, the consequent is more conclusive melodically than the antecedent.

antecedent (I-----I) [IAC]	consequent (I-----I) [PAC]
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More terms and distinctions:

Parallel vs. contrasting period: a period is parallel if the *beginnings* of the antecedent and consequent are similar; it is contrasting if they are dissimilar. For our purposes we will generally consider a transposed phrase to be parallel to the original, untransposed form of the phrase.

Symmetrical vs. asymmetrical period: a period is symmetrical if the antecedent and consequent are balanced, that is, for every antecedent there is one consequent. These are usually of the same length. If they are unbalanced—that is, if there is not an equal pairing of antecedents and consequents—then the period is asymmetrical. Note that symmetry in this sense *does not* reflect the number of measures in any phrase.

Phrase chain: several dissimilar phrases (phrases that do not resemble each other) which appear consecutively in a composition. The phrase chain does NOT end with a conclusive cadence.

Phrase group: two or more phrases, at least two of which are similar, that appear consecutively in a composition. The phrase group does NOT end with a conclusive cadence.

Repetition of phrases: A phrase is sounded, then repeated either exactly or with some variation. Such repetition does not constitute a larger unit, such as a period, phrase group, or phrase chain, which must each comprise at least two *different phrases*. Note: in a period, a repeated consequent does not change a two-phrase period into one of three phrases.