

Diagramming Melodic Phrases

Motives, Phrases, and Periods

A composer creates a piece by deciding what the building blocks will be, how they will be developed and extended, and what form the piece will take. The smallest of these building blocks is the *motive*.

Motives are typically combined and varied to create a phrase. The *phrase* might be referred to as the smallest structural unit that is concluded with a cadence. Two or more phrases together can be used to build a *period* if the cadence in the middle is weaker or less conclusive than the final cadence.

The example below shows a symmetrical period with a Half Cadence ending the first phrase, and a Perfect Authentic Cadence ending the second phrase. A formal diagram shows the architecture.

The musical score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system covers measures 1-4, and the second system covers measures 5-8. Chord symbols are placed above the treble clef staff: Cm (1), D° (2), Cm (3), Fm7/Ab (4), G (4), Fm (5), Cm (6), D° (7), G/B (7), Cm (8).

Musical example of a Contrasting Period

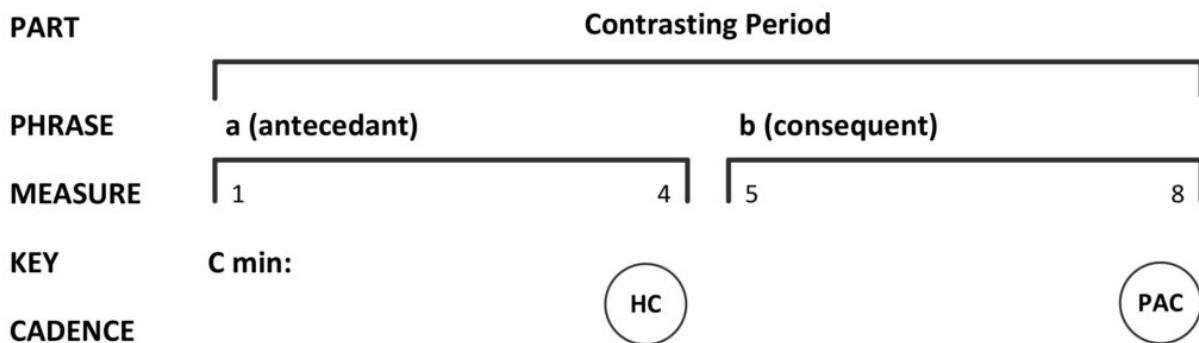


Diagram of a Contrasting Period