

Notes on Form

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Types of Period

If the melodies of the first and second phrases begin with the same or quite similar pitch materials that use the same scale degrees, the period is called a **parallel period**. Example 1 was an extremely clear instance of a parallel period.

Sometimes parallel periods vary or decorate the initial melodic material when it returns in the second phrase. In Example 3 below, the start of the second movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in C, K. 545, measures 9-14 present a lightly elaborated version of measures 1-6. (This is a much more extensive parallel than is required – a single measure of parallel content is often enough.) Note that the phrases in Example 3 are eight measures long, twice as long as those in Example 1. Though the melody comes to a place of relative rest at the end of m. 4, there has been as of yet no real departure from the initial tonic harmony. Measure 4 is therefore not a cadence, and mm. 1-4 are therefore not a phrase. Example 4, from the second movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B-flat, K. 570, is less decorated than Example 3, but it has the interesting feature of two-measure phrases. Finally, in Example 5, taken from Mozart's Piano Sonata in B-flat, K. 333, closer listening is required to detect the parallels between measures 1-2 and 5-6, but this still counts as a parallel period.

If the first and second phrases begin with similar pitch material but using different scale degrees (if the start of the second phrase is basically a transposition of the start of the first, but with intervals adjusted to fit the key), the period is called a **sequential period**. Example 6, the opening of Mozart's K. 576, is a sequential period.

If the first and second phrases start with contrasting material, the period is called a **contrasting period**. Example 7, which is taken from the beginning of the first movement of Haydn's Sonatina in C, Hob. XVI:35, is a contrasting period.

So far all of the periods we have seen have stayed entirely in a single key. A period can also modulate, though, and when it does it is called a **modulating period**.¹ Example 8, from the slow movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in C, K. 330, is a modulating contrasting period.

Now that we have introduced all of the kinds of period, be careful to be clear about which terms are necessary and which are not. We will always specify that a period is parallel, sequential, or contrasting. We will use the terms 'asymmetrical' and 'modulating' only when they apply.

¹ Just as we rarely bother to use the term 'symmetrical period', we will basically never use the term 'non-modulating period'.