

Phrase structure and classical form

The Sentence

The *sentence* is normatively an eight-measure structure. It begins with a two-measure basic idea, which brings in the fundamental melodic material of the theme. The basic idea frequently contains several distinct motives, which often are developed in the course of the theme (or later in the movement). The basic idea is repeated in measures 3 -4. Repetition of the basic idea "presents" the theme to the listener, so we speak of the music fulfilling a *presentation function* and label the first four measures a *presentation phrase*. A presentation is thus defined by its melodic-motivic content and its harmonic organization.

By repeating a basic idea we separate the individual ideas from each other; thus, at the end of the phrase, we don't have thematic closure (or "cadence"). This generates demand for a *continuation phrase*, one that will directly follow, and draw consequences from, the presentation.

The formal function of continuation has two outstanding characteristics: *fragmentation*, a reduction in the size of the units; and *harmonic acceleration*, an increase in the rate of harmonic change. In the *presentation phrase*, the size of the constituent units (i.e., the basic idea) is two mm. At the beginning of the *continuation phrase*, the units are reduced by a half.

The systematic elimination of characteristic motives in the continuation phrase is termed *liquidation*. Fragmentation and liquidation frequently work together; fragmentation concerns the lengths of units, and liquidation concerns the melodic-motivic content of units. The fragmented units of some examples also display a new, third type of repetition, in which the entire fragment is transposed to different scale-degrees. This *sequential repetition* is particularly characteristic of continuation function. By convention, we refer to the initial unit as a model and each unit of repetition as its sequence. Thus sequential repetition can also be termed *model-sequence technique*.

Cadential function is the third formal function—beside presentation and continuation—in the sentence theme-type. A cadential idea contains not only a conventionalized harmonic progression but also a conventionalized melodic formula, usually of falling contour. The melody is conventional because it lacks motivic features that would specifically associate it with a particular theme. In this sense, the cadential idea stands opposed to the basic idea, whose characteristic motives are used precisely to define the uniqueness of the theme.

Often the processes of fragmentation, harmonic acceleration, and liquidation begun in measure 5 extend all the way the cadence. Indeed, the two functions of continuation and cadential normally fuse into a single "continuation phrase" in the eight-measure sentence.

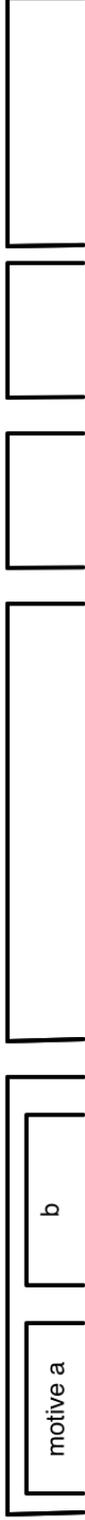
The 8 measure Sentence:

mm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Formal Function: Presentation Normative
 Phrase length: four

Continuation:
 four (often longer)

Basic Idea



Content: Rhythmic stability (reinforces meter)
 Distinct melodic profile

May be B.I. in V

Faster surface rhythm
 Faster harmonic rhythm

Harmony: Prolongs Tonic

No cadence

Prolongs tonic or sequential Cadential

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in f minor, Op. 2/1, I: opening theme

mm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Formal Function: Presentation
 Phrase length: four

Continuation:
 four

B. I.

B. I. in dom.

Fragmentation
 (liquidation)

Cadential Idea

Content: Opening motive appears twice
 Harmony: i

$N(V \frac{6}{5})$

i P ($V \frac{\#6}{4}$) i6 ii6 $V \frac{4}{4}$ HC

Period

That formal units can express varying degrees of cadential closure allows for the possibility of creating thematic organization based largely on such cadential differentiation. If an initial unit ending with a weak cadence is repeated and brought to a fuller cadential close, then we can say, following traditional usage, that the first unit is an antecedent to the following consequent. Together, the two functions of *antecedent* and *consequent* combine to create the theme-type normally termed period.

Like the sentence, the period is normatively an eight-measure structure divided into two four-measure phrases. Like the presentation of a sentence, the antecedent phrase of a period begins with a two-measure basic idea. The same features of a basic idea discussed in connection with the sentence apply to the period as well. Instead of immediately repeating the basic idea, however, measures 3-4 of the antecedent phrase bring a contrasting idea that leads to a weak cadence of some kind.

The notion of a “contrasting” idea must be understood in the sense of its being “not-a-repetition.” The extent to which a contrasting idea differs from a basic idea may be striking or minimal. Nevertheless, the idea in measures 3 - 4 of an antecedent phrase must be sufficiently distinct from the basic idea that we do not perceive it to be a repetition.

It is difficult to generalize about the nature of a contrasting idea, but we can say that it often features characteristics of continuation function such as fragmentation, an increased rate of harmonic change, harmonic sequence, and a conventionalized melodic formula for the cadence. The consequent phrase of the period repeats the antecedent but concludes with a stronger cadence. More specifically, the basic idea returns in measures 5-6 and then leads to a contrasting idea, which may or may not be based on that of the antecedent. Most importantly the contrasting idea must end with a cadence stronger than the one closing the antecedent, usually a perfect authentic cadence.

The 8 measure Period:

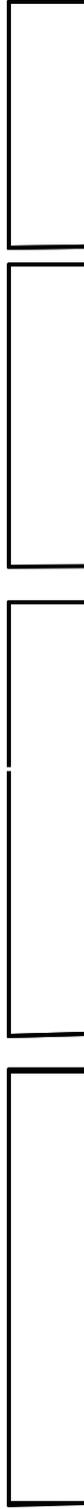
mm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Formal Function: Antecedent

Normative

Phrase length: four

Basic Idea 1 Contrasting Idea B. I. C. I.



four (balances antec.)

Content: Rhythmic stability (reinforces meter)
Distinct melodic profile

"Continuational"

Cadence

Same as 3-4 or new
Cadence

Harmony: Prolongs Tonic

Weak

Stronger than 4

Mozart, Piano Sonata in A, K. 331, I: a rare opening period in a Sonata-Allegro form

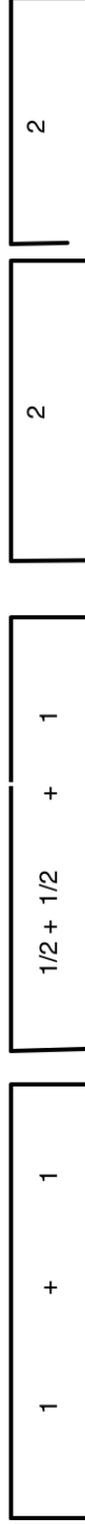
mm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Formal Function: Antecedent

Normative

Phrase length: four

Basic Idea Contrasting Idea B. I. C. I.



Consequent

four

Fund line: 5 ^ 4

^ 3

^ 5

^ 4

^ 3 ^ 2 ^ 1

Content: Miniature sentence=antec
B.I. 1 m. w/ s/r repetition

"Continuational" frag.
liquid., faster harmonic & surface rhythm

HC

PAC

Harmony: I (inner ped V) N (V 6 5

V6)

I

ii6 V 6-5 4-3

I

N (V 6 5

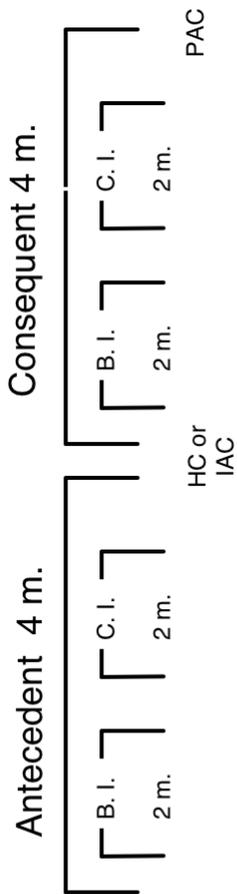
mm.7

V6)

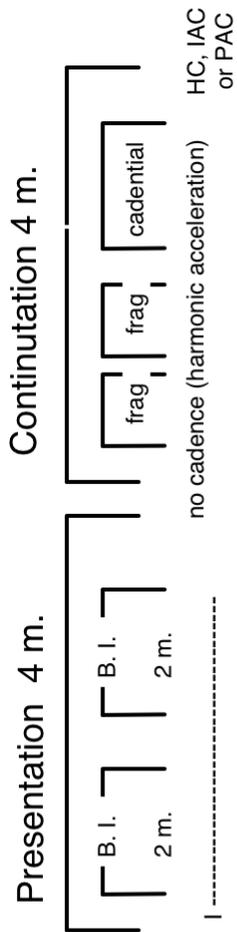
I i i6 V 6-5 4-3 I

A comparison of Sentence and Period

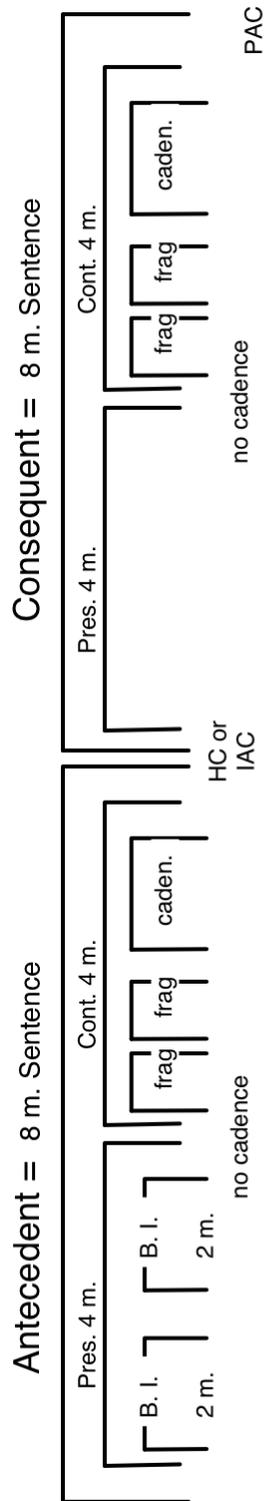
8 m. Period



8 m. Sentence



16 m. Period



Basic idea: may be literally repeated, repeated on different tonic scale degrees, repeated on V

Contrasting idea: level of contrast is variable. C. I. may be different in Antecedent and Consequent

Fragmentation: primarily rhythmic in nature, may or may not be motivically related to the basic idea